Before It's Too Late

Protecting the Character of Glen Ellyn

A Report by the Historic Preservation Graduate Program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

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Report by the graduate students in HPRES 5015, a planning studio class of the Historic Preservation Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Fall 2002.

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Central Glen Ellyn Teardown Map  Our “reconnaissance survey” found that more than 200 residential buildings have been demolished — and replaced by new residences — in the last decade.
Introduction

Glen Ellyn is at a critical juncture in its development. Recent teardowns have been changing the look and feel of the community but have not yet reached the point of no return — where Glen Ellyn’s “character” is irreparably harmed. However, that point may be reached soon if the type of teardown development described in the November 30, 2002, Chicago Tribune article about Glen Ellyn is allowed to continue unchecked.

- According to the article, a family “purchased property on a one-acre lot and razed an existing structure in order to build their new home, which includes 6,000 square feet on two upper levels and a 2,000-square-foot lower floor.”
- A developer was quoted, “Because of the land prices in Glen Ellyn, it’s pretty hard to build anything under $650,000 these days.” This belief — even if not true — continues to fuel rampant speculative teardowns.

In turn, many residents are asking the village to promote and encourage alternate plans for growth and development before it’s too late. We strongly believe that the benefits of preservation and landmarking should be summoned to help protect the character of Glen Ellyn.

But what is Glen Ellyn’s “character”? Other than the 1925 remodeling of the downtown into a Tudor Revival village, there has been no formal definition of this term, particularly concerning residential neighborhoods. The 2001 Comprehensive Plan talks about character but doesn’t define it explicitly.

This class was commissioned to undertake a survey of selected neighborhoods in search of historic resources and the effects of teardowns. We took it upon ourselves to also search for a definition of the elusive “character” of Glen Ellyn in hopes that it would help fine tune the village’s preservation planning efforts.

Our definition of Glen Ellyn’s character is a result of our research and field survey work. We:

- Researched the history of development in Glen Ellyn and created a timeline (see Chapter One).
- Conducted two field surveys and developed a residential style guide (Chapter Two). We also reviewed additions to a number of existing homes in the surveyed neighborhoods (Chapter Four).
Our Definition Of “Community Character”

As a result, we propose the following definition of Glen Ellyn’s “community character.”

Glen Ellyn is characterized by single-family homes representing the variety of architectural styles prominent from its founding through today that conform in several ways. They:

– Share the same setbacks on front and sides, allowing for uniform green space and space between lots.
– Have rear garages with car-width drives (no circular driveways that pave much of the front yard). Exceptions are the mid-century ranch houses.
– Feature front porches and windows, not garage doors or paved driveways, as their faces to the public.
– Do not tower over pre-existing residences.
– Incorporate trees into their landscaping.
– Often represent the latest in the architectural styles of their time.

Additions: The Secret Revolution

In conducting our surveys of Glen Ellyn, two things became obvious. First, the majority of infill development in the past five years has violated this definition of the “character” of the village. Second, many residents have solved their space requirements by taking part in a secret revolution: additions that maintain the integrity of the original single-family home. Additions are a viable solution to today’s trend in larger homes that does not destroy the village’s character.

As the village looks at these and other options for its future, we believe historic preservation strategies and tools are important keys to success. However, they must be combined with economic incentives that will encourage individual homeowners and developers alike to make use them. The end result can be a vibrant future that incorporates the best of Glen Ellyn’s past and its community character. 

• Analyzed the impact of teardowns on community character, drawing from Glen Ellyn history and surveys as well as lessons learned from other Chicagoland communities (Chapter Three).
• Examined existing preservation and regulatory tools in Glen Ellyn and made recommendations for strengthening those tools and increasing public participation through education programs (Chapter Four).
Chapter One: Developing Community Character

Historians constantly remind us to learn from the past. Glen Ellyn’s unique history, which is detailed in this chapter, teaches us the importance of balancing new development with a respect for the community’s existing physical character.

Glen Ellyn features one of the more diverse built environments in the Chicago region. Its hilly topography — coupled with a lively downtown, a wide variety of street grids and lot sizes, and diverse architectural styles — has created a community that continues to attract the interest of new residents and developers.

This distinctive character is no accident. It is the result of generations of steady but carefully managed growth, as Glen Ellyn has evolved from a tiny rural crossroads and summer resort into the “world’s loveliest suburb” and one of the first communities in Illinois to enact local zoning protection and to discourage look-a-like housing. Here’s a summary of the village’s key development milestones:

1850s – Growth moves south, from the early settlement of Babcock’s Grove to the new railroad community of Danby.

1890 – Prospect Park, as the community is now known, is marketed as a health resort featuring natural springs. Lake Ellyn is built and the town name is changed to Glen Ellyn.

1900 – Leaders decide to turn the community into “the world’s loveliest suburb.” Street layouts begin to adhere to the hilly topography, termed one of the “most picturesque” in the region.

1923 – The village adopts zoning controls the same year as Chicago. Two years later, the village’s Plan Commission establishes “Old English” (Tudor Revival) as the downtown’s preferred architectural style.

1960 – With prefabricated suburban housing at its peak, the village approves an ordinance prohibiting “two houses of identical exteriors” to be located near one another.

1971-2001 – Three decades of village master plans cite preservation of the community’s unique identity and appearance as a top priority. The 1986 plan says that new residences should be “in character with surrounding existing development.”
1830-1849

- Trappers and Indians settled the early years of the village, before white farmers arrive. As the town grew, mills, schools, and a few small businesses were built.
- Taverns built as a midpoint for travelers between Chicago and the Fox River. (1834)
- Officially recognized as a settlement. (1839)
- Milton Township’s population is 3,535. Land sells at $1.25 per acre. (1840s)
- Stacy’s Tavern is built. (1846)
- Construction on the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad begins. (1848)

Galena and Chicago Union Railroad Station, built 1851. Southeast corner of Main Street and Crescent Boulevard.

The Mansion House hotel built by David Kelley in 1852 on the northeast corner of Main Street and Delevan (Crescent Avenue).

Stacy’s Tavern, built 1846. It was restored in 1971 after the village purchased it from Dr. Grace Clunis.

Stacy’s Corner, a detail from the 1874 DuPage County map.
Main Street, looking north from present Duane Street, 1870.

In 1891 Thomas Hill changed the name of the village from Prospect Park to Glen Ellyn. Hill developed Lake Ellyn and built a resort around it.

Lake Ellyn, looking southwest at the island.

The Five Mineral Springs on Riford Road, 1890. Today a plaque marks the spot where the structure once stood.

1850-1859

- Township organization in effect. Milton Township’s population is now 10,000. (1850)

- The railroad is built through the settlement of Newton, which is renamed Danby. In 1852 David Kelly builds the Danby Hotel. He is active as a postmaster, justice-of-peace and owner of the Mansion House hotel. (1851)

- Population of Danby rises 300 to 400. (1856)

1860-1889

- Village name changed from Danby to Prospect Park. (1874). Village becomes a resort town with the discovery of mineral springs.

- First telephone in village at Boyd’s Hardware Store. (1880)

- Village’s population is 500. (1881)
1890-1899

- First big boom period. R.G. Boyd and Brothers contracted to build many of the homes in Glen Ellyn.

- Lake Ellyn and dam are proposed and built by Thomas Hill. (1890)

- Name changed to Glen Ellyn. (1891)

- Population of Glen Ellyn is 600. The village size is extended by 1,000 acres. (1892)

- Fire burns west side of downtown and records are lost.

- Village officials decide to change it from a resort town into the “world’s loveliest suburb.” (1900)

In 1890 the Glen Ellyn Hotel and Springs Company purchased and subdivided the land. The hotel opened for the 1893 summer season and, following its closing in 1895, was used by a variety of other institutions. It burned down following a lightning storm in 1906.

The Chicago and North Western Station, built in 1895. As the summer resorts close down, the village experiences a steady population growth. By 1900, it is being promoted as “the world’s loveliest suburb.”
The Chicago, Aurora and Elgin electric train line began service through Glen Ellyn in 1902, making it easy for residents to commute to Chicago.

Subdivisions like this one, offered by Chicago developer E. W. Zander, began transforming the look of largely rural Glen Ellyn in the early 1900s.

The influence of the Plan Commission, established in 1926, is seen in the unified Tudor Revival style of downtown Glen Ellyn.

1900-1909

- Chicago, Aurora and Elgin electric train line begins service through Glen Ellyn. (1902)
- Glen Ellyn Hotel, the last summer resort, burns to the ground. (1906)
- Village water system installed at cost of $40,776. (1907)
- Villa Park begins as a residential subdivision of Glen Ellyn.

1910-1919

- Village begins paving major streets.
- Ardmore subdivision created. (1910)
- Wave of subdivisions in 1914, including E.W. Zander’s Addition and William B. Walworth Country House Addition, and many smaller ones, developed.
- Lake Ellyn and surrounding area sold to village; turned into public park. (1914)
- First village ordinance on paving. (1915)
- World War I begins. (1917)
1920-1929

- Glen Ellyn had three real estate companies in 1920 serving a population of 3,890 — by 1929, there are 20 real estate companies and over 9,000 people.

- DuPage County Forest Preserve established. (1920)

- Village Board passes first zoning ordinance in Glen Ellyn. (1923)

- Glen Ellyn’s first Village Hall, on Pennsylvania Avenue, is completed in 1926.

- Glen Ellyn Plan Commission is formed. (1925)

1937 view of Main Street, looking north from Hillside Avenue, where residential and commercial uses still meet in Glen Ellyn today.
The Works Progress Administration (WPA) completed many public works in Glen Ellyn during the 1930s and early 1940s, including this mural for the village’s Post Office.

Main Street in 1958, with the newly completed Woolworth store in the foreground.

This 1959 Plat Book map shows Glen Ellyn boundaries at the end of the 1950s.

1940-1949

- Works Progress Administration (WPA) puts in signposts, sidewalks, storm sewers, and the Sunset Park swimming pool. (1940)
- World War II ends. (1945)
- G.I. Bill of Rights provides Federal-backed mortgages for home purchases, which is the beginning of the post-war housing boom. (1947)

1950-1959

- Home building exceeds $45 million/year by the end of the decade.
- Village Board approves plan for one-way streets in central business district. (1956)
• East-West Tollway opens south of Glen Ellyn. (1958)

• Market Plaza opens at Park Avenue and Roosevelt Road. (1958)

**1960-1969**

• Glen Ellyn experiences 40% population increase during the decade.

• Village Board passes ordinance prohibiting any two houses of identical exterior to be located on the same block or around the corner from one another. Meant to discourage prefabricated housing in the village. (1960)

• Annexations include 100 acres north of Roosevelt Road and the northwest side of Geneva Road from Main Street to the west corporate limits.

• Village purchases Stacy’s Tavern with intention of restoring and re-opening the historic inn. (1968)

• Village Board passes ordinance creating the Historic Sites Commission, an advisory body for preservation issues. (1968)

To prevent Glen Ellyn from being overrun by tract housing (like those in Levitttown, NY, pictured here) the village passed an ordinance promoting a diversity of housing styles in the 1960s.

In 1972, the Glen Ellyn Historical Society began its program to acknowledge historic houses with plaques. The Seth L. Baker Home, pictured here, was built in 1891 and plaqued in 1976.
Restoration of Stacy’s Tavern was the village’s first major preservation project. The tavern was dedicated on July 3, 1976.

In 1986, Glen Ellyn drafted its second comprehensive plan, which focused on preserving and improving the downtown and keeping the village’s “unique character and quality.”

Glen Ellyn revised its appearance criteria in 1989. The original guide had been passed with the first master plan in the 1970s.

1970-1979

- Glen Ellyn adopts first master plan, which includes creation of the Architectural Review Commission to review construction of public, commercial, business, and multi-family buildings, and the adoption of the Appearance Guide and Criteria Ordinance. (1972)

- Glen Ellyn Historical Society initiates program to place plaques on buildings 100 years or older. (1972) Society has plaqued 50 properties to date.

- Stacy’s Tavern placed on National Register of Historic Places. (1974)
1980-1989

- Glen Ellyn’s population is 24,687. (1986)

- Village Board approves $1.8 million improvement program for the central business district. (1984)

- Annexations include Saddlewood (development on St. Charles Road), Stacy Woods subdivision, and Darby Woods subdivision.

- Glen Ellyn drafts an updated comprehensive plan for the village. Among major concerns of village residents and board members are “the improvement and preservation of the central business district” and “the preservation of the village’s unique character and quality.” (1986)

- Glen Ellyn Main Street Historic District placed on National Register of Historic Places. (1984)

- Historic Sites Commission presents its first restoration award. (1985)

Glen Ellyn’s commitment to historic structures is reflected in this photo of the relocation of the Edgar H. McChesney home, moved in 1989 to escape demolition.

Glen Ellyn retains much of its historic character, particularly in its downtown area, as evidenced in this 1997 photograph.
To prevent new houses from filling most of their lots, Glen Ellyn passed an ordinance restricting lot coverage of new construction in 1995.

Glen Ellyn’s third and most recent comprehensive plan was drafted in 2001.

1990-present

- Village Board passes Historic Landmark Ordinance, which provides for volunteer designation of historic structures. (1991)

- Glen Ellyn annexes seven subdivision along the perimeter of the village. (1990-2000)

- Village census shows population has increased to 25,673. (1994)

- In response to new houses built close to lot lines, the Village Board prohibits one-story houses from covering more than 35% of the lot and two-story houses from covering more than 25% of the lot. (1995)

- Village Board drafts third comprehensive plan. (2001)

- Village adopts revised zoning ordinance to further guide infill development. (2002)
Central Glen Ellyn Map  The outlines indicate the boundaries of the three areas that were the subject of an Intensive Architectural Survey by students in the Historic Preservation Graduate Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Fall 2002.
Chapter Two:

Surveying the Architecture Of Central Glen Ellyn

At the request of the Village of Glen Ellyn, together with its Historic Preservation Commission and the Glen Ellyn Historical Society, this class conducted a historic resources survey of the community’s residential and commercial buildings in Fall 2002.

Reconnaissance Survey

The project began with a “reconnaissance survey” that covered more than half the village’s land area. For survey purposes, this area was broken down into 13 smaller sections, each assigned to an individual member of the class. (The area, shown at right, was roughly bounded by Geneva Road on the north; Riford, Waverly, Whittier, and Woodstock on the east; Greenfield and Revere on the south; and Newton and Kenilworth on the west.)

The major focus of this one-week reconnaissance survey was to quickly determine the extent of recent “teardowns” and to identify which buildings in Glen Ellyn had potential as future stand-alone local landmarks (rated "A") and those which could potentially contribute to a historic district (rated "B"). Some of the other topics covered in this reconnaissance survey were: the location of garages (front or rear yards), building setback lines, significant trees, and tree canopy coverage.

The locations of “A-” and “B-” rated buildings and teardowns were color-coded on a large map of the village. A total of 4,100 buildings was surveyed. Our general conclusions from this reconnaissance survey were that a great diversity of architectural styles exists throughout the village and that teardowns are broadly distributed throughout the initial study area.

Intensive Architectural Survey

Based on findings from the reconnaissance survey — and in consultation with village representatives — a smaller study area was identified for the second phase: a detailed building-by-building “intensive architectural survey.” This area (facing page) was subdivided into three study areas, each assigned to a survey team.

- The boundaries of the North Area were Geneva Road on the north; Lenox on the east; Anthony on the south; and Pleasant on the west. Also included in this area were Lake Ellyn Park and Glenbard East High School.
- The South Area was bounded by Hillside Avenue on the...
north; Main on the east; Hill on the south; and Brandon on the west.

- The boundaries of the Downtown Commercial Area were Anthony Street on the north; Park on the east; Hillside on the south; and Western on the west.

**Survey Forms**

The survey forms that the class developed for the Intensive Architectural Survey were loosely based on those used by the City of Chicago in its citywide historic resources survey. The Glen Ellyn forms were modified to meet certain key needs, such as: garage location/description, tree coverage, and building setback.

**Evaluation Criteria**

Two groups of buildings were identified for inclusion in the survey: those that surveyors felt would be eligible for designation as an individual local landmark and those that they felt would be “contributing” to a potential local or National Register Historic District. Each of these buildings was photographed and an individual survey form was completed.

After completion of the field survey work, each surveyor selected those structures they regarded as “A”-rated properties. These forms, with the photographs attached, were then evaluated by the entire class to confirm their architectural significance and integrity as “A” buildings. The remaining surveyed buildings were given a rating of “B.”

**Database**

A comprehensive database has been developed based on the results of the survey. Each entry includes current street address, historic name (if known), construction date (if known), dominant architectural style, style of any key architectural details, architect (if known), and if it is included in the Glen Ellyn Plaque Program, the Illinois State Historic Resources Survey, or the National Register of Historic Places.

**Key Findings**

More than 1,000 properties were reviewed for their significance. Of those, survey forms were completed for roughly half (509) of the buildings. Of these, 79 were identified as “A-rated” structures, with the rest classified as “B.” Detailed recommendations are listed in Chapter Four of this report.

**Next Step**

Due to the time constraints of this four-month project, permit research was not conducted for the bulk of the surveyed residences. We feel this task is best completed by local volunteers. Survey funding for this task could be applied for through the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.
Almost every building documented in the Glen Ellyn Intensive Architectural Survey was assigned an overall building or architectural style. These styles are based on commonly accepted American architectural styles. This guide is not a definitive listing of all styles found in Glen Ellyn, but rather meant as a representation of the most dominant architectural styles found in the survey area.

**Stick (1860-1890)**
The style is defined primarily by decorative detailing. Varied patterns of wood siding and shingles are applied in square and triangular spaces.

**Common Characteristics**
- Steeply pitched gable roof with cross gables
- Decorative truss work
- Overhanging eaves with exposed rafter ends
- Wooden clapboards or shingle siding

**Queen Anne (1880-1910)**
Queen Anne was just one of the many styles popular during the last half of the 19th Century. Queen Anne homes were wonderfully asymmetrical, with turrets, gables, dormers, and porches projecting at every angle. Many of the Queen Anne homes in Glen Ellyn are simpler versions of high-style designs.

**Common Characteristics**
- Rich but simple ornament
- Variety of materials, including wood, terra cotta, stone and pressed metal
- Expansive porches
- Pressed metal bays and turrets
- Irregular rooflines with many dormers and chimneys
**Folk Victorian (1870-1910)**
With their spindles and porches, some Folk Victorian may suggest Queen Anne architecture. But, unlike Queen Anne designs, these are orderly, symmetrical houses. They do not have towers, bay windows or elaborate moldings.

**Common Characteristics**
- Low-pitched pyramid shaped roof
- Front gable and side wings
- Square, symmetrical shape
- Brackets under the eaves
- Porches with spindle work or flat jigsaw-cut trim

**Colonial Revival (1880-1955)**
This style combines elements of both Federal and Georgian architecture, which were popular styles in America in the 1700s and 1800s. Typically, they are built from brick or sided with clapboard or shingles.

**Common Characteristics**
- Symmetrical facades, often with side porches
- Red brick or wood clapboard walls
- Entrances decorated with sidelights, transoms, columns and pediments
- Either hip or gable roof, often with dormers
- Generally trimmed in white
**Tudor Revival (1890-1940)**
Based on English architecture from the 1500s and 1600s, Tudor Revival gained great popularity as a residential style in America during the early 20th Century.

**Common Characteristics**
- Asymmetrical massing
- Brick and stone 1st floors
- Half-timbered upper floors
- Diamond paned casement windows
- Steeply pitched, intersecting gable roofs
- Tall decorative chimneys

**American Foursquare (1895-1930)**
Post-Victorian style of single-family house, prized for its ease of construction, practicality and roomy interior. Name derived from layout of “four rooms up and four rooms down.” This style of house is found throughout Glen Ellyn.

**Common Characteristics**
- Cubic shape
- Hipped roof, usually with dormers
- Broad front porch, sometimes enclosed
- Little use of ornament
- Built in a wide variety of materials including: wood, brick and stucco
**Cottage (1890-1940)**
The small, fanciful cottage is a sub-type of the Tudor Revival house style. Based on cottages built in England since medieval times. A massive chimney often dominates the front or one side of the house.

**Common Characteristics**
- 1 1/2 stories
- Asymmetrical design
- Ornament restricted to around windows and beneath the roofline
- Brick stone or stucco siding
- Small dormer windows

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**Gable Front/Farmhouse (1895-1930)**
Gable Front houses were inexpensive and easy to build. They were particularly well suited to narrow lots in rapidly expanding cities. This type of house could easily be dressed up with whatever details were characteristic of high-style homes at the time.

**Common Characteristics**
- Rectangular floor plan
- Front facing gable
- Few details