

**DOWNERS GROVE PUBLIC LIBRARY  
STRATEGIC PLANNING  
SUMMARY OF KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW RESPONSES  
FEBRUARY - MARCH 2017**

**What are the issues in our community that your organization is seeking to address?**

Issues are grouped under the following 6 major rubrics: Education, Government, Social Issues, Business, Diversity, and the Arts. In addition, responses that weren't categorizable under specific concerns, but related to general issues of broad concern, are captured under the more general rubric "Community." The following lists how many concerns related to each rubric, and identifies some general themes that emerged under each of them. The total equals more than 39, since many responses related to more than one category.

**Themes** (in order of most mentioned to least mentioned, numbers indicate total responses)

- **Community:** These responses included themes such as providing space for recreation and socializing, enhancing the general quality of life in the community economic and maintaining the Village's appeal as a good place to live and have a family. (16)
- **Education:** Major themes included access to technology, providing support for Downers Grove educational institutions. (15)
- **Social Issues:** Creating awareness and providing support to marginalized communities in DG, including the homeless, the aged and the disabled. (12)
- **Diversity:** The primary concerns respondents were attempting to address included economic diversity, inclusion and support of aging community members, while welcoming newcomers into an expensive housing stock. (9)
- **Government:** Major themes included safety, planning and provision of core government services (fire, police, urban planning). (8)
- **Business:** Issues addressed included responding to outside competition (e-commerce and neighboring towns), encouraging local business. (5)
- **The Arts:** These organization were focused on maintaining and renewing the current platforms for artistic endeavor in DG for adults and children. (3)

**What challenges are your organization facing?**

Five challenges dominated the conversations with key stakeholders. Many were concerned with their organization's finances or funding. Many had facility needs--some needed a facility, some needed to upgrade, repair or add to their facility, and some had parking issues. Many stakeholders saw promotion or marketing as a challenge, wanting to improve their promotion or marketing endeavors. Membership—getting new members, attracting younger members, difficulties in relying on aging members—was a common theme. Volunteerism was also important, especially to those who depend on volunteers to staff their organizations and are worried about attracting new volunteers.

**Themes** (in order of most mentioned to least mentioned, numbers indicate total responses)

- Finances/Funding (19)
- Facilities (upgrade, repairs, additional space, parking) (14)
- Promotion/Marketing (13)
- Membership (aging membership, few new members, younger members) (12)
- Volunteerism (11)
- Community partnerships (5)
- Change (4)
- Social Issues (4)
- Staffing (3)
- State of IL issues (3)
- Time (lack of) (3)
- Unfunded mandates (3)
- Diversity (2)
- Transportation (2)
- Communication (1)
- Lifelong Learning (1)
- Objective Information (1)
- Programming (1)
- Research Help (1)
- Stormwater Issues (1)

**When you think about our community, what are your most positive and powerful impressions?**

Residents of Downers Grove take pride in their community and really enjoy living here. A safe, clean, and nice community, it has a small town feel despite its larger population. People are engaged and get involved in the community. Highlights include a walkable and vibrant downtown with many fun activities to take part in for all ages. Several comments noted the great public services available to them. Overall, Downers Grove is a friendly and caring community.

**Themes** (in order of most mentioned to least mentioned, numbers indicate total responses)

- Great schools, parks, library, police and fire, village services (14)
- Friendly (9)
- Caring and generous spirit (8)
- Family friendly, oriented (7)
- Vibrant downtown (7)
- Strong sense of community (7)
- Community activities (educational and entertainment) (6)
- People who grew up here return to raise their families (generational) (6)
- Location and ease of access to public transportation (6)
- Strong local business presence (4)

- Restaurants (3)
- Local history (3)
- Diverse (3)
- Progressive (3)

### **What other issues or concerns do you see for our community?**

Five major themes stood out in response to this question: concern over decisions by the Village and Downers Grove's infrastructure, access and awareness of social services, a need for education and lifelong learning, a need for diversity, and connectivity issues for organizations and community members. The groups interviewed also expressed concerns that are not able to be categorized under the other themes. The themes are listed in order from most responses to least.

**Infrastructure and the Village:** A major theme that emerged under community concerns deals with decisions made by the Village and its infrastructure. The interviewees are concerned about the effects of real estate development decisions and treatment of local businesses in the downtown area. Businesses are struggling to abide by Village rules and there is concern that, as a result, businesses will leave Downers Grove and we won't be able to attract new ones (also applies to other retail corridors of Downers Grove, not just the downtown area). Lack of a thriving downtown will make the new condo developments less appealing to new residents. Also, a repeated concern by interviewees is the lack of parking in the downtown area with residents, commuters, and businesses competing for parking space; the issue has been exacerbated by the condominium construction. Interviewees do not think that the downtown area will be able to support even more demand for parking once new residents start moving into the condos. Further, there is concern that the cost of living is too high and prohibitive to fostering the socio-economic diversity as discussed in a later point.

**Social Services:** A sizeable amount of responses related to the need for, access to, and awareness of services for underserved and marginalized populations, including (but not limited to) the elderly, homeless, developmentally disabled, those suffering from mental illnesses, low-income households, and those seeking to escape domestic violence. Individuals tend to be unaware services exist and do not have the skills or equipment needed (computer, internet access) to seek them out. Increases in both the senior population and the number of individuals with mental health issues particularly highlighted the need for social services, and there is concern over the future of funding for relevant programs. There is a lack of public space where the homeless population is welcome to spend the day; residents will complain about the presence of the homeless in parks, pavilions, etc., even if they are not causing problems.

**Education and Lifelong Learning:** Many interviewees made comments on challenges related to education and lifelong learning for both students and adult populations. Interviewees commented on the need for a well-supported school district, as well as a more thorough understanding of the curriculum and curriculum changes by parents. Students need help navigating college prep and balancing extracurricular activities, as

the college application process is more competitive. There is also a feeling that students and families need opportunities outside of school for learning in the areas of technology, STEM, art, and music. Special education students are in need of opportunities to feel included in the community outside of school and after they graduate. For adults (including seniors) and families, interviewees commented on the lack of opportunities in arts and music, or at least at a lack of funding or support for it. Adult education is also needed in technology and information literacy, particularly for seniors and groups with limited access.

**Need for Diversity:** The interviewees commented on a need for both cultural and socioeconomic diversity within Downers Grove. However, they also recognize that saying you want diversity is easier than actively incorporating it into your community. Some perceive a feeling of superiority over more diverse neighboring communities, such as Bolingbrook and Woodridge, that potentially creates a sense of unwelcomeness. Within Downers Grove, there is a sense of a division between the north and south side of town. As a result, there is concern that underserved populations on the south side of town do not have access to as many services or resources as the more privileged north side.

**Connectivity:** According to some interview responses, organizations and community members both desire to be more connected within their communities. For organizations, there is a desire for better communication between different groups and/or village agencies. Organizations would like to be more aware of what services fellow organizations are offering in order to form partnerships and avoid duplication. Community members are also interested in being more connected and involved in their community. There is a desire to give and volunteer, but also a lack of knowledge about various organizations or opportunities. Some citizens also now want to be more involved in their communities in an activist capacity, but are not sure how or where they can do this. Both organizations and community members face the problem of there just being 'too many things to do.' Organizations are competing for attention and funding, while community members, families, and children may already be involved in too many activities.

**Miscellaneous:** There were also a few responses that were on single topics or didn't have enough context for us to categorize. These included:

- Government worries- new federal administration, uncertainty in Springfield, possibilities of tax freezes.
- Lack of public pool or aquatic facility in Downers Grove
- Unwillingness to challenge 'status quo'
- Change is coming, how do we adapt?

**When you think about what we've talked about, what are the kinds of things that could be done that would make a difference?**

Responses to what would make a difference centered around partnerships and civic engagement, especially in the areas of marketing/communications and programming.

Responses included suggestions and ideas for Library programs as well as partnerships for programming. Working together to connect people to services and local organizations through referral or cooperative marketing efforts was mentioned repeatedly. Support of diversity and inclusion through civic engagement and programming would make a difference. Parking improvements were also mentioned, as a possible partnership opportunity.

**Themes** (in order of most mentioned to least mentioned, numbers indicate total responses)

- Civic engagement (identifying and addressing issues) (23)
  - Pooling collective talent
  - Listening
  - Finding answers together
  - Community forum
  - Educating others on available resources
  - Diverse dialogue among individuals, organizations, government
- Programming/services (22)
  - Supporting others programs/services
  - Working together on new ones
  - Offering our own "traditional" services like meeting/study space
  - Educational & entertainment programs
- Partnerships (18)
  - Usually in the form of conversations, programming ideas, pooling resources, sharing space
- Communication (15)
  - Getting the word out
  - Knowing about and sharing resources
  - One place to look for information
- Diversity (4)
  - Language, age
  - Variety of people/organizations/government at the table together
- Parking (3)