



GUIDING DG

PLANNING THE FUTURE OF
DOWNERS GROVE

Village of Downers Grove

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN



Adopted | April 8, 2025

GUIDING DG

Guiding DG encompasses a collection of four plans, including a:

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN



STREETSCAPES PLAN



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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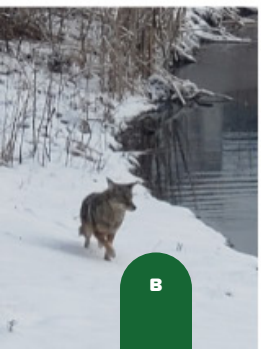
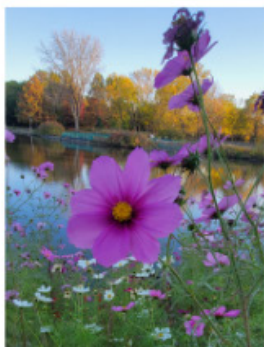
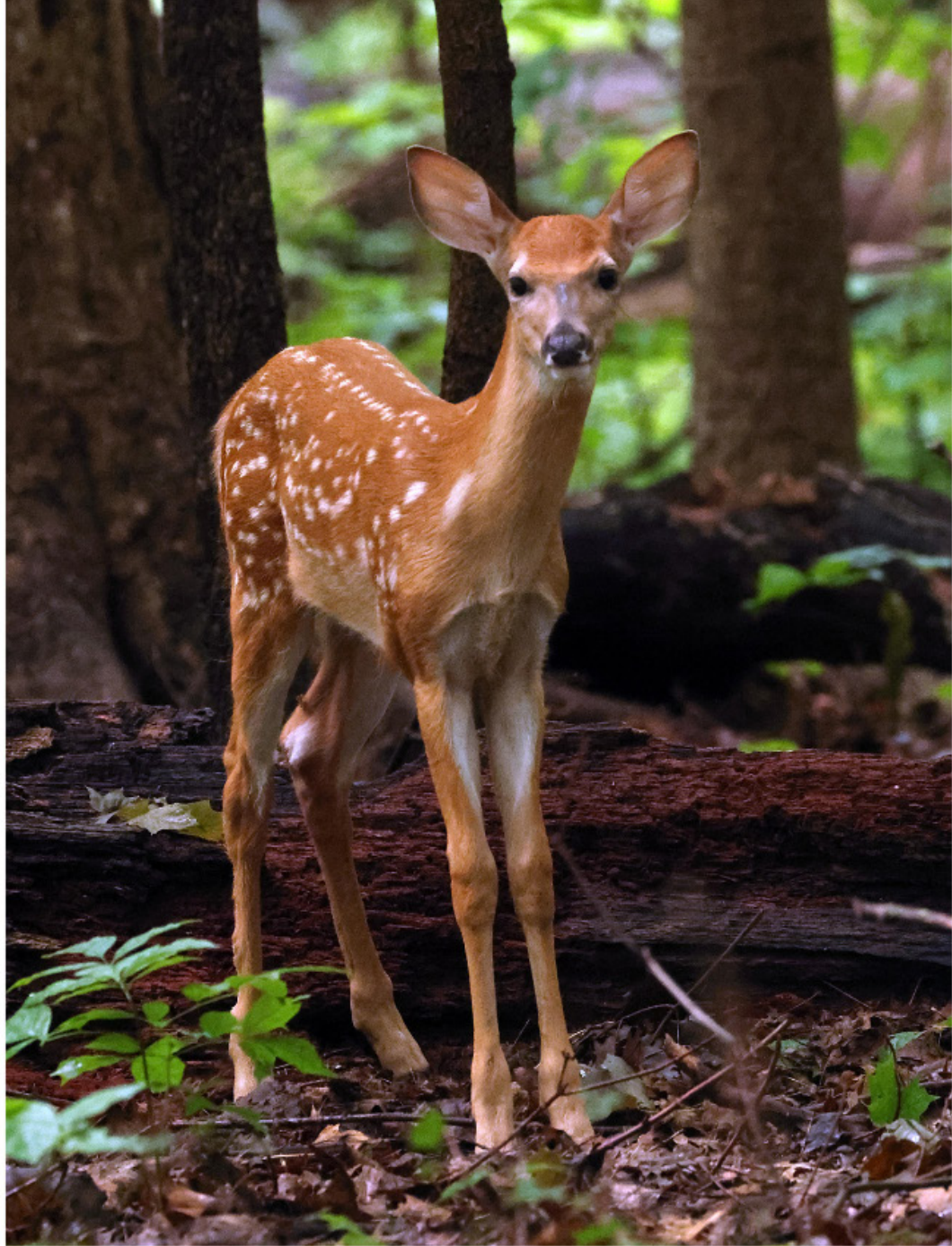


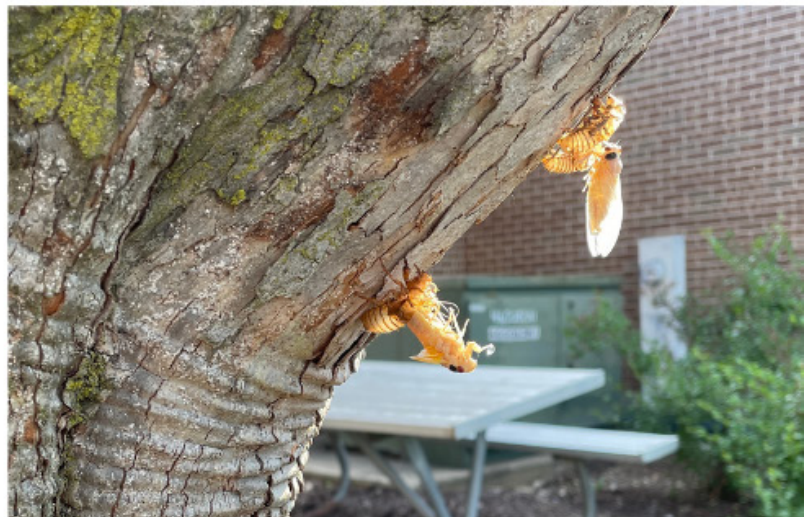
With assistance from:



ACRONYMS

Acronym	Definition
ATP	Active Transportation Plan
ECM	Existing Conditions Memorandum
ESP	Environmental Sustainability Plan
EV	Electric Vehicle
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GRC	Green Region Compact
HVAC	Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning
KW	Kilowatt
LED	Light-Emitting Diode
ROW	Right-of-Way





Photos submitted by: Steven Lepic, David Pitrak, Amanda Joyce Dies, Deb Howard, Donna Granback, Dorothy Dvorachek Larsen, Elizabeth O'Neill, John Mensick, Judy Blunder Wholt, Karl Knecht, Katherine Zirbel, Mary Volk, Matthew Klara, Robin Tryloff



TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

INTRODUCTION

A Greener Future
From an Oak Grove to Downers Grove

6

8
10

02

VISION

Energy
Ecology
Materials and Resources
Mobility, Parkways, and Parking
Governance

12

16
18
20
22
24

03

VILLAGE STRATEGIES

Control and Influence
Considerations for Strategy Selection and Policymaking
Village's Role

26

28
30
32

04

VILLAGE OBJECTIVES

Objectives

38

40

05

VILLAGE ACTION PLAN

42

About the 2025 to 2027 Action Plan

44

Village's 2025 to 2027 Sustainability Actions

45

06

A COMMUNITY PLEDGE

46

Our Ecological Footprints

48

A Greener Way Pledge

49

High Impact Actions

50

07

CONCLUSION

52

INTRODUCTION

Definition of Sustainability for Downers Grove

Being environmentally sustainable is the continuous and conscious effort to act strategically in service delivery and policymaking in a way that preserves resources and enhances the natural environment for future generations.

01



Key Terminology

Community

When the term community is used in this plan, it describes people and organizations. This includes residents, businesses and their employees, and other community organizations.

Downers Grove

When the term Downers Grove is used, it describes the geography of the community and properties located within the municipal boundaries.

Village

The term Village will be used to describe the Village of Downers Grove as the corporate authority and municipal organization.



A female Red-winged blackbird perched in Hooper's Hollow Park, submitted by Katherine Zirbel

A GREENER FUTURE

Downers Grove is one of 284 municipalities that make up the Chicago metropolitan region and home to more than 50,000 residents and almost equal number of individuals that work in Downers Grove. It is both centrally located and well connected to the rest of the region, making it a desirable place to call home and do business. While Downers Grove strengthens the region's economy and cultural vibrancy, it also contributes to environmental impacts at local, regional, and global levels.¹

In 2023, the Village joined the Greenest Region Compact (GRC), a regional initiative aimed at coordinating sustainability efforts across the Chicago metropolitan region. The GRC's goal is to leverage the strength of municipal governments to build vibrant, sustainable communities and reduce their environmental impacts. By creating its first Environmental Sustainability Plan (ESP), the Village is taking an additional step toward embracing the GRC's purpose. The goal is to enhance the character of Downers Grove, become a more sustainable community, and make long-term improvements to the environment for those that live and work here.

Achieving the goals laid out in this plan will not happen all at once. Instead, the ESP sets a course and serves as a guide for investing the community's human, natural, social, political, and economic capital. It establishes an aspirational vision with goals and objectives to guide actions and decisions. The actions identified here will support new trends like reducing the consumption of energy and resources,² improving biodiversity³ and ecological connectivity,⁴ increasing community resilience,⁵ and promoting a culture of stewardship and thoughtfulness.⁶

1. Urban regions are responsible for 80% of global GDP and 85% of global GHG emissions. Suburban communities are responsible for about 50% of emissions in the US, largely due to car dependent development patterns and higher square footage residential dwellings that consume more energy.
2. The Greenest Region Compact has established a collective goal to reduce regional GHG emissions 50% from a 2005 baseline by 2030 and 80% by 2050 in the 2021 Climate Action Plan for the Chicago Region.
3. Biodiversity is an important measure of the health of the environment. The loss of biodiversity has a cascading impact on other species, ecosystems, and can reduce quality of life for people. As a key indicator for planetary boundaries, biodiversity is considered to be rapidly declining and a serious issue.
4. An Existing Conditions Memo key takeaway was that biodiversity and connectivity between various natural areas were an area for improvement.
5. The Climate Risk Assessment in the ECM found that there are heightened risks for natural disasters based on climate modeling for 2050 and 2100.
6. A key takeaway from public engagement was the need to develop a culture of environmental stewardship within the community.



To:
Village of Downers Grove

From:
KRISTINE TRANDAFIR

O'Neill Middle School Student Kristine Trandafir shares a vision for a more sustainable Downers Grove

A key feature of the ESP is the organization of its goals, objectives, and proposed actions. During the development of this plan, Village leadership discussed whether the scope of the plan should be on the Village as an organization or the community as a whole. Village leadership decided that promoting positive changes and working toward a more sustainable community requires a collective effort. Although the ESP includes a vision and goals for the community, it also acknowledges the important role of the Village as a leader. The Village can influence positive actions through service delivery and seek ways to ease pathways for residents and businesses to act in a more sustainable way.

The ESP is also a call to action to the community that centers around a collective pledge. The pledge invites residents, businesses, and community groups to be a part of the effort to support sustainability goals. The goals and objectives in the plan are not an exhaustive list, they are a starting point and will evolve as progress is made and new opportunities are identified. There is a place and role in this plan for everyone, not just those that are most passionate about the environment. Every member of the community is encouraged to be involved.



Wetland area adjacent to Wallingford Park in August 2024. Submitted by Karl Knecht

FROM AN OAK GROVE TO DOWNERS GROVE

When Pierce Downer, the founder of Downers Grove, arrived to the area in 1832, he set up camp in a small grove of bur oak trees⁷ and staked his claim to 160 acres of surrounding prairie and timberland. The valuable timber hardwood and fertile prairie soils provided the necessary resources for a vibrant community to be established. Shortly after, John Deere's steel plow⁸ was released to the public, playing an important role in transforming the state and allowing it to grow. By 1860, Illinois' population expanded from 157,000 to 1.7 million people and a majority of its 22 million acres of tallgrass prairie was turned over to make way for agricultural crops. Today, less than 0.01% of Illinois' original prairie acreage remains, but a small sliver of remnant prairie still exists in Downers Grove.

Belmont Prairie, a roughly 10-acre protected nature preserve, reflects the way pioneers saw the area in 1832. During the 1970s, conservation-minded Downers Grove residents took action to purchase and protect the land from development. In 1979, Belmont Prairie was dedicated as the 75th State of Illinois Nature Preserve. Along with Belmont Prairie, the Village and the community have worked together to preserve and protect other native ecosystems. In the 1980s, the Village, Downers Grove Park District, and DuPage County Forest Preserve District partnered to protect Lyman Woods, a 150-acre preserve of old-growth oak forest, prairie, and marshlands.

As Downers Grove expanded,⁹ cropland gave way to homes, businesses, transportation corridors, and other infrastructure. Today, the community is largely built out, with little undeveloped land remaining. Despite this, residents and local leaders have remained committed to preserving elements of the natural environment and coexisting with nature. Downers Grove has a system of parks and other open spaces, nature preserves, and an extensive urban forest. The Village maintains more than 22,000 parkway trees and has earned the Tree City USA designation for 40 consecutive years. It also stands among 18 communities accredited by the Urban and Community Forestry Society. The urban forest not only adds to the community's charm but also plays a vital role in reducing the impacts of urbanization.

7. According to the Oak Ecosystem Recovery Plan, the Chicago region had approximately 1 million acres of oak ecosystems prior to the Euro-American settlement period. Today, about 17% of remnant oak ecosystems remain in the region.
8. The steel plow more effectively cut through the sticky soil of the prairies. While this allowed settlers to more efficiently farm the land, it rapidly transformed Illinois' prairies to farmland.
9. Downers Grove saw a period of continuous growth through the second half of the 20th century, with its population increasing from 10,888 in 1950 to 46,858 in 1990.



Residents gather to skate on Prince Pond in 1955

One of the Village's most significant investments in community resilience came with the creation of the stormwater utility. Since 2012, the Village has invested more than \$60 million to reduce urban flooding. As one of the first stormwater utilities in the region, the Village has worked to prepare for increasingly intense rainfall caused by climate change. Green infrastructure projects on both public and private properties have further reduced flooding risks while also creating more habitat for pollinators.

Beyond managing natural assets and restoring habitats, the Village has actively reduced its environmental impact through innovative solutions like biofuels, precision salting, and green procurement. These efforts have prevented hundreds of metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions, improved air and water quality, and earned numerous awards. As Downers Grove looks to the future, this Environmental Sustainability Plan will guide the community in working together to ensure future generations enjoy a healthy environment.



The sun rises on Downers Grove and the BNSF in downtown. Photo submitted by Brian Beine.

VISION



The oldest task in human history is to live on a piece of land without spoiling it.

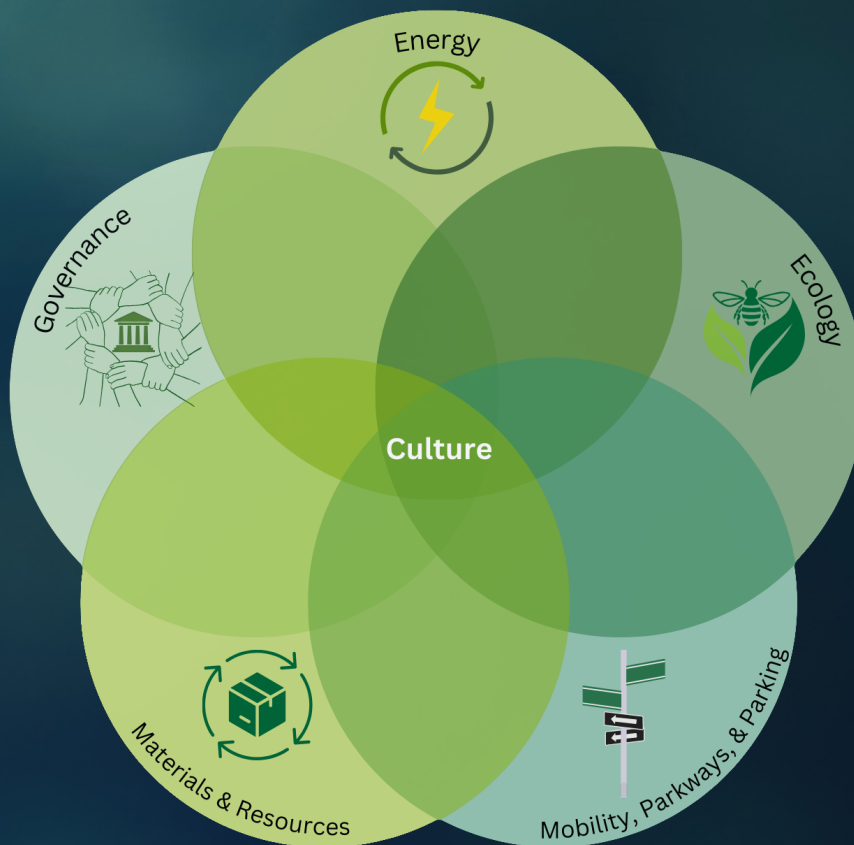
- Aldo Leopold



02

Guiding DG Comprehensive Plan Vision Excerpt

Downers Grove will respect its natural resources by being a more sustainable and livable community that consists of permanently preserved open spaces, biologically rich native landscapes, green stormwater management systems, and healthy relationships with nature. Downers Grove will be resilient in the face of intensifying climatological events. Sustainability efforts will be embraced throughout the community. Downers Grove will benefit from interrelated connections between natural systems, walking paths and trails, and a vibrant urban canopy of trees native to the area.





Fall colors in Maple Grove Forest Preserve, submitted by Laura Fritz

ABOUT THE VISION SECTION

The ESP vision section includes an overall vision statement and five supporting themes. The vision statement describes the ideal outcomes of achieving the ESP's objectives. The five themes—ecology, energy, transportation and transportation facilities, materials and resources, and governance—support the overall vision and highlight the different aspects of sustainability and their connections.

Each theme includes background information and a thematic vision statement. The background explains key environmental issues and connects past challenges to present conditions. The thematic vision statement describes what the community aims to achieve in that area. Each theme also outlines high-level community goals and key recommendations for Village action that align with its vision.



Downers Grove youth participating in a camp at Lyman Woods, photo by Danielle Strohmer, Downers Grove Park District

A MORE SUSTAINABLE DOWNERS GROVE

Through a collective effort between the Village, other governmental partners, and the community, Downers Grove will become a model sustainable suburban community. While many of the defining characteristics of the community will remain, Downers Grove will find innovative ways to reduce its impact on the environment and promote equitable benefits through effective communication and collaboration, thoughtful planning and investment, and shared values for the natural world.

ENERGY

Background

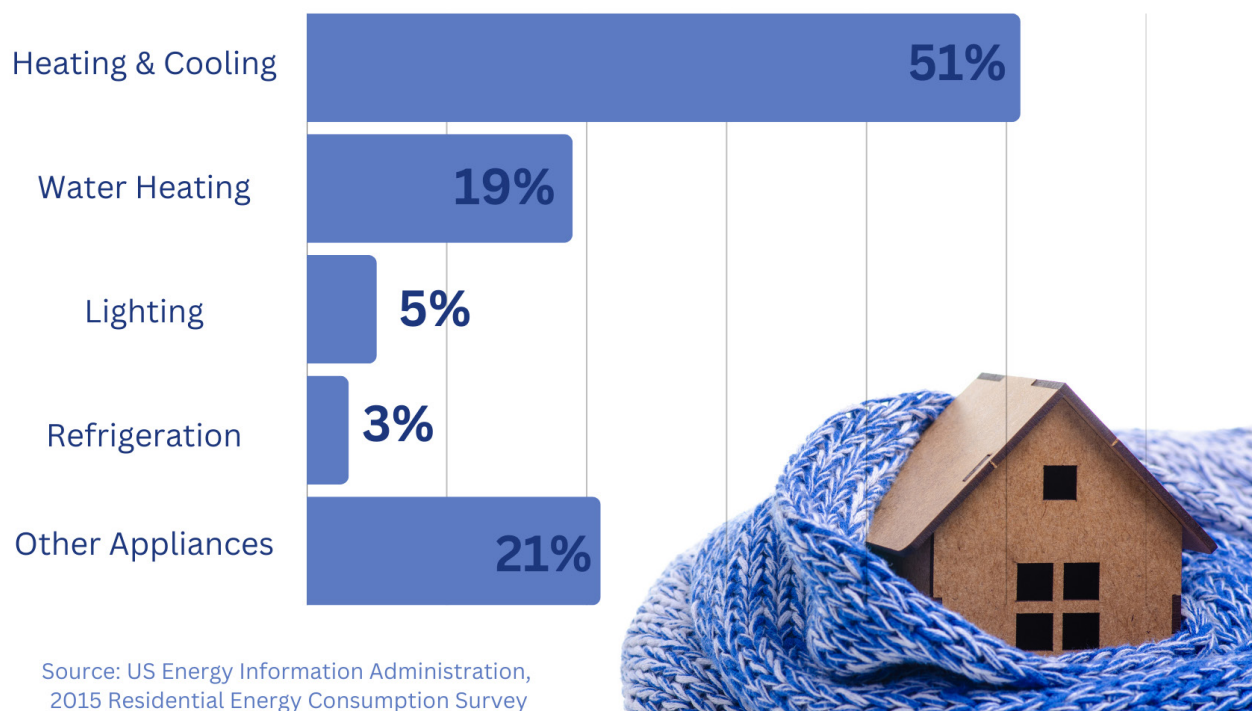
Energy is at the core of the modern relationship with nature. Harnessing natural resources has enabled great advancements but has also harmed the environment. Today, most electricity and transportation relies on fossil fuels that drive climate change. Moving forward, there is an opportunity for Downers Grove to transition to renewable sources of energy. This will require concerted efforts to both reduce existing energy demand and investment in renewable energy technologies.

Vision

Diligent planning and investment will help preserve¹⁰ houses and buildings while significantly improving energy efficiency and reducing building-related emissions. Redevelopment and new construction will meet or exceed current building and energy conservation codes in a way that minimizes future greenhouse gas emissions. Downers Grove will also be a regional leader in the amount of renewable energy that is generated and stored locally. Property owners who are not able to meet their renewable energy goals directly on-site will have multiple options to purchase renewable electricity.

10. Adaptive reuse and preservation of existing structures reduces the community's overall environmental impact by limiting the amount of resources consumed for new construction, construction related emissions, and the debris created by demolition.

HOME ENERGY USAGE



Community Goals

- ❑ Work towards becoming a carbon-neutral¹¹ community
- ❑ Reduce building-related energy use through energy-efficiency retrofits and upgrades
- ❑ Find innovative ways to partner with other organizations to decarbonize¹² energy sources while maintaining a robust and resilient grid
- ❑ Expand options for residents and businesses in Downers Grove to purchase renewable electricity

Village Key Recommendations

- ❑ Strive to become a carbon-neutral organization by 2035 and carbon-negative¹³ by 2045
- ❑ Purchase 100% renewable energy for Village-owned facilities while working towards self-generating renewable energy
- ❑ Determine the most appropriate way to implement energy conservation and energy efficiency retrofits

11. Carbon neutral is a point at which the amount of GHG emissions being generated by the community or an organization are equal to the amount that is being removed through natural processes or through market-based mechanisms such as carbon offsets
12. Decarbonization involves a transition to energy sources that do not produce specific greenhouse gasses, such as solar, wind, hydro, or nuclear power
13. Carbon negative is a point at which the Village would produce less greenhouse gas emission than are removed through natural processes such as the carbon captured by parkway trees or through some alternative and appropriate carbon offset program



ECOLOGY

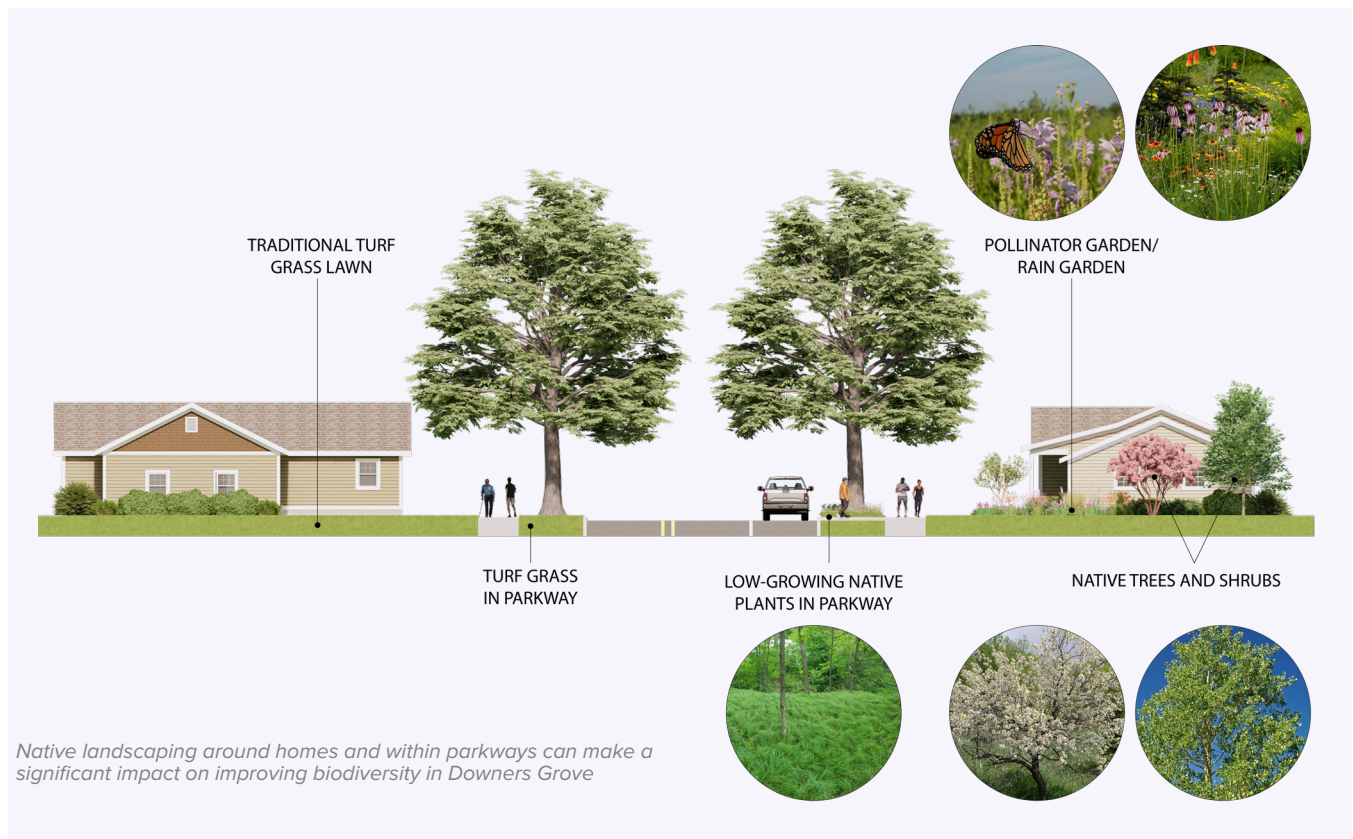
Background

The ecological web¹⁴ is a complex system where living creatures (biotic) and nonliving elements like land, water, and air (abiotic) are deeply interconnected.¹⁵ Every action taken can help or harm the environment. For decades, human activities in the places we live, work, and play have strained this balance, leading to polluted waterways, declining biodiversity, soil erosion, plastic-filled oceans, intensifying storms, and urban heat islands. While reversing this damage will take generations, greater awareness and collective action can create meaningful change.

Vision

Every home, business, and institution within Downers Grove will find a way to give back to nature rather than take more from it. Holistic efforts by the community will result in stronger relationships with nature, more biologically diverse landscapes, connectivity between natural habitats and the built environment, cleaner air and water, and nature-rich neighborhoods. The result will be a healthier and more resilient Downers Grove.

14. The collective network of living and non-living things that have interconnected relationships based on predation, competition, and symbiosis.
15. Changes to the overall health of a specific species or quality of environment can result in the changes of other species, which may or may not be directly connected in the ecological web.



Community Goals

- ☐ Increase biodiversity and habitat connectivity throughout Downers Grove
- ☐ Maintain a healthy urban forest
- ☐ Improve water quality in local waterways
- ☐ Support the conservation of potable water
- ☐ Reduce light pollution

Village Key Recommendations

- ☐ Actively improve biodiversity and habitat restoration on Village properties and through partnerships with other local government entities
- ☐ Explore strategies to make Downers Grove a certified Dark Sky Community
- ☐ Prioritize nature-based solutions to reduce risks associated with climate change and improve the quality of water in waterways
- ☐ Continue and expand the use of public spaces as native landscaping demonstration gardens
- ☐ Avoid the use of chemicals that harm plants and impact water quality
- ☐ Continue to maintain the lowest possible leakage throughout the Village's water system



Native Landscape in a Downers Grove resident's yard, photo submitted by Janine Johnson

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Background

Early settlers in Downers Grove depended on local natural resources. Today, the community no longer extracts resources locally, but relies on materials from elsewhere. Drinking water comes from Lake Michigan, while most energy comes from fossil fuels¹⁶ extracted across North America. Much of the food supply and most consumer goods originate from other countries. The community also generates more than twice as much garbage as it recycles, sending all waste to landfills outside DuPage County. Every purchasing decision has impacts beyond the local area. By promoting conscious consumption, the community can significantly reduce environmental harm on a larger scale.

Vision

Through on-going education, residents will be made aware of how daily choices impact the environment, especially when it comes to goods and services. Thoughtful purchasing choices will prioritize local businesses and regionally produced goods to reduce direct and indirect environmental impacts. Increased awareness of materials being thrown away will divert waste from going to landfills. Businesses and institutions will lead in green procurement and work together to reduce overall resource consumption. These conscious choices will strengthen the local economy and attract sustainable-focused businesses that want to be part of a greener community.

16. In 2024, approximately 60% of electricity delivered to Downers Grove buildings and facilities was from oil, natural gas, or coal-sourced energy.

IN 2024...

25,091,540 pounds of garbage

9,877,440 pounds of recyclables

3,392,840 pounds of compostables

**...WERE COLLECTED CURBSIDE IN
DOWNERS GROVE**



Community Goals

- Promote awareness about the environmental impact of the different goods and services, as well as sustainable alternatives
- Find solutions to reduce the amount of waste while improving recycling and composting throughout the community
- Promote the availability of locally and regionally produced goods and services

Village Key Recommendations

- Consider enhancing green procurement practices that prioritize sustainable goods and services
- Maximize the longevity of infrastructure and facilities to reduce the overall use of materials and resources in Village operations
- Seek ways to repurpose, recycle, or use resources to their highest potential when they reach the end of their useful life
- Encourage economic development strategies that support green businesses and a circular economy¹⁷

17. A circular economy promotes product lifecycles that do not end with the landfill and instead allow for products to be repurposed or for materials to be recovered and recycled.



Students at Downers Grove North High School collect more than 800 pumpkins in November 2024 to help divert waste from the landfill

MOBILITY, PARKWAYS, AND PARKING

Background

There is a distinct relationship between the built environment and the way people move. In the U.S., automobile dependence is a cultural norm, and personal vehicles are a major source of emissions¹⁸, including in Downers Grove. Roads and parking facilities take up vast amounts of space, increase urban flooding, contribute to heat islands, and fragment natural habitats. While it's unrealistic to quickly reverse 80 years of development patterns, the community can take steps to reduce transportation's impact. Roadways can be more than a means to move and parking lots can be more than a hardscape needed to park vehicles.

Vision

By integrating nature into roads and rights-of-way, Downers Grove will transform its streets into natural corridors that efficiently move people and support ecology. A thriving urban forest, enhanced with native plantings, will strengthen ecological connectivity and enrich neighborhood streetscapes. A well-connected network of bike and pedestrian paths will make it easier to travel without a car. Infrastructure for emerging clean transportation options will be widely available, ensuring regional connectivity while reducing emissions. Parking lots will support the community's energy goals, and strategically placed public lots will serve as dynamic, multi-functional spaces.

18. Emissions from transportation is the second largest source of community-level emissions in Downers Grove. This is mostly due to the high rate (80%) of individuals commuting alone.



**THERE ARE MORE THAN
22,000 PARKWAYS TREES
IN DOWNERS GROVE...**

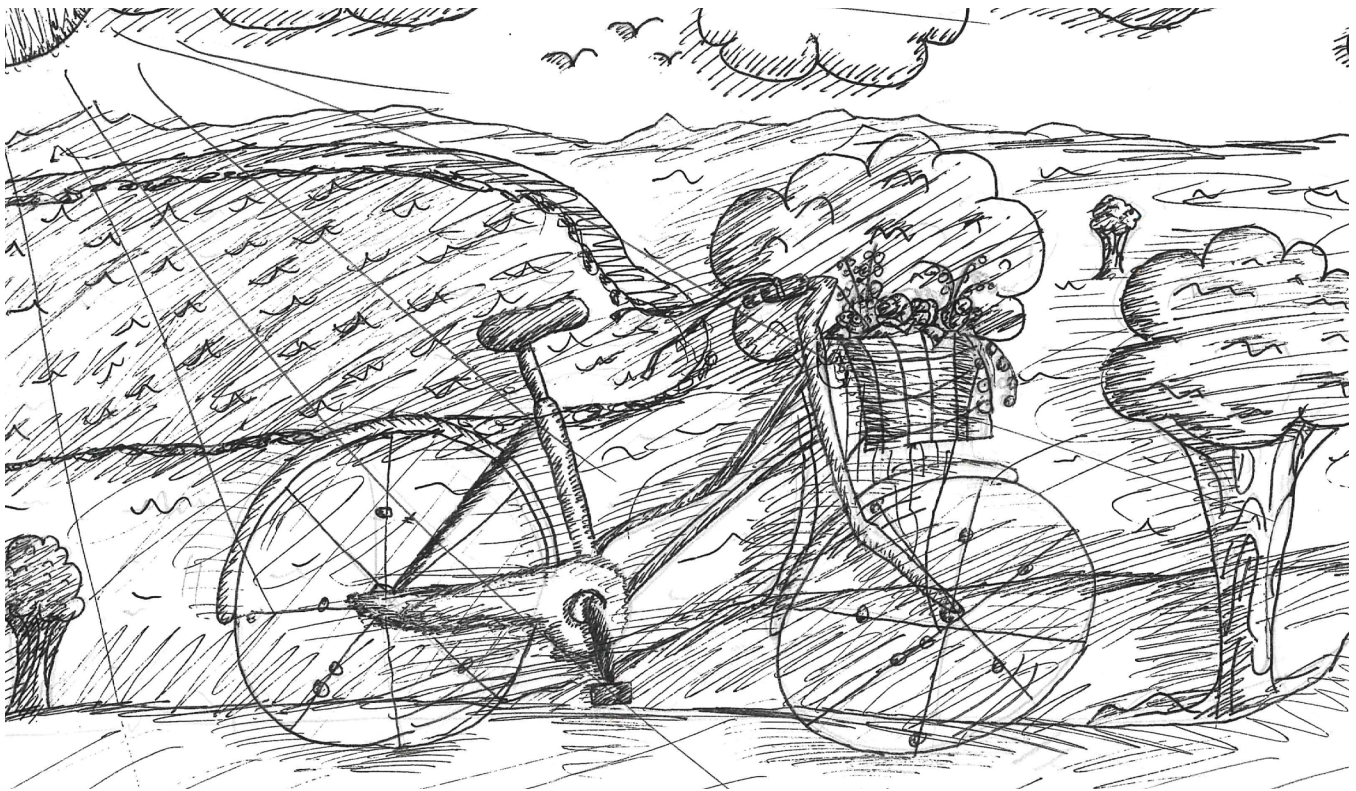
...keeping neighborhoods cooler, providing habitat for different species, and helping manage stormwater.

Community Goals

- ☐ Seek ways to transform parkways into natural corridors
- ☐ Promote strategies that reduce vehicle related emission
- ☐ Minimize urban heat islands
- ☐ Reduce impervious surfaces related to transportation facilities (e.g., parking lots, driveways, etc.)

Village Key Recommendations

- ☐ Develop strategies that utilize Village rights-of-way as a means of meeting carbon-neutrality and habitat connectivity goals
- ☐ Consider the installation of solar canopies in public parking lots and promote the installation of solar canopies in privately owned lots
- ☐ Promote the development of vehicle charging infrastructure throughout Downers Grove
- ☐ Seek to reduce the environmental impacts of parking lots through stormwater and zoning regulations
- ☐ Enhance the biodiversity and resilience of parkway trees throughout Downers Grove



O'Neill Middle School Student Katherine S. envisions a more sustainable Downers Grove being a place to easily bike.

GOVERNANCE

Background

Balancing personal freedoms, economic growth, and the actions needed to protect the environment can be complicated. It becomes even more complex when government systems and regulations don't align well with environmental issues and how they need to be addressed. While governing is what governments do to carry out their duties, governance is a broader process that includes local government agencies, community groups and organizations, and residents, working together to address problems. As the Village and community work toward sustainability, strong collaboration and shared goals will be a key to success.

Vision

A collective pledge to be more sustainable as a community will result in an active effort to coordinate across local governments and community groups to find efficient and effective means of delivering high-quality public services in the least impactful way. The Village will seek to implement forward-thinking policies and innovative service delivery with a goal of empowering the community to achieve its sustainability goals. The Village will also be an active leader in regional efforts to share best practices and champion collective action to protect natural resources and reduce the region's environmental impact.



Resident volunteers show their haul from the 2024 DuPage River Sweep

Community Goals

- Inspire a culture of environmental stewardship and thoughtfulness about the natural world as a cornerstone of the community
- Collaborate with community organizations and other local government partners to ensure that residents and businesses are well-informed about the ways they can support community-wide and Village sustainability goals
- Support resident coordination, especially within neighborhoods, to promote neighborhood sustainability practices and projects

Village Key Recommendations

- Explore policies to promote sustainable action in the community
- Continue to invest in projects and ongoing Village services that increase natural habitat, enhance community resilience, and reduce emissions
- Collaborate with other governmental entities to achieve community and regional sustainability goals
- Promote awareness of the Village's efforts and progress on achieving sustainability-related goals



Residents attend the **Guiding DG** open house to share their ideas for the community

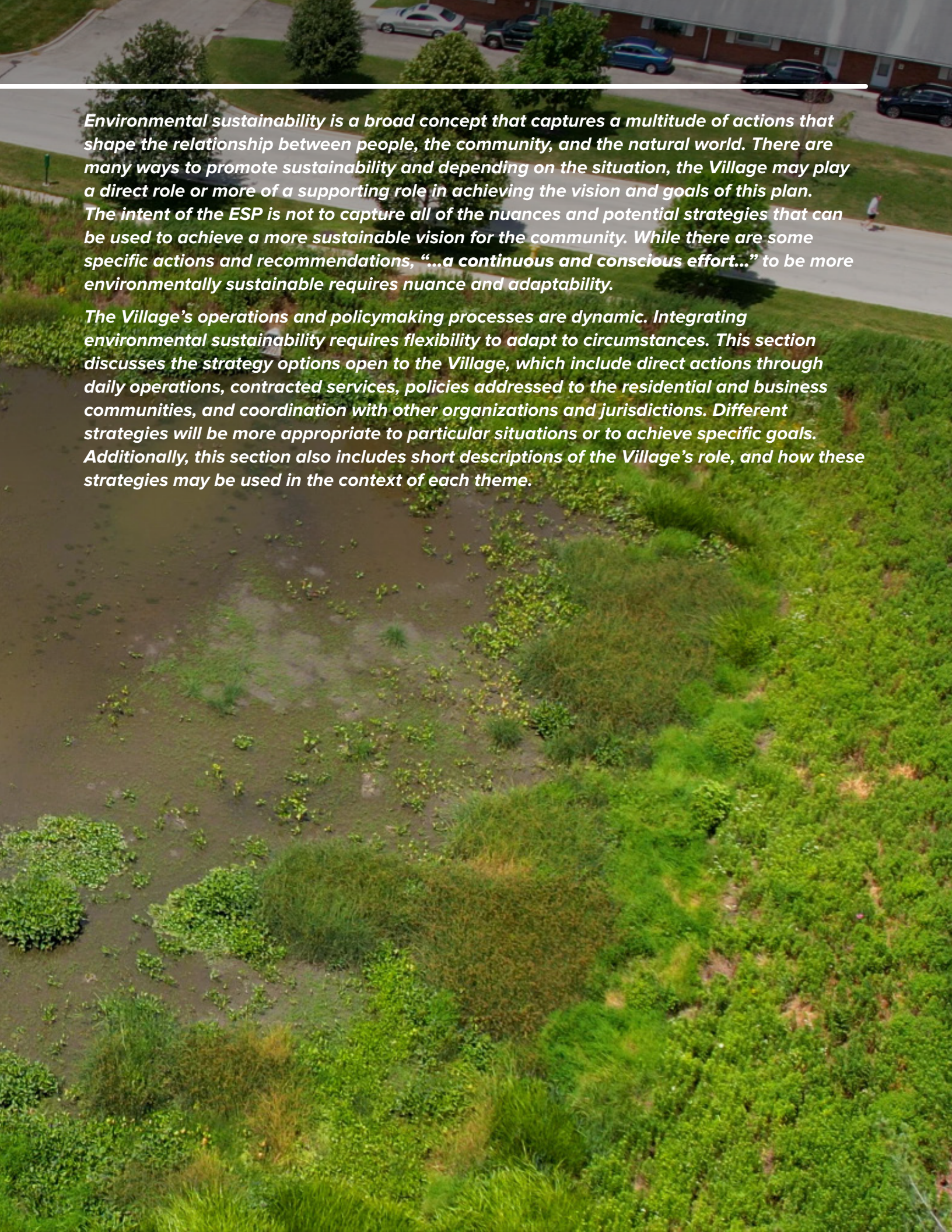
VILLAGE STRATEGIES



We need joy as we need air.
We need love as we need water.
We need each other as we
need the earth we share.

- Maya Angelou

03

An aerial photograph showing a wetland area in the foreground with a parking lot and a building in the background. The wetland is filled with green vegetation and water. The parking lot has several cars parked. The building is a long, low structure with a red roof. The text is overlaid on the image, providing information about environmental sustainability and the Village's role in achieving its vision and goals.

Environmental sustainability is a broad concept that captures a multitude of actions that shape the relationship between people, the community, and the natural world. There are many ways to promote sustainability and depending on the situation, the Village may play a direct role or more of a supporting role in achieving the vision and goals of this plan. The intent of the ESP is not to capture all of the nuances and potential strategies that can be used to achieve a more sustainable vision for the community. While there are some specific actions and recommendations, “...a continuous and conscious effort...” to be more environmentally sustainable requires nuance and adaptability.

The Village’s operations and policymaking processes are dynamic. Integrating environmental sustainability requires flexibility to adapt to circumstances. This section discusses the strategy options open to the Village, which include direct actions through daily operations, contracted services, policies addressed to the residential and business communities, and coordination with other organizations and jurisdictions. Different strategies will be more appropriate to particular situations or to achieve specific goals. Additionally, this section also includes short descriptions of the Village’s role, and how these strategies may be used in the context of each theme.

CONTROL AND INFLUENCE

Strategies for Supporting Community Goals

The Village is responsible for both governing and providing specific services to the community. Some of the Village's functions and how they are carried out may be constrained by existing state or federal laws. In other areas, the Village may have more flexibility in how it provides services or crafts policies. At a high level, the different strategies that the Village may use to support community sustainability goals can be categorized based on the amount of control or influence that the Village has through that strategy. Below are four categories where the Village may play a direct or indirect role in supporting a community goal.

DIRECT SERVICE

Direct services are those that are provided directly by the Village through its day-to-day operations. The Village has the most control over how these services are provided since they are implemented by Village staff and with Village resources. This control allows for the most flexibility to learn and adapt towards less impactful practices.

CONTRACTED SERVICES

Contracted services are those that are provided by an external organization that is hired by the Village. The decision to use a contracted service may be due to the need for a specific set of resources or expertise, a project being short-term or time sensitive, or allow the Village to take advantage of cost savings through a specialized vendor. The Village does maintain some control over how these services are carried out, especially when defining projects, soliciting bids, selecting contractors, and supervising completion. However, there is less flexibility in how contracted services are provided due to a contract that stipulates specific terms or conditions. It may be possible to modify a contract, but it can take time and resources to do so. Additionally, the Village may desire to include specific terms or require sustainable practices, but this can result in fewer or limited vendors bidding on a specific contract.

VILLAGE POLICIES

Village policies can range from guiding principles used in decision making to ordinances that are laws that govern the community. With the exceptions of requirements or constraints in existing state and federal policies, the Village has a high degree of flexibility in how it sets and enforces policies. Policies aimed at supporting community sustainability goals may take different approaches that make certain practices more or less restrictive, incentivize certain strategies, or deter specific harmful practices.



COORDINATED POLICIES AND SERVICES

Coordinated policies and services are those that require the Village to coordinate with another organization due to limited jurisdiction or the scope of the environmental problems. Within Downers Grove, there are multiple units of local governments that are responsible for providing different services and have their own unique jurisdictions and characteristics. These include the Downers Grove Park District, Downers Grove Grade School District 58, and Community High School District 99. These other governmental entities are independent from the Village, though may be subject to the Village's policies in some instances. There are also environmental issues and geographic considerations that extend beyond the boundaries of Downers Grove. In circumstances where the Village seeks to reduce an environmental impact or promote a sustainable practice that is outside of its direct authority, it is necessary to coordinate with other organizations. This can limit the Village's strategies, but it can also result in economies of scale and scope.

While there are some Village functions can be categorized into a single strategy, others are more complex and require multiple approaches. For example, the Village's approach to stormwater management includes the construction and maintenance of stormwater infrastructure that is carried out through a mix of direct and contracted services, enforcement of stormwater regulations that dictate stormwater requirements in the built environment, and coordination with DuPage County and other organizations in watershed planning.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR STRATEGY SELECTION AND POLICYMAKING

When the Village is evaluating its options to support or influence a specific community goal, there are some important considerations that can help determine the most appropriate strategy. These considerations often evolve over time through changes in technology, economic conditions, effectiveness of existing policies, and community preferences. Below are some specific considerations as they may relate to identifying strategies to support the goals of the ESP.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

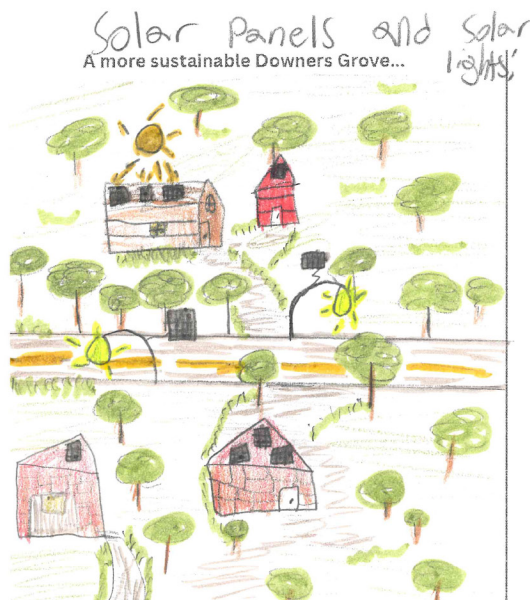
Certain environmental risks or harmful practices pose a more significant or immediate risk to health and property. These impacts or risks may be more widespread or may be geographically focused. Strategies that are aimed at mitigating high risks or harmful impacts should be more direct and urgent, as well as aligning with the geographic scale of the impact being targeted.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

All the goals of this plan were developed with consideration given to the existing environmental conditions in Downers Grove. Key questions when identifying viable strategies for supporting a specific goal are, “What is/are the existing condition(s) relative to the identified goal?” and “What is driving the existing condition(s)?” This will help determine whether a strategy should target reducing the prevalence of a certain practice or promoting more sustainable ones, as well as the gap between the existing condition and the goal.

CURRENT POLICIES OR PRACTICES

In many instances, the Village may already have an existing policy or set of policies that relate to one or more goals. An important consideration is to determine if, or how, an existing policy is ineffective at preventing harmful practices or if a policy acts as a barrier to best practices in the community. These determinations can assist in identifying if a policy update is required and whether it should be aimed at easing pathways to sustainability or restricting harmful practices. Similar evaluations around different functions of service delivery can also be considered.



To:
Village of Downers Grove

From:
Ryan Ciezadlo

O'Neill Middle School student Ryan C. shares some ideas for making Downers Grove more sustainable

SCALE AND DURATION OF IMPLEMENTATION

Several of the goals in the ESP are tied to physical projects that have a definitive start and end to implementation. Other goals focus on environmental conditions where the scale of the problem may take an ongoing incremental approach to see meaningful results. The intended duration and scale of implementing a specific strategy has real costs (monetary and temporal) that should be considered.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Making changes or creating new policies, programs, or services requires time of both Village staff and Village Council, Village resources, and decision-making capacity. The true costs of implementation of new policies, programs, or services must take into account the impact it would have on the Village's current operations.

AVAILABILITY OF SERVICE PROVIDER OR PARTNER

Contracted and coordinated services require qualified and willing vendors or partners to participate. Although specific sustainability practices or services may exist, market availability and the capacity of other organizations may impact the Village's ability to contract or coordinate with other entities.

COST-BENEFIT OF STRATEGY

The combined considerations listed here contribute to an overall cost of implementing certain strategies. Certain strategies may have a tradeoff or result in real costs being incurred by community members. They may also have positive impacts on community health or quality of life in addition to reducing environmental impacts. Anticipated costs and potential externalities should be weighed against the benefits that may be realized on the other side of implementation.



Spring emerges in Belmont Prairie following a controlled burn, photo submitted by Dorothy Dvorachek Larsen

VILLAGE'S ROLE IN ENERGY

While the Village provides some services directly, it is not an energy supplier. Energy in the form of electricity and natural gas that is used to power and heat buildings is provided by energy utilities, such as ComEd and Nicor. These utility companies are primarily regulated by federal and state laws, limiting the Village's ability to directly influence outcomes through supply side strategies. However, one strategy the Village can leverage is a community aggregation program for the supply of electricity, which can be used to achieve a cleaner energy portfolio.

The Village can also support community energy goals through the adoption of building codes and other policies that influence the demand for energy, specifically in the construction of new buildings and remodeling of existing buildings. Building codes include specific standards for the energy efficiency of a building. In 2024, the Village adopted zoning and building code updates that require both solar and electric vehicle (EV) charging readiness, and also provide flexibility for emerging building technologies to be used in Downers Grove. In the future, the Village can also explore strategies to financially support investment into renewable electricity generation within Downers Grove, or through renewable energy developments that can be effectively connected to Downers Grove through the regional grid.



Installation of a solar car canopy at the Civic Center in April 2025. When completed, the Civic Center will have a 160 kW solar array to generate renewable electricity for the facility.

VILLAGE'S ROLE IN ECOLOGY

Ecology is a broad concept with many connected living and nonliving entities that are dependent on one another to create a healthy ecosystem. Depending on the ecological focus, the Village may play multiple roles in promoting healthy ecosystems. Some of the most important services provided by the Village - stormwater management, drinking water, urban forestry, and street maintenance - have varying effects on the natural landscapes in Downers Grove and beyond.

The Village's stormwater utility plays a critical role in reducing the risk of flooding, which has been more frequent due to climate change. The Village has made significant investments into both hard infrastructure and green infrastructure with the goal of increasing biodiversity while taking advantage of nature's natural stormwater benefits.

Additionally, the Village also maintains more than 22,000 parkway trees through its Forestry Division and 1,400 streetlights through its Streets Division. Street trees provide shade that reduces urban heat islands, and streetlight replacements can reduce energy use while also limiting light pollution.

The Village also enforces an important set of land use policies that influence how properties can be developed or redeveloped. With more than 20,000 individual parcels of land in Downers Grove, these policies are important for managing the built environment and its impacts on the natural world. Land use policies can be used to reduce the environmental impact of development, as well as promote positive land management practices. As the largest landowner in Downers Grove, the Village can also be an effective leader by employing best practices on its own properties in an effort to demonstrate how residents and businesses can support a healthy environment.



The Conservation@Home program managed by The Conservation Foundation is a great way for residents to learn how they can make their yards more sustainable

VILLAGE'S ROLE IN MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

A key concept in the Materials and Resources goals is reducing waste. One of the largest contracted services provided to residents is garbage collection. The Village also has the ability to set policies related to how waste and recycling is disposed of by commercial and multi-family properties that are not covered by the solid waste contract. These policies and the services provided through the solid waste contract play an important role in promoting recycling, composting, and the proper disposal of household waste.

The Village also takes an active role and maintains important partnerships to promote economic development in the community. Economic development is a critical function of the Village, as well as being a service where sustainability initiatives can have a positive impact on a larger scale. Sustainability strategies that promote greener business practices within the community, recruitment of businesses that are at the forefront of sustainability efforts and industries, and seeking environmentally friendly development projects can all contribute towards a stronger reputation as a sustainable community.



VILLAGE'S ROLE IN MOBILITY, PARKWAYS, AND PARKING

Reducing the environmental impacts associated with vehicles is complex and requires multiple strategies and partnerships. One strategy aimed at limiting reliance on vehicles within Downers Grove is the development of a well connected active transportation network. As part of the *Guiding DG* planning process, the Village has also developed an Active Transportation Plan (ATP) that includes recommendations for new bicycle facilities and improvements to improve pedestrian safety. Implementing the recommendations of the ATP will take time, but improving bike and pedestrian connectivity between neighborhoods, employment centers, and public transit has multiple benefits to community and environmental wellbeing.

The Village can also reduce the environmental impacts of parking facilities through land use, stormwater, and construction regulations. Reducing impervious areas, increasing the reflectivity of parking surfaces, and promoting solar canopies in parking lots can all reduce the environmental impacts of parking facilities. The Village also has a set of policies related to the maintenance of parkways that can be leveraged to promote biodiversity and transform the roadways in Downers Grove into natural corridors. Property maintenance policies can be amended to more explicitly state the benefits of native plants, reduce turfgrass in parkways, and enhance the character of neighborhood streets.



VILLAGE'S ROLE IN GOVERNANCE

Although the definition of governance used in the ESP is broader than the formal duties of the Village, leading by example through forward-thinking policies and thoughtful service delivery sets the stage for community-wide sustainability efforts. Integrating environmental stewardship into decision-making can help build an expectation that sustainability is a shared expectation. Policies can be crafted to make sustainability the easier and more attractive choice, whether through streamlined permitting for green initiatives or incentives for implementing eco-friendly practices.

The Village can also embrace a leadership role by creating partnerships and platforms that empower residents and organizations to take meaningful action. Serving as both a guide and a convener, different groups can be brought together to share knowledge, pool resources, and scale up successful initiatives. This could include efforts that are focused within the community, or more broadly across the region. As previously noted in this plan, environmental issues do not stop at municipal borders. The Village has an opportunity to step up as a leader in regional sustainability efforts. By actively engaging with neighboring communities, sharing best practices, and advocating for policies that protect natural resources on a broader level, the Village can amplify its positive impact.



Village Staff meet with members of Greener Grove to discuss sustainability efforts in the community



Learning about important pollinators through Lyman Woods butterfly program. Photo taken by Danielle Strohmier, Downers Grove Park District.

VILLAGE OBJECTIVES



In the past, conservationists worked exclusively where people weren't; we now need to save nature where people are.

- Doug Tallamy

04

Leading by Example

This section outlines a set of measurable objectives that are specifically tailored to the Village as an organization. These objectives are structured around the established vision themes and were developed to achieve several key outcomes. First, they are intended to align with the key recommendations identified in the Vision section of the plan. Additionally, these objectives aim to demonstrate the Village's leadership in reducing environmental impacts across various sustainability themes, setting an example for residents, businesses, and other local organizations.

Beyond leadership, the objectives also provide clear direction by defining desired sustainability outcomes in relation to current conditions. This helps guide decision-making and policy development while ensuring that sustainability efforts remain focused and effective. Importantly, each objective is designed to be measurable, using at least one quantitative or qualitative metric to track progress over time. This commitment to measurement ensures accountability and allows the Village to assess the effectiveness of its efforts, make necessary adjustments, and communicate progress to the community.



THEME	OBJECTIVE	EXAMPLE METRICS
01 Energy	☐ Reduce quantifiable emissions throughout Village operations	☐ Electricity and natural gas use ☐ Fuel consumed
	☐ Increase the amount of carbon sequestered on Village properties and Village right-of-way	☐ Total carbon removed by trees and other vegetation
	☐ Invest in offset strategies that provide additive benefits, especially locally and regionally	☐ Renewable Energy Certificates ☐ New trees planted ☐ Conservation credits purchased
02 Ecology	☐ Increase the biodiversity of parkway trees and vegetation on Village properties, including detention areas	☐ % of total trees (by species) ☐ Number of species
	☐ Increase participation in bioswale, rain garden, and other stormwater programs	☐ Linear feet of bioswale ☐ Acres of naturalized area ☐ # of demonstration gardens
	☐ Replace turf grass with restorative landscaping and other nature-based urban design elements on Village properties and Village right-of-way	☐ Square feet of turf grass replaced ☐ # different species
	☐ Convert Village lighting to meet Dark Sky standards	☐ % of streetlights replaced ☐ Sky quality (Bortles)
	☐ Improve weed and pest management practices to protect local wildlife and the quality of waterways	☐ Qualitative: Process description ☐ Observations of model species and pollinators (e.g. fireflies, dragonflies, butterflies, etc.)
	☐ Reduce chloride runoff from snow operations	☐ Chloride measurements in water samples
	☐ Maintain annual average leakage of drinking water system within Lake Michigan requirements	☐ % nonrevenue water
	☐ Increase awareness of strategies to reduce environmental impacts throughout Village operations	☐ Surveys ☐ Field observations
03 Materials & Resources	☐ Reduce upstream and downstream environmental impacts of Village operations through procurement and contracting	☐ Scope 3 assessments
	☐ Reduce waste in Village facilities, operations, and at community events through increased recycling and composting	☐ Total waste produced ☐ Recycling/Refuse ratio ☐ Amount of food waste diverted
	☐ Maintain appropriate maintenance schedules for Village infrastructure and facilities	☐ % of watermain replaced ☐ Total infrastructure investment
	☐ Increase awareness of green business practices in Downers Grove	☐ Business participation ☐ Surveys

THEME	OBJECTIVE	EXAMPLE METRICS
04 Mobility, Parkways, and Parking	☐ Reduce the amount of turf grass and increase the biodiversity in Village right-of-way	☐ Square feet turf grass replaced
	☐ Reduce impervious surfaces on Village properties	☐ Total impervious surface
	☐ Improve the soil health of parkways	☐ Soil composition
	☐ Improve neighborhood connectivity with modes of active transportation	☐ Intersection upgrades ☐ Miles of bike facilities installed
	☐ Incorporate native plants and other natural design strategies into new active transportation facilities and improvements	☐ Miles of paths with landscaping ☐ # of rain garden bump-outs
	☐ Increase the number of solar car canopies throughout Village parking lots	☐ # of canopies ☐ Total capacity (KW)
05 Governance	☐ Further integrate environmental considerations into the policymaking process	☐ Qualitative: process description
	☐ Use the Village's policymaking authority to support community sustainability goals	☐ Types of policies updated
	☐ Improve environmental reporting on key metrics and progress of the ESP	☐ Total metrics reported
	☐ Increase coordination with other local governments and community organizations to further the goals of the ESP	☐ Qualitative: Process Description ☐ Number of collaborative projects
	☐ Increase awareness and participation in the Community Pledge	☐ Number of individuals taking pledge ☐ Surveys



VILLAGE ACTION PLAN



When one tugs at a single thing
in nature, he finds it attached
to the rest of the world.

- John Muir

05



ABOUT THE 2025 TO 2027 ACTION PLAN

The following is a list of specific actions recommended as priorities for the period between now and 2027. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list of efforts that will take place within Village operations. There are ongoing and incremental improvements to daily operations that would take place in addition to the list of actions in this section. The items included in this list are specific projects that require input from multiple departments, Village Council discussion and direction, and budgetary consideration.

The actions identified in the 2025 to 2027 Action Plan are organized in a similar fashion as the process in A Greener Way Pledge (i.e. Understand, Identify, Plan, and Act). Physical assessments and policy reviews will include a learning process (understand), data collection and evaluation (identify), and then provide a set of recommendations (plan). Items listed in the Projects and Services sections have been identified based on key takeaways and findings from the Existing Conditions Memorandum and also align with the Village's current Community Investment Plan, other *Guiding DG* recommendations, or contractual arrangements.



VILLAGE'S 2025 TO 2027 SUSTAINABILITY ACTIONS

PHYSICAL ASSESSMENTS

Evaluations that require physical data collection and evaluation to develop recommendations for future actions.

1. **Facilities Assessment:** Conduct an evaluation of Village facilities that provides recommendations to:
 - a. Improve the longevity of facilities
 - b. Reduce energy usage
 - c. Provide a timeline to replace HVAC equipment and viability of different retrofits (i.e. heat pumps, geothermal, etc.)
 - d. Identify viability and siting of renewable energy and energy storage equipment
2. **Ecological Assessment:** Conduct an evaluation of biodiversity and land management practices on Village-owned properties that includes:
 - a. An enhanced inventory of parkway trees that can be used to calculate carbon sink values
 - b. An evaluation of biodiversity around Village facilities
 - c. Identification and prioritization of areas of Village-owned property that would benefit from naturalization
 - d. Recommendations to improve the biodiversity of parkway trees and land that is directly managed by the Village
3. **Waste Survey:** Evaluate the amount and types of waste generated throughout Village operations and provide recommendations to:
 - a. Reduce the overall amount of waste
 - b. Identify ways to improve recycling rates
 - c. Identify areas where the environmental impact of disposal can be reduced

POLICY REVIEW

Evaluation of existing policies to identify opportunities to ease pathways and increase sustainable practices in the community.

1. **Landscape and Biodiversity:** Evaluation of existing policies that relate to landscape and maintenance of plants on private property and in Village right-of-way.
2. **Energy Efficiency and Renewables:** Review zoning regulations and permitting processes relative to the SolSmart framework and other sustainable building practices and systems (e.g. geothermal, small-scale wind, passive solar, etc.).
3. **Village Purchasing Policy:** Investigate strategies that allow for preferential selection from vendors that propose less environmentally impactful services and enhanced reporting that allow for evaluation of upstream and downstream environmental impacts.
4. **Waste Ordinances and Licensing:** Evaluation of existing waste ordinances and licenses to identify recommendations that would improve recycling and composting services for single-family, multi-family, and commercial properties.
5. **Dark Sky - Exterior Lighting:** Evaluation of existing policies to identify necessary updates to comply with Dark Sky Community Guidelines.

PROJECTS AND SERVICES

The following actions are projects that have known outcomes and deliverables, focusing on a mix of capital projects and service enhancements.

1. **Enhanced Curbside Collection Services:** Improve curbside collection services through the next solid waste contract. Requests for Proposals or contract renewal should investigate the viability of year-round compost collection, curbside or drop-off electronics and household hazardous waste collection, and strategies to reduce recycling contamination.
2. **Streetlight Replacement:** Replace Village-owned streetlights and Curtiss Street parking deck lights with high efficiency LED fixtures that are also Dark Sky certified.
3. **Pledge Resource Guide:** Develop a resource guide to support the Community Pledge that is educational and includes a comprehensive list of actions to support the community goals in the ESP.
4. **Install EV charging stations at Village Facilities:** Identify a strategy for installing EV charging stations at Village facilities.

A COMMUNITY PLEDGE





Unless someone like you cares
a whole awful lot, nothing is
going to get better. It's not.

- Dr. Seuss



Photos Submitted by: Ken Lerner, Robin
Tryloff, Jason Michnick, Jennifer Gillespie

OUR ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTS

Every person, household, and business that resides within the Village requires energy, food, water, and shelter to survive. Taken as a whole, these items represent a person's Ecological Footprint.¹⁹ Think of it as the demand required by humans and the supply offered by nature. Individuals rarely think about or question the quantities of natural resources their lifestyle requires or how those uses impact the environment. Many of Earth's resources are limited or take years to be replenished. When people consume too many resources or consume them too quickly, resource consumption exceeds the capacity of our planet.

Daily decisions about the products and materials that we use, how things that are no longer needed are discarded, and the ways people travel all contribute to an Ecological Footprint. The lifestyle of the average person in the U.S. results in an Ecological Footprint that is more than twice the available resources in North America and 5.1 times the world's carrying capacity.²⁰ In other words, it would require more than 5 Earths if everyone in the world consumed the same resources as the average American. Reducing our individual Ecological Footprint is at the core of becoming a more sustainable community.

The good news is that we can take actions to reduce our Ecological Footprint and have a positive impact on the environment. Although it may feel at times like individual efforts have a limited impact in the grand scheme, there is a compounding effect when we act together. To help support a community-wide effort, all are encouraged to participate by taking a pledge. The pledge is intended to bring the community together around the shared goal of making environmental stewardship something that is deeply rooted in Downers Grove.

HOW THE PLEDGE WORKS

The pledge is voluntary. There is no cost to take the pledge itself and no special knowledge is needed. By taking the pledge, members of the community are committing to doing their part to reduce their own Ecological Footprint and support broader community efforts. At the core of the pledge is a process that can help each person identify certain changes or actions that are more sustainable. Each person is unique in where they are in their journey, and the process is intended to be adaptable for each member of the community.

Because the pledge is voluntary, active participation is highly encouraged. Taking the pledge does not require an official "sign up" or any progress reporting. For those who are interested, there will be opportunities to be more actively engaged. As it is presented here in the ESP, the pledge is like a seed being planted. Active support is what will give the collective effort the ability to grow into something as mighty as the oaks that gave Downers Grove its namesake.

19. An Ecological Footprint measures how fast we consume natural resources and generate waste compared to how fast nature can absorb our waste and generate resources.

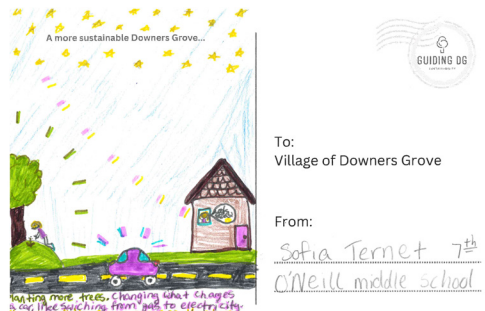
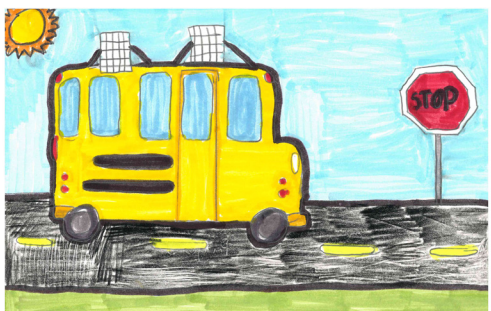
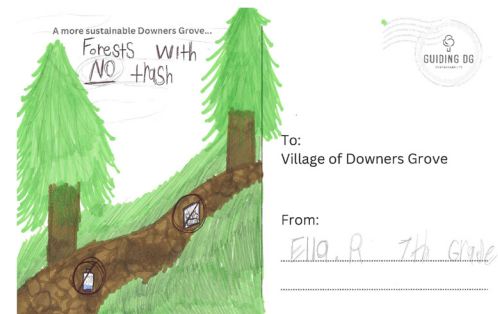
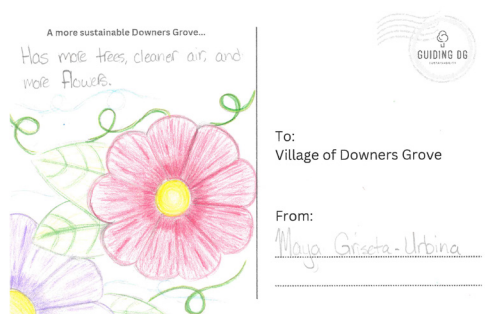
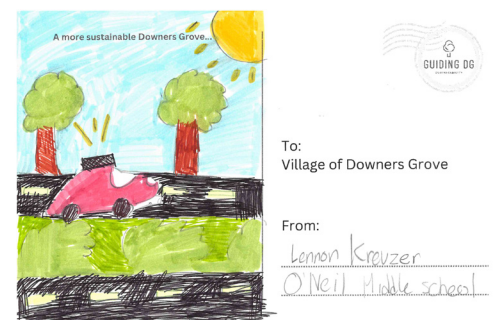
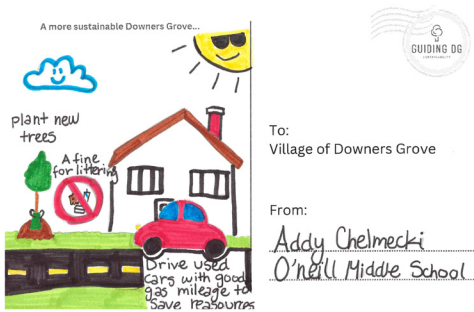
20. The Ecological Footprint of the average American is 7.8 global hectares, compared to our national biocapacity of 3.8 global hectares per person and the global biocapacity of 1.7 global hectares per person.



A GREENER WAY PLEDGE

As a member of the Downers Grove community, I pledge to do my part to create a healthier and more resilient community where the natural environment is preserved for future generations. I am committed to finding my path by understanding my ecological footprint and how our collective actions as a community impact the environment; identifying the best ways to reduce my Ecological Footprint in support of community goals; planning the appropriate steps, especially for areas where it will be the most impactful or challenging to reduce my footprint; and acting on my plans to reduce my ecological footprint and engaging with broader community efforts.

Students from O'Neill Middle School share their vision for a more sustainable Downers Grove via postcards from the future



HIGH IMPACT ACTIONS

A Starting Point for the Community

The purpose of A Greener Way Pledge is not to provide an exhaustive checklist of things that individuals must undertake to be more sustainable. However, some specific actions have been identified as having the potential to have the greatest collective impact. The list below is a set of individual objectives to support the vision and community goals identified earlier in the ESP.



Understand your Ecological Footprint

A holistic understanding of your Ecological Footprint allows you to identify how you consume resources and where you can make the biggest impacts to reduce your footprint.



Replace turf grass in your yard with native plants and trees or get certified through Conservation@Home program

Replacing turfgrass (lawn) with deeply rooted native plants and native trees improves soil health, reduces stormwater runoff, increases biodiversity, and provides food and habitat for insects and animals.



Conduct an energy audit/assessment for your home or business

An energy audit identifies the types of investments that can reduce energy consumption and save money.



Compost food waste at home or through your weekly garbage pick up

About 25% of residential garbage is made up of food waste that can be diverted from landfills and returned to the soil as nutrients.

5



Read the label – know where products come from and where they will go when you dispose of them

Reducing the number of resources we consume and the waste we generate all starts with well-informed purchases.

6



Use fertilizers, pesticides, and road salt responsibly

Chemicals that we use in our yards can inadvertently harm beneficial species and biodiversity and make their way into our waterways.

7



Walk or bike to neighborhood parks and open spaces as often as possible

Being present and engaging with nature has positive mental and physical benefits while strengthening our relationship with the natural world and community.

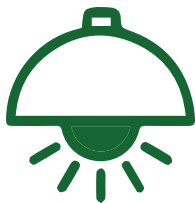
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Conserve water

Water is critical to life and excessive use puts pressure on our most important natural resource.

9



Reduce light pollution

Light pollution is harmful to all species and reducing it can be as easy as changing a light bulb or using timers.

10



Share your knowledge and experience with your neighbors and others in the community

The things you learn along the way can be helpful to others who are just starting out. Engaging with your neighbors to help them understand makes us all more aware.

CONCLUSION



We don't inherit the earth
from our ancestors, we
borrow it from our children.

- Chief Seattle

07





A family of Great Horned Owls in Maple Grove Forest Preserve. Photo submitted by David Pitrak



The ESP provides
a framework for
a healthier, more
resilient community.

While it does not encompass every possible sustainability action, it serves as a guide for strategic decision-making and meaningful progress. The Village will lead by example, integrating sustainability into policies, services, and partnerships, ensuring that environmental stewardship remains a core value.

However, the success of this plan depends on collective action. Residents, businesses, and community organizations all have a role to play in reducing environmental impact and fostering a culture of sustainability. By taking part in A Greener Way Pledge and adopting sustainable practices, individuals can contribute to lasting change.

Sustainability is an ongoing journey, requiring adaptation and innovation as new challenges and opportunities arise. By working together, Downers Grove can achieve a sustainable future—one where environmental responsibility is ingrained in daily life, ensuring the well-being of future generations.

Photo Submitted by: Dorothy Dvorachek Larsen