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Glen Ellyn debates future of downtown



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Glen Ellyn trustees are expected to vote on May 28 on a streetscape and parking study that could shape future developments in downtown. (Quan Truong, Chicago Tribune)

By Quan Truong, Chicago Tribune reporter

3:05 p.m. CDT, May 21, 2013

Final adjustments are being made to a new study that could shape much of how downtown Glen Ellyn will look in the coming years.

Glen Ellyn trustees are expected to vote on the streetscape and parking study at their next board meeting on May 28.

"I'm not a big fan of spending money on studies, but this plan, I think, was done very appropriately," said Village President Alex Demos, after the study was formally presented to the board at a special meeting on May 20.

He, along with some trustees, named parking as one of the biggest problems they'd like to address.

MAPS

Glen Ellyn, IL

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The study was paid for with a \$50,000 grant from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. It'll have to be finalized by the end of the month in order for the village to keep the grant, Planning and Development Director Staci Hulseberg told the board.

Recommendations in the study included retrofitting tree grates so they're all consistent and bringing uniformity to signs, trash cans, benches and lighting. Consultants who put together the study also suggested adding landscaped buffers to hide cars in parking lots, enhancing alleys that are frequently used by pedestrians and burying future overhead wires.

"The recommendations are designed so that the individual components can be implemented largely independent of each other," said Rich Olson, a landscape architect with Gary R. Weber Associates. "These planning elements can be phased in based off budget, time, cost and public opinion."

The study suggested mid-block crossings so pedestrians won't have to dash across the street. Recommended brick pavers were met with mixed reaction from the board.

Trustee Diane McGinley worried about divots forming in the pavers from the trucks that travel through.

"The last thing that we want is a sidewalk that dips," she said.

Trustee Robert Friedberg agreed, saying "I'm hesitant about pavers anywhere just because they're a maintenance nightmare."

Dan Gardner, of Houseal Lavigne Associates, told the board that brick pavers should be built on top of concrete for reinforcement underneath.

Other ideas were better received, such as portable outdoor dining for businesses so the village could test whether it's viable to widen sidewalks or take away some parking spots for restaurants that want outdoor seating.

As for parking, Friedberg reminded the board that business owners and residents have named it as one of their top issues.

"From a policy perspective, we could argue the numbers all day long, but nobody believes us," he said. "For us to keep saying perpetually that we have plenty of parking goes against what they tell us. I think we have to address that issue."

The consultants recommended that the village put in more visible signs to direct drivers to public parking areas that are underutilized.

Other ideas include providing valet parking in downtown and creating partnerships with businesses to turn private lots into public parking areas on evenings and weekends.

If the village decides to build parking garages, the consultants suggested some sort of development that would be of mixed use, as opposed to just a stand alone parking building. Having retail projects folded into the plans would add to the tax roll and boost business, Gardner said.

Village Manager Mark Franz told the board the study could be used in a number of ways. It could be incorporated into future development or the village could implement some of the ideas as pilot projects and then modify accordingly. With Glen Ellyn's streets coming up in a few years for resurfacing, many of the recommendations could be incorporated then, he said.

The village has set aside \$2 million for streetscape improvements as it plans for major investment in the downtown infrastructure in 2015 or 2016, Franz said.

Some residents urged the board not to move the village's iconic horse trough.

"People love it, they appreciate it, they recognize it and they look for it," said Lee Marks, chairman of the Glen Ellyn Historic Preservation Commission. "I'd like to see it stay there."

Trustee Peter Ladesic told Marks that he wouldn't support any plans that eliminated the horse trough.

A copy of the streetscape and parking study can be found on the village's website at