

**DOWNERS GROVE PUBLIC LIBRARY  
STRATEGIC PLANNING  
COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY  
FEBRUARY 2017**

**1. COMMUNITY**

Friendly, unpretentious, well-educated and with a sense of community pride, the people of Downers Grove enjoy a wide variety of interests and events. While similar to other suburbs, what sets Downers Grove apart is its transportation options and vibrant walkable downtown. Its family-friendly, safe, hometown feel draw those who grew up here back to raise their kids, contributing to the sense of history. With some rivalry between North and South high schools as well as the train tracks dividing the town, it sometimes lacks a cohesive identity.

- Walkable town
- Downtown area
- Manageable downtown
- Vibrant downtown
- Downtown, 3-4 square mile area
  - Meeting area, shopping, some schools, events
  - Definitely activity in some other areas too, but this is more of the "town"
  - The library geographically is smack dab in the center of that
- Train
  - 3 stops nearby, and geographically the library is right there
  - Then you have to get across the tracks! Sometimes, you want to avoid that
  - Also a stopper for traffic
- 3 train stations to get to Chicago, expressways
- Commuters
  - Availability of transportation options
  - Train is downtown and well-located.
- Love being able to take train into Chicago
- Downers Grove doesn't stand apart from other towns/communities compared to other areas.
- Suburban location
  - Diversity of real estate options
  - Starter homes to expensive options
  - Unlike surrounding communities
- Three main areas / communities within
  - Not much interaction between the three, what you feel about DG may be affected by where you live
  - Southern part (those think more of 75th as the main DG area)
  - Northern part (those think more of Butterfield as the main DG area)
  - Central part (those think of downtown as the main DG area)

- I end up doing some things in surrounding communities because those are closer, more convenient
  - Sometimes divisive
- North/South – some rivalry among areas
- Community feeling beyond the North/South
- Not as diverse – more homogenous – than we thought
- Organizations/groups
  - Many clubs and service organizations
- Safe, stable
- Friendly
- Friendly
- Library!
- Library was his introduction to the downtown area
- Library operates as leader in region/system
- Library is the central/vital to this community Dependent on library; touched that you are serving have nots with hot spots
- Vibrancy (Library)
- Schools, very good
  - They are why people move here!
- Good schools
- Family friendly
- Families
- Sense of community, focus on community
- Community pride Main street, community feeling as draw to live here
- Hometown feel, calm
- Love being able to drive down the street and smell grass and find parking
- Home: neighborhood and schools
- Seniors
- Long term residents, people grow up here and return to raise their families
- Place where people stay
- Variety among residents
  - Long term
  - Returning after growing up here
  - New
- Old and new side-by-side
  - Mixed ages in residential/retail, etc
  - Adds to vibrancy
  - Lamborghini dealership next to failing strip mall example
- Long history as a community
- History of the town
- Sense of history
- Established – big trees, etc.
- Understated place, unpretentious (though this may be changing)

- Not a glitzy town
- Not looking to move ahead
- Love Tivoli after hours film society
- Events that bring folks to the downtown
  - DG isn't pigeonholed into one annual event (example given: Sycamore Scarecrow Festival)
  - Events year-round, seasonal
- Park district
- Intellectual vibe, well-educated
- Interested in a wide variety of issues/things.
- Moved here in 2013, things are different here than in DC (where lived before)
- Regulations that safeguard rights and property of all

## **2. ISSUES**

Parking and traffic are the most frequently discussed issues. Balance came up repeatedly, especially in connection to downtown, local businesses and residential development: old vs. new, economic growth vs. community needs, preservation vs. progress, and property rights vs. neighborhood concerns. A strong sentiment was voiced that a communitywide information clearinghouse and/or unified marketing and promotion efforts for events, programs and local organizations is needed. Taxes are of concern, particularly for the schools with the uncertainty in the State of Illinois.

- Parking in downtown area
  - keep increasing demand for more parking with residential development
  - busy library impacts ability to park
- Parking
  - Hand-in-hand with traffic
  - Especially effects library
  - Not keeping up with events/growth in demand
- Parking
  - Restrictions limit when people can come/how often they want to come
  - Village needs to help
- Parking
- Traffic
  - One way streets are confusing
  - People avoid downtown due to this
  - Added congestion due to development
- Traffic
  - Especially with new construction of condos/residential
- Definition of what downtown is
  - new construction of condos

- business turnover for downtown
  - Is it supposed to be walkable shopping? Is it a destination?
- Have a lot of restaurants
  - one person felt too many
  - another felt like not enough variety
  - lack of quick food in downtown area for people who want something fast
- Anchor for the downtown is library
  - Used to be Walgreens when on Curtiss/Main
  - Library should be better supported by infrastructure and local government
  - Should be looking for additional parking not taking away parking by building on it
- Lack of access to grocery/food in downtown area
- Balance in downtown
  - Parking
  - Residential
  - Retail
  - Restaurants
- Downtown area
  - Vacancies
  - Lack of growth compared to other communities
- Limited space in downtown
  - Not a lot of space for retail
  - Not a lot of space for extra restaurants
  - Some community members might want a different feel
- Aesthetics of downtown
  - Some ugly buildings downtown
  - Impacts choice to live here
  - Trees/environment
- Will residential development change the character of downtown?
- Can we have a retail base (anchor stores in the downtown area) given the space/geographic footprint?
  - Don't want to move away from the hometown feel
  - Push to become more like other communities (ie Naperville, Hinsdale) with big-name retail downtown
- Keep downtown alive; love the developments
- Don't turn into massive developments like Naperville or Elmhurst
- Big condo buildings
  - Not all existing are occupied and already building more
  - Setting up for failure?
- Residential/condo development could be good for the area
  - Brings in different people

- Variety of housing stock
  - Attracts new restaurants/retail
- Residential/condo development makes the traffic and the parking problematic
- Residential development in downtown
- Streets
  - They seem in bad shape, patches over patches
  - Near South High School particularly bad
- Balance of economic growth vs. community needs
  - All branches of government working together on their focuses
  - Majority of budget by sales tax vs. increase in taxes
  - Subdivision increases before, but now that's not the case
- Balancing historic preservation with progress
- Built-out community
  - Stability in size but challenge of growth
- Competition among retail areas within Downers Grove
- Location as a draw
  - Close to 355/88/55/etc.
  - Easy to get to/from. That would be a good reason to locate here vs. other places.
- Disconnect between north and south
  - Downtown brings all together
  - Library as downtown meeting place
  - North/South high schools fuels competition
  - High schools draw from different communities than Downers Grove, adds to lack of feeling of a cohesive community
- New homes going up in existing neighborhoods can cause tension with long-term residents
- Older, smaller homes/historic buildings are being torn down to make way for larger homes
- Older citizens are staying in their homes because it's a comfortable community to live in for seniors with the train, etc.
- Tension between property rights vs. neighborhood concerns
  - Balance between individual rights and community good
- No big draw to come to DG
  - If someone is in Glen Ellyn, there is no big reason for anyone to come here instead.
  - Need something to put DG on the map (a theatre, a stadium, etc.)
  - Turning on La Grange Rd. from 55 - I don't see similar routes for turning off major highways to come to DG.
  - We have Midwestern University and Good Samaritan Hospital. Not exactly Elmhurst College or other big draw - but it's a start.
- Lack of promotion of events – perceived as less than was once done
- Community events are not listed through the library

- People don't know what is going on in the community or what to do with their time
  - No central place for people to know what goes on in town
- Learn a lot of what is going on from Village's Facebook posts
- People don't have access to resources and information
- More places in library for sitting/discussing/browsing
- Publicizing what libraries/librarians can do
- Balancing technology in the library with customer service There are very few noncommercial places for tweens and teens
- Library should stay open until 10 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights
- Library should have filmmaking workshops for adults
- Library should have drop in sessions in Media Lab for kids to make things like music videos
- Homeless population
  - Driven by the PADS shelters, the train routes, and places like the library being located where it is (personal observations)
  - Do we know if DG has significantly more or less than other nearby communities?
  - We do not actually know numbers or comparisons from DG to other communities.
  - PADS has made significant strides at getting people into homes.
  - Now we are seeing chronic homelessness - medical, mental health, substance abuse. Some other factor impeding the ability to find permanent housing through social service programs.
  - Some people don't want to find housing. So how do we work with those people?
- Lack of sidewalks / walkability
- Schools in the area
  - How to address growth / change
- Are there more children/families in Downers Grove? Potential impact on schools
- State budget and potential impact on schools/libraries
  - LRC directors fading out
  - How can the library fit in the gap
  - Schools are making a choice of technology versus librarians versus reading/traditional print
- How schools teach reading and impart learning and a love of reading to students
- Stress between D58 board and community
- Schools
  - Tradition of quality
  - Maintaining excellence
  - Impact of homeschooling and private schools
  - Impact on property values
- Police Department

- Can they keep up with growth?
  - Do they they have the knowledge and equipment to keep us safe?
- Concerned about police presence in downtown last Friday
- Fees for Park District services/programs too high
- Can't understand why citizens aren't revolting against the state government not having a budget
- State of Illinois
  - Gridlock
  - Negative impact on all
  - Dampens/overshadows all positives
- State's reputation is a casualty of political issues
- Resistance to change
  - Desire to mitigate change rather than stop it
- Village revenues – where will they come from?
- Maintaining diverse property tax base
- High taxes
- Keep my taxes low by allowing developments such as on Ogden Avenue
- Property taxes
- Untapped immigrant community
  - Many women in particular stay at home and don't know what to do with their time, don't know about the library
- Lack of diversity

### **3. VISION**

A vibrant and welcoming community with services to support people at all ages and stages of life centers around a beautiful downtown. Diversity in all aspects, from housing stock to race to economic status, contributes to the community feeling and supports the programs and cultural events that draw people to Downers Grove, making it a destination.

- Beautiful town - aesthetics
- We want it to be one community, not 3 separate communities.
- Higher profile in the Chicago area
  - More of a destination, rather than a point along the way to somewhere else
- More accessible to new buyers + seniors + families in between
  - You want to cover everyone, so it's attractive to multiple kinds of people
  - Do seniors have somewhere to move? Note: retirement used to trigger selling a home; now it is the death of a spouse. Causing some residents to leave DG
- Affordable housing
  - variety of options
  - especially in the downtown area
  - For singles, young couples, etc.

- Vibrant community
  - Something new and exciting
  - Not just the same thing year after year
- What is our "thing" - something big enough that draws people in
  - Parks? Bicycle paths? Water area? Bustling downtown? Heritage Fest? Lombard's Lilac Fest? Music and arts? Not sure what it would be...
  - Do we need a good meeting space? Convention center type place? Less than 1,000 people at the Tivoli but more than 100 at the Masonic Temple. A recent study showed that nearby areas did it and couldn't fill them.
  - Do artists live here? More of a focus on galleries and entertainment.
- Programs/cultural events for people/group events
- Downtown as self-sustaining, walkable area
  - Groceries
  - Carry out food
  - Hardware
  - If you don't have car, you can live here
- Get formula right in downtown – residential/retail/events/restaurants
  - Condos fully occupied
  - Events
  - Retail like mom-and-pop grocer, pharmacy
  - All ages and stages
- No overdevelopment
- Multi -generational community – should have services to deal with all of those needs
  - Difficult to know about the services that already exist
  - For all ages
- More people aging in place
  - Need to remember these long-time residents
  - Support/services they need
- Diversity
  - Racial
  - Economic
  - Housing stock
- Attractive to diverse audience
- Diversity – increased overall aspects
  - People
  - Housing options
  - Intellectually
  - Economically
- With the condo construction around downtown, a more cosmopolitan element may be coming to DG
- Welcoming for all
  - Ages



- Economics
  - Diverse housing stock to give all a place
- Community resources for all ages and stages
- Overpass/underpass for either Main or Washington.
  - Would help would traffic back up.
  - Better traffic flow
  - Car show impeded traffic on Fridays or with any kind of program
- A place that relies more on alternative forms of transportation (bikes instead of cars)
- DG parks being utilized with facilities that are accessible to the elderly and handicapped
- More outdoor space with opportunities for people to interact and spend time together
  - Downtown area
  - Library
- More green space
- Opportunities for people to gather, to meet, to talk, to break down barriers, to meet face to face and share, opportunities for people who are different to be able to talk and share
- A sense of belonging, a sense of community
- Friendly
- Neighborhood connections, opportunities to be social
- Well-maintained infrastructure that cuts out the politics

#### **4. SERVICES**

Services desired included cultural and arts programming and civic engagement opportunities around topics of general community interest. Participants stated the need for a place to make social connections and have face-to-face interactions. Information about how to access supportive services as well as the services themselves is needed.

- Wi-Fi & computer access & printing
- Computer help
- School programs and extracurricular activities
- Continuing / ongoing education
- Access to literacy/lifelong learning
  - Increased awareness of programs available (ie GED etc)
  - Volunteer opportunities
- People to have a place to share knowledge about the community/ways to benefit each other (ie Maker-fairs)
- More homeschool support programs
- Mentoring programs
  - Intergenerational
  - Use community talent and resources

- Docents? Human library?
- Partnerships with artists/galleries - like the quilt display up right now!
- DG needs to have a “Cinearts theater of the southern suburbs” that show films such as “I am not your Negro”
- Bookstore with author speakers that appeal to me and better emails about books
- Core Village services - streets, police, etc. - they just work!
- Concerned about how budget problems are affecting services
- Park District - kids programs, preschool, Lincoln Center activities, sports
- Lots of parks - you don't have to drive too far to get to one
- Better parking needed!
- Parking
- Public forums
- Might be one of the reasons it feels like there are three separate communities. Where / when do we interact with each other?
- A role some libraries have taken on - civic engagement. Ongoing series of community dialogues. Various topics. Who's hurting? Who's doing what? What can we do?
- Bring together entire community – move beyond neighborhood segmentation
- Opportunities to connect
  - Communitywide
  - Civic engagement
  - Social, face-to-face
  - Human element
- Events draw folks to the downtown – concerts in the park, car shows, etc.
- Retail anchor in downtown
- Need a reason to shop here on regular days
- Need to know what's available – don't know what's available unless you already use it
- County-based services
  - Individual communities can't compete
- Knowledge about volunteering opportunities
  - For families / with kids
- Community center
  - Library used to be more of a gathering place
  - Homeless monopolize seating areas for long periods of time
- Get the word out about library services
- Can't get affordable dental care
- Live on Social Security Disability and Food Stamps—afraid of what will happen with these in current Administration

## **5. CHALLENGES**

Again, parking, traffic and taxes were repeated by participants. Participants identified a lack of big ideas, a vision of how to overcome challenges. It was noted that people are overscheduled and don't volunteer like previous generations, which is affecting many

community organizations. There is a perceived lack of connection and social interaction as technology becomes more pervasive. Keeping local businesses competitive is important. The library's role as a sanctuary

- Proximity
  - How do we make Downers Grove stand out from the surrounding suburbs?
  - What would entice people to come live here?
- Parking! Ha!
- Parking again
- Traffic and parking again
- Public transportation
  - Local and affordable
  - Timely
  - Increasing shuttle bus access or some sort of public transportation access
- Funding
- Nobody wants to pay more, but everyone wants everything.
- No one wants taxes to increase
  - Cuts to balance budgets
  - Storm water referenda as example
  - Poor quality of construction in projects due to low bidder restrictions, street paving example given
- Intergovernmental cooperation – making progress
- Big ideas – vision of how to overcome challenges
  - Has anyone proposed anything big? What do we think we should do and want to fund?
  - Do you think anyone would back a big idea though?
- NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard)
- Non-residents sometimes the most vocal. May have restricted access to some services but vocal about what they want.
- Lack of volunteers
  - People are working, commuting, and raising families. Busy! Takes a lot to do all of that.
  - Nature of volunteers has changed - what they are willing/able to do is not necessarily what organizations are looking for or need.
  - Is inertia the problem? Getting people motivated?
- Friends of the Library volunteers are elderly and seem anxious to pass the baton, don't see their [baby boomer] generation and younger involved
- Overscheduled lifestyles - time
- Walkability / physical connectedness
  - Unincorporated, quiet areas but make walking harder.
  - Initiative to put sidewalks on at least one side of every street. Some people don't want that though. Multiple points of view.

- More than just sidewalks - bike trails, connecting neighborhoods, gutter/curb system, etc.
- Town feels too cramped
- Real estate in downtown - doesn't have much space to expand.
  - Opportunities to expand near industrial park at Belmont
  - Redevelopment of existing parcels
  - Think past downtown
- The library 20 years ago was not necessarily a place I would leave my kids alone
- Library used to have more events, programs, speakers
  - Spring Gala, WGN radio DJ, Christmas decorating examples of programs no longer offered
  - Wider range for adults needed
  - Daytime programming suggested
  - Not aware of computer classes (discussion among participants about what's available)
- Lack of homeschool support in this area
- Lack of promotion of services and events
  - Definitely not as much as they used to be
  - Welcome Wagon example of service no longer available
  - Computer classes no longer promoted by Worknet
  - "People can't ask what they don't know about."
- Connecting to organizations/businesses/local events calendars
- Where do you find information and resources on community opportunities?
  - Social
  - Programs
  - Events
- Lack of face-to-face, social interaction
  - Divides people
  - Diminishes feeling of community
- Getting people out of their comfort zone
- Not a lot going on
  - Increase opportunities
  - Need to pique people's interest to get them there
- Competition with other communities – not as many interesting opportunities locally
- Park District - beautiful building on Belmont, but programs and services are cost-prohibitive
- Change
  - Construction
  - Retail turnover
- Downtown retail isn't open on Sundays
  - Little incentive for people to come downtown

- Balance between working people who want to come downtown and the challenges of a small business.
- Downtown businesses compete with the Ogden and 63rd street businesses, feeling of competition among DG businesses in different areas
- Change in the education system
  - How kids use the library is changing because so much of their materials are online
- Tech divide between parents and kids, especially as tech is pushed in the school
  - Supporting parents in knowledge/use of tech for school etc.
- Changes to the school system as politics change
  - Education climate nationwide
- Technology as a social outlet for kids and seniors
- Support individualism by connecting parents to help each other
- Homeless in library: at a certain point, can't stay in area with homeless because of the smell and large number of bags
- Homeless don't bother me at all; I'm not offended by smell
- The library is a sanctuary
- Kids in youth area aren't comfortable with homeless, they keep their distance or move away from homeless
- Homeless like the library because it is a better environment than a shelter
- Library staff is incredible
- Touched to witness a staff member listening to and talking with a homeless person about what they are working on with their piles of papers

## **6. WHAT WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

Improved bicycle access and local public transportation could help alleviate the parking problem. A vibrant downtown with a variety of arts and cultural events, supported by integrated public relations, promotion and marketing to help get the word out about what's available. Civil discourse and community conversation occurs with opportunities to learn from one another.

- Better parking! Especially north side of the tracks.
- More parking!
- Better bike access could alleviate traffic and parking concerns
- Unifying community through public transportation access
  - Accommodate people where they are
  - Needs to be visible and convenient.
- Alleviate congestion
  - Close Main Street to vehicle traffic
- Knowing more about what's going on around town – example of street fests shutting down areas
- Better communication! How do people want to receive their information?
  - Currently using NextDoor website for news and alerts.

- Separate enews or source for every organization
  - Unaware that the Village has an eBlast, and downtown management, and the library.
  - Under-utilized events calendars
  - Usually it's accidentally heard about - or mentioned from a friend.
- One community theme – One stop shop for all details.
  - Website? App? Enews?
  - Services, events, emergency alerts
  - It is definitely a challenge. How do you make it findable? Usable?
- Village could do better job of promoting the library
- Library needs to promote itself better
- Lots of social media Downers Grove pages, all separate
  - Look for ways for library to contribute more to them
- Work with partners to promote ourselves better
- Let community know what's available
  - “Community organizations fair”
  - Help get the word out to all
- Increased cultural events/knowledge of cultural events
- Getting the word out about what's available – people get too many emails/mailings
- Civic engagement
  - Line item groups on real estate taxes - I don't know much about them or what they're doing
- Community focus groups on topics of local interest
  - Opportunities for civic engagement
  - Former business association in town did this for local businesses, not sure what's available now
- (Disagreement during above conversation about homeless) This is an example of the level of dialogue that is getting worse in our community
- Hostility is going up during civil discourse; library could do something about that
- More opportunities for people to share what they have/know/can do
- Community center – one central place online and in-person to connect to the community
- More events to draw people in
  - Variety of things to do
  - Support for new or different
  - Broad appeal
  - Willingness and means to try new things
- Food festival
- Openness to new ideas
- Library staff are an asset – kind, informative, patient, helpful
- Library to become a more comfortable gathering place
- Less self-service in the library.
- Having a sense of welcoming/belonging in the library

- Chatting too long with staff at desk gets cut off by supervisor even when no one is waiting
- Library is a way to feel connected in the community
- Give tweens and teens alternative activities that are not commercial
- Every time I ask for a book, you get it for me
- I couldn't live without the library
- Troubles me that I can't access the full text New York Times or other primary sources
- The younger generation does not understand media literacy
- Library should work with the school system to augment their media literacy lessons
- Show films that teens might not see otherwise
- Infrastructure improvements in downtown
- Enticing a "draw" retail store to downtown
- Spread out the downtown area past the tracks
- Downtown events should be a draw, not something you avoid due to traffic, parking, etc.
- Downtown as destination
  - More street art/scenic walk areas
  - Cultural events
- Village not listening to local businesses, making rules that are not business-friendly
  - Sign ordinance example – expensive to comply and makes businesses harder to find
  - Licensing requirements/fees to generate income for Village drive businesses out
- Long-time residents may need support/assistance on upkeep of older homes
- Importance of supporting local businesses
- How do you increase awareness of local businesses and make them more visible?
- Incentives for energy efficiency
  - Are public buildings working to become more energy efficient? They should.
  - Individuals too. What could we be doing and be rewarded for?
  - Fragmented DG - different areas want different things. There is no unifying vision.
- Diversity of DG can be intimidating to some, making one vision difficult to achieve
  - So how do you get a unifying village-wide vision when we all have such different backgrounds and ideas?

## **Final Thoughts**

Just before leaving, the couple who had attended together stopped me to comment that they should have added homeless people in the Library to their concerns. They felt that finding ways to connect those people to services would make a difference.

Library is a draw - find ways to improve upon that.

### **Other Feedback**

Prior to starting, a man came in, asking what the Community Focus Group was. After hearing the description, he said, "I can't stay, but this Library is the best. I always find what I need. Keep doing what you're doing!"

After the session ended, a woman came in, apologizing that she had missed the session. She had a few comments:

- The Teen area should be open to adults during the day, with some way of letting people know that.
- The lighting upstairs is terrible in most of the seating areas upstairs (underlying basis for wanting to use the Teen area during the day – better light).
- Classes for adults about Google Cardboard or other virtual reality would be great.

Julie Milavec directed both to [dglibrary.org/plan](http://dglibrary.org/plan) for the online survey version of the questions.