Social Impacts Related to Teardowns

- Decreased safety due to construction traffic and on-street parking.
- As front yards are replaced by driveways, the way children play, people garden, and the community interacts will be affected.
- The way the community celebrates and expresses holiday cheer will change as garages dominate the front yard and replace picture windows, etc.
- A sense of neighborhood continuity and stability is lost when speculative developers rather than residents control the neighborhood’s destiny.
- Decrease in the number of first time homebuyers and elderly because of lack of affordable housing stock.
- Diminishing economic diversity of population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glen Ellyn's Average Household Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Census</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.44</td>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area/ Income Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $15,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>$15,000 to $24,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>$25,000 to $34,999</td>
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<td>$35,000 to $49,999</td>
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<td>$50,000 to $74,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>$75,000 to $99,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>$100,000 and Over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Glen Ellyn’s April 2001 Comprehensive Plan, 220 homes were torn down between 1993 and 2000. Forty-six homes were lost in 2000 alone. In June 2000, Christensen Contracting Corporation purchased the home at 750 Highview for $287,000. Six months later, the new four-bedroom house built on the site was listed at $1.265 million on www.chicagotribune.com. This escalation is not an anomaly, but part of an overall trend. The home at 681 N. Park sold for $329,000 in 1997. In 2000, the new house built on the site sold for $1.3 million.

In addition to cost, the scale of these larger homes is often insensitive to neighboring homes and, therefore, neighboring homeowners. Existing homeowners are not shy about expressing their frustrations. For example, when old houses are torn down and new ones built, neighbors are inconvenienced by construction traffic. Then, as the new building begins to rise and spread, it is not uncommon for neighbors to find large shadows cast onto their properties and their yards damper from the new house’s rainwater runoff. One homeowner on Euclid Avenue also noted that his new neighbors often walk onto his property to get to their backyard due to the lack of a side yard. Whether this is fact or fiction, animosity is present as the frustration that established homeowners feel toward the new construction is projected onto the new homeowner as well.

All of these factors work to diminish the “small-town” atmosphere that many Glen Ellyn residents value about their community (see the June 2000 Community Attitude Study). If scenarios similar to the ones above continue to be played out, the friendly, “small-town” atmosphere that citizens have come to appreciate will surely be jeopardized.

In September 2002, the Citizens for Glen Ellyn Preservation surveyed village citizens regarding their feelings on teardowns. Although the final compilation of the results had not been released at the time of this report, here are some of the most common comments from residents.

“But let us suggest a possible short-term remedy for the demolition problem, and that is a moratorium on new residential building permits until the Village of Glen Ellyn has updated and modernized the existing waste disposal sewer system.”
“I’m also concerned when an ‘historic’ $250,000 bungalow on a large lot is replaced by a $750,000 mansion.”

“It is absolutely clear that the system is currently over-taxed and that this problem continues to worsen with every teardown that is rebuilt (or every garage demolished to make way for another condo building). It does seem a bit unjust that owners of homes are now required to subsidize the teardown process by installing overhead sewers to protect their homes from waste backup.”

“No more senior citizen buildings — please. Why do we permit such cheap, tacky buildings? What’s with the ‘brick front’? Do they think we never look around the corners? ‘Brick front’ should be outlawed.”

“Not all houses are worth saving but when one comes down, the HUGE new houses almost always look out of place and changes the character of the neighborhood.”

“I’m glad a group is finally getting together to protect historic Glen Ellyn. It is too late to save Glen Ellyn’s charm and small town feel. We’ve lost valuable housing stock to developers. The mega-mansions are all over and different people are moving in. Our tax dollars will increase, but the charm is gone. The moment the downtown condos got higher than the tree line and pressed against the sidewalk and we could no longer see church steeples downtown, we lost ‘the village.’ ”

“I’ve lived in this village 33 years and I love living here. I love everything here and shopping in town. Please don’t allow some organization or builder, who wants to make a profit on a site they care nothing about, to name their way. High rises (frown face). Glen Ellyn is a refuge!”
Recent Teardowns: Before and After

After

Before

- Interrupts height pattern of neighborhood, causing shadow effect on adjacent homes
- Garage and driveway are the predominant visual features
- Encroaches on adjacent homes
- Loss of front yard to pavement

- Garage is as large as a small home
- The lack of porch and yard lessens neighborhood interaction
- Mass of the building is inconsistent with the neighborhood
- Loss of trees and green area
• Garage creates a blank face to side street
• Loss of side yard and craftsmanship
• The building is too bulky and tall for scale of neighborhood

• Garage is the main visual feature
• The lack of a front porch lessens neighborhood interaction
• Massing is inconsistent with neighborhood

• Garage is half of the building
• Loss of green space to pavement
• Windows are too small for elevation
• Façade is flat and visually uninteresting
• Front door is obscured by garage
• Building is out of scale with other homes in neighborhood
• Loss of front yard caused by size of driveway

• Loss of craftsmanship and character
• Home is very automobile oriented
• Significant loss of green space to three-lane drive
• Multiple rooflines create cluttered appearance

• Garage roofline too prominent
• Loss of craftsmanship and side yard
• Home has no discernable style
- Garage is almost as large as house
- Encroaches on adjacent homes
- Mass is out of scale with other houses in neighborhood
- Building is three times larger than original home (see site plans below)
Lessons Learned
From Other Communities

Teardowns are a hot topic around the country as cities and suburbs have begun losing much of their architectural heritage to new construction. Called “Bash and Builds,” “Starter Castles,” “McMansions,” “Monster Homes,” “Big Box Victorian,” and “Snout Houses,” among other names, these new structures are out of scale with their surrounding neighborhoods and often replace historic buildings that contributed to the community’s character.

A number of towns have recognized the impact of teardowns and instituted regulations that have helped slow down the trend. Articles covering these efforts abound in both national and local media. The National Trust for Historic Preservation recently published a report, *Protecting America’s Historic Neighborhoods: Taming the Teardown Trend*, that outlines the causes and effects of teardowns.

Lessons learned about teardowns from other communities can be valuable for Glen Ellyn. This section focuses on towns around Chicago that are also faced with the issue of teardowns and how citizens are responding to them.

Elmhurst is located 20 miles west of Chicago: (population: 42,762)

“*I think it’s a shame Elmhurst doesn’t do more to protect pieces of history. If there was anything I thought could be done, it wouldn’t be that way.*” – Adele Neubauer, realtor with Schiller Real Estate in Elmhurst (*Elmhurst Press*, 2-22-02)

“I’m not against improvement; I’m not against additions. But they should fit in with the nature of the community and the size of the lot. Some of them seem to overpower the lot and certainly seem to be out of character with the house next door.” – Olivia Gow, former Elmhurst Alderman (*Chicago Tribune*, 11-11-01)

**Current Tools/Actions:**
- Demolition moratorium proposed in Fall 2002; not acted on at press time.
- No preservation ordinance; hence, no protected local landmarks

Elmhurst

This Walter Burley Griffin-designed house was demolished in 2002. It is scheduled to be replaced by two new residences.
Located 28 miles west of Chicago; immediately east of Aurora (population: 128,000)

“Awareness is the first step.” – Stacey Schillerstrom, co-president of Community First in Naperville (Tribune 1-13-02)

“Teardowns were not thought of back in 1989. But increasing the size of the setback may not be as important as indicating that setbacks within a zoning district ought to fit with the most comparable lot.” – Gary von Behren, City Council Member (Tribune 10-12-01)

“The educational tool that this group has put together can be put in front of a home builder.” – Gerry Cassioppi, secretary and director of Community First (Tribune 2-9-02)

“You have to look at the overall picture: what is a neighborhood? It’s people walking around, having a sense of belonging.” – Ellen Shubart, member of the Campaign for Sensible Growth (Daily Herald 9-21-02)

“If someone is putting in this large home that has a completely different aspect to it, it may ruin that feeling, make people feel there’s not a neighborhood character. Not to mention that the larger houses often overwhelm the houses next to them and block out light. Or sometimes these buildings leave (neighbors) faced with a blank wall.” – Ellen Shubart (Daily Herald 9-21-02)

“There are some post-war neighborhoods that are starting to be recognized as historic and that’s going to continue.” – Jim Lindberg, co-author of the National Trust for Historic Preservation teardown report (Daily Herald 9-21-02)

“I think we also have to think...what part of that area are we going to save so that in year 2070, you can look back and say, ‘That was an interesting piece of architecture, and people are still living there.’” – Ellen Shubart (Daily Herald 9-21-02)

**Current Tools/Actions:**

- Survey
- Educating the public
- Design workbook
- Design guidelines
- Appeal process for new homes
- New driveway minimum
- Floor-area ratio of 30% required
- Placement of garage and landscape review
- Front-yard setbacks
Hinsdale is located 21 miles west of Chicago (population 17,049)

“The growth is attributed, in part, to active teardown of older housing to make way for larger homes. The village estimates that roughly 15% of the housing stock is subject to teardown activity. Remodeling and building additions also spur considerable tax base growth.” – Excerpt from the village’s AAA credit rating from Standard & Poor’s, a financial analyst and rating service

“They said the house makes the house next door look like a dog house. It’s out of scale with what’s next door, what’s across the street, what’s behind it.” – Jean Follett, member of Hinsdale Historic Preservation Commission (USA Today, 3-13-02)

“Additions very often are out of step with their neighborhood design-wise and because they’re so huge.” – Marya Morris, senior research with Chicago-based American Planning Association (Pioneer Press, 6-27-01)

“We’re creating a new ghetto. We’re pushing affordable housing into the outer fringes of suburbia.” – Jean Follett (USA Today, 3-13-02)

“If there’s a message to be sent, it’s that the village should keep tabs on the situation so it doesn’t get out of hand. We need to be proactive.” – Jamie Hogan, real estate broker with Erdenberg Otten & Associates (Pioneer Press, 6-27-01)

Current Tools/Actions:
- Maximum building height recently reduced
- Required size of side yard recently increased
- Stricter limits on FAR (floor-area ratio)
- “Bonus” offered to those who build unattached garages, which do not count as floor space in FAR
- Zoning incentives for building a front porch
- Zoning incentives for building with more “traditional” home features
- Existing landmark ordinance requires owner consent