



# DISCOVER

Magazine



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# Mayor's Message



If the law of attraction is based upon the belief that like attracts like and that one's thoughts create reality through visualization, action, and implementation, then . . .

"Why can't Park Forest attract more businesses?" That's a question that I get asked a lot. It's often accompanied by another: "Why do businesses leave Park Forest?"

I'm not sure that anyone has the perfect answer, but after one full year as your mayor, I've come to recognize that two major obstacles stand in way of more business development in our Village.

- (1) The majority of properties zoned for business use in Park Forest are not on major roadways, which means they have low traffic patterns and that compromises their potential for success, and
- (2) Taxes on commercial and industrial property in the Village are extremely high, making it difficult for businesses to see a pathway to success.

Those two circumstances not only make it difficult to attract new business, but they also impede our existing businesses, sometimes causing them to close shop or relocate to regions where such challenges do not exist.

It seems to me that the answer to the first of these problems is to balance our economic development emphasis. For almost 30 years now, the major efforts toward business development have been focused on perhaps only DownTown Park Forest, the location of the long-gone Park Forest Plaza, which for years was the economic heart of our community. It's understandable that leaders of our Village in the past hoped to revive that region of town as our economic engine. Let's face it: There simply is not similar traffic in DownTown Park Forest as there is along major thoroughfares. As a result, many prospective

businesses tend to look elsewhere where there are higher traffic counts.

By contrast to the DownTown, three roadways—Lincoln Highway, Western Avenue, and Sauk Trail—get heavy amounts of traffic, something that’s absolutely necessary for any retail business to succeed. Granted, these three roadways are more heavily zoned for residential use and not commercial, but still there are major parcels where businesses could locate and gain the advantage of good traffic patterns. One of my goals, therefore, is to continue to work with staff to make development of those sites our highest priority.

The second problem is more difficult to tackle, given the unique system in Cook County in regards to property taxes. Since businesses pay roughly twice the tax rate that residential property owners do, they can thrive in regions where there is a sufficient number of other businesses to share the tax burden. However, our high taxes make it nearly impossible to attract new business. And why are our taxes high? Because we have no businesses to pay their portion. The situation is like a dog chasing its tail! We need more business in order to lower the overall tax burden, but it is extremely difficult to attract more business because the taxes are too high!

An unfortunate side effect of this dilemma, in regards to property taxes, is that the lack of businesses to pay their share means that our homeowners must pick up the greatest portion. That’s not the case in communities that have a strong commercial and industrial base.

I’ve spent my first year in office studying these situations as much as I can, talking to as many people in leadership roles as I can, reaching out to legislators and other elected officials to seek possible remedies. I’ve received lots of input, lots of ideas, lots of suggestions, but we’re still far from pinpointing a definitive solution. State Representative Anthony DeLuca is offering assistance by proposing legislation that focuses on some changes, where the property tax problem seems to be causing the greatest havoc. I’ve been working closely with him and with other contacts I’ve made in Springfield, in the hope of beginning to see some light at the end of this gloomy tunnel in which we find ourselves. I know there’s no “magic bullet,” but I’m optimistic a good people working together on a good cause, will find good solutions.

To you, the residents, I make one plea: *Don’t lose hope!*

As we celebrate our 75th Anniversary as a Village, I am sure—after studying and listening to those pioneers who have come before me—that each decade has had its own respective challenges. This decade is no different. Our community has been successful in many endeavors over the years because of the vigor and strength of our citizenry. I’m confident we will do that again, but we all have to pull together to make it happen.

Being successful in attracting new business is only half of the solution; the other half is providing sufficient clientele for our businesses to succeed. We may not yet have a lot of places where you can shop, but it’s important that you shop at those places we do have. The board, staff, and I will do our part to attract new business, but we need you to do your part in supporting the places we find.

Meanwhile, you have my word that I will continue doing all I can to attract new business, support existing businesses, and lobby state and federal officials to give us the tools we need to achieve our goals. That’s why I’ve made multiple trips this past year to Springfield, lobbying for the increase of the Local Government Distributive Fund; and to Washington, lobbying for what has resulted in more than 1 million dollars in grant funding. I will continue to do so in the days, weeks, and months ahead. I promise to leave no stone unturned until we work our way out of this quagmire. It won’t be easy, but truly important work never is.



A message from Mayor Joseph A. Woods

## Through the good, the bad, and ugly – Park Forest will forever be our home

It was 60 years ago that we first heard about this place called Park Forest. I was working for a newspaper in Albuquerque, New Mexico at the time, and was offered a job on the Hammond, Ind., Times (now the Northwest Indiana Times).



On Wednesday, March 4, 1964, we loaded our three-year-old son Alan, our two-month-old daughter Deborah along with a makeshift crib, our Shetland sheep dog Tosca, and as much luggage as we could pack into our 1962 Chevrolet Corvair (Ralph Nader called it a car “unsafe at any speed”) and began our 1,000-plus mile trek toward ---who knows what.

Except for that book “The Organization Man,” neither of us knew anything about the community that Penny’s mother Mignon had reserved an apartment for us.

Mignon was in the business of selling homes in the Chicago area, and by asking others where her daughter, son-in-law, and grandkids could live close to where he was going to work. The answers varied. Homewood. Flossmoor, Glenwood, and Chicago Heights were the names given to her. Then someone said “try Park Forest. Their rents are cheap.”

We arrived in Chicago on a Saturday, stayed with Mignon in her Sandburg Village apartment for one night and on Sunday drove south on the two-year old Dan Ryan Expressway because I-57 did not stretch down to the south suburbs those days, so we took the Bishop Ford. When we saw a road sign pointing to Danville, I wondered if we had come too far south.

We saw Park Forest for the first time when we came to Western Avenue and there it was – a collection

of both single family homes and rows of apartment buildings surrounding an outdoor mall.

The rental office, on Forest Boulevard, was open. We signed papers and were given keys to a two-bedroom apartment at 50 Hemlock. Because of that snowstorm, our belongings were still enroute and it was the following Wednesday before we could move in, little more than 15 years after the village was incorporated... So it was that we officially became part of this community on Wednesday, March 11, 1964.

Welcome to Park Forest!

Early on, someone from Welcome Wagon knocked on our door with information for us. We learned where to pay utility bills, addresses and phone numbers of churches and temples, how to contact village officials, schools, pre-schools, and lots of coupons for stores in town.

In those days, all phones began with a PI (for Pilgrim) 7. That is still our number today. In those days Dixie Dairy would deliver milk and dairy products to our door.

In those days you could shop at the Jewel Food Store in the Plaza (located somewhere near the Dining on the Green site I think, and have those groceries delivered to you in your car.

In those days lasting friendships were made when you joined any club, alliance, society, or religious organization. That was always the way to plant roots in the community and we were able to nestle in the welcoming soil of the village. We sprouted quickly.

We were within walking distance of the Aqua Center and all things commercial in the Plaza. We once bought books at Maeyama’s. We once had to stand in line waiting to see



a movie at the Holiday Theater. We often used our next door neighbors as babysitters when we would go to Mickelberry's for dinner.

The next year - 1965 – we bought a house on Shabbona Drive. Within three years we remodeled, adding a bedroom, bathroom, and family room, thus turning our house into our home.

Welcome to Park Forest.

Penny began a teaching career, and for 23 years worked at Talala Grade School. She then spent another 13 years at Governors State University, teaching would-be teachers how to teach.

Our children graduated high school, went off to college, were married, moved, and had children of their own. Why move, we decided. Why leave our house and our friends?

One year after retiring from the Tribune (1967), I was named Park Forest's public relations officer, and by that time things were changing. The days were numbered for what was left of the Plaza. High property taxes forced some to leave town. We needed a car to do a lot of our shopping. Some pristine homes a generation before were slowly decaying. People began to leave for what they thought to be a better place to live.

We stayed.

I left the village job in 2008, and shortly thereafter began writing stories about the village and the south suburbs for the Daily Southtown. I am still at it today.

Welcome to Park Forest.

One final note. A statistics professor once told me there is no such thing as a coincidence, and that these weird connections are simply random events that always take place in a person's life.

So here is our random event.

Tom McDade was the Rental Sales Agent for Park Forest during its first days and a trusted confidant of Park Forest developer



Phillip Klutznick. When Klutznick developed Water Tower Place on North Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Tom came along with the concrete, mortar, and elevators.



Tom later married Penny's mother Mignon in 1979. When he retired, they left their apartment overlooking Lake Michigan to move back to Park Forest, the community he said he loved. Their second house, on Lakewood Boulevard, was owned by Mayer Singerman, who was once the village's mayor.

That house is now the home of our son and his wife. Don't get me wrong. I know everything changes all the time. Park Forest is not the Valhalla of our youth, and yes, we have infrastructure issues, property tax issues, school issues, crime issues and other issues faced by other communities these days.

But those roots we established 60 years ago are today still cultivated by the people of Park Forest. No issue can be solved by empty houses and an uncaring population.

From the day we moved into that apartment in 1964, we have shared our lives with what was once called a by the late U.S. Representative John Lewis once called "a beloved community."

One last note.

I've had people sniff haughtily when we tell them where we live.

"Why there," they might ask

"We like it here, and we like being with our friends, is our reply.

And that's it.

Welcome to Park Forest.



*Former Village employee, Park Forest Resident, and Daily SouthTown Columnist Jerry Shnay*

## Civic Leadership Academy returns after COVID hiatus

The Park Forest Civic Leadership Academy returned this year after being paused for nearly three years due to the coronavirus pandemic.

It was 2020 when the academy completed half of its session when Illinois Governor J. B. Pritzker ordered people to stay home for nonessential activities. The Village of Park Forest was forced with the decision to halt the Civic Leadership Academy.



Assistant Village Manager Jason Miller said as the pandemic continued, they waited to see if and when the academy would continue.

"As COVID numbers went up and down over the next few years, we felt that individuals may not be comfortable spending extended time in a large group," Miller said. "So, we determined to give things additional time. Last year, we were finally in a position to restart the program."

Miller said the Park Forest Civic Leadership Academy is a nine-month program that educates Park Forest stakeholders on an array of community-focused topics. He noted prospective participants must first apply to and be accepted into this graduate-course-like program. A collective of Park Forest staff members, elected officials, leaders from local community groups, and businesses serve as facilitators for the day-long sessions held each Friday from September to May.

"There are many advantages to this program," Miller said. "Members have the opportunity to meet other like-minded residents in the program who care about Park Forest and are interested in better understanding the community, particularly how



the municipal operation side of things works."

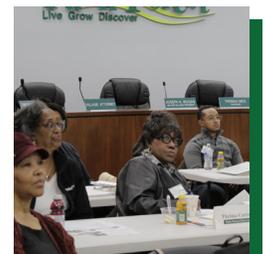
Miller continued, "Being part of the program also provides access to community leaders and a more robust dialogue that can come with that. While a large number of program participants are often more long-time residents, there are also newer residents who pursue the program for gaining a better, more through introduction to their new community."

Miller mentioned that joining the academy is one of many ways residents can engage and connect with municipal government.

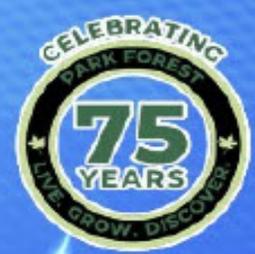
He said the Village's boards and commissions provide a great opportunity for residents to steer the Village's efforts in particular areas of focus. He added all of Park Forest's Monday night board meetings are televised, live-streamed, and archived on the website, and special Saturday Rules meetings are offered to allow residents to speak with elected officials in a more casual setting.

"The Park Forest Civic Leadership Academy continues in the spirit of transparency and resident engagement," Miller said. "The program provides an authentic behind-the-scenes look that most residents are not exposed to."

Those interested in applying to be part of the next Park Forest Civic Leadership Academy class should apply on the Village's website at [villageofparkforest.com/civicleadership](http://villageofparkforest.com/civicleadership) before Aug. 9. Those accepted to the program will begin in September.



PARK FOREST YOUTH COMMISSION  
PRESENTS



 **YOUTH**  
**DAY 2024**

JULY  
27<sup>th</sup>

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF SERVICE

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EVENT STARTS  
**10AM-2PM**

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**DJ - BOUNCE HOUSES - GAMES TRUCK**  
**BIG RAFFLES - FACEPAINTING**  
**SCHOOL SUPPLIES & MORE**



**I**t was 75 years ago that our first residents gathered together to embark on a dream — the conversion of a planned community into a municipality.



The developers who created the community had done their job. Now, it was time for the residents to do theirs. And thus came the Village of Park Forest.

But as we all know from personal experience, dreams can often be illusionary. Too often, things are inherited dreams that don't appear in reality. Too often,

we're grateful that the illusions are not real. Other times, we lament that real life doesn't live up to the dream. And that's much akin to Park Forest's history over the last 75 years.



There has been much that made us happy and made us proud, but also much that we just soon forget. It's natural to focus on the positive things; who doesn't prefer the sweet to the bitter? But we know from history that while the good things boost our pride, the less than pleasant experiences — many times are equally important teaching tools. If we are to learn and grow, we must be honest in our assessments; this year, we begin celebrating our 75th birthday. But indeed, we wish to celebrate our 100th anniversary in the days ahead.

It is important that we look at where we've been in order to better see where we're going. I think perhaps the wise decision our first residents made was to create a form of local government that guarded against the ugliness of partisan politics, a process that fosters factions, nepotism, and cronyism.



Fortunately, Park Forest has been free of the problems that create cesspools of corruption in too many municipalities. The combination of nonpartisanship and the council-manager form of government has met 75 years of honesty and integrity, which has legitimately earned accolades from persons both inside and outside of the larger realm of government.

Our image of this community has been modeled within that framework. It is an image that we must strive to maintain through continued forthright and honest deliberations, both by elected officials and professional staff. It has enticed so many people to become our residents over the years, and we owe it to those residents to preserve it and nurture it so it grows.

What, perhaps, it was a significant failure on the part of our earliest residents; it may have been their misconception that Park Forest could exist on an island. From its earliest day, our Village has provided our residents with all their needs since its earliest days. The Park Forest Plaza offered more than enough shopping



opportunities.

Our schools were ranked among the best in the state. Citizens were willing to invest in cultural and recreational amenities such as the Aqua Center, what became the Tall Grass Art Center, and events such as the annual art fair and a ten-mile labor day race, still a pleasant memory to so many to this day.



Because commerce thrived at the Park Forest Plaza burst over a commercial property, no one worried about how the Village would acquire the revenue needed to support its various services. It all functioned in perfect harmony with the dream. But then we were rudely awakened.



Things were happening around us, and we hadn't paid close enough attention. Other shopping opportunities arose around us, and some of our businesses began to move to locations with better traffic patterns. After several years of leading the pack, we suddenly found ourselves playing catch-up.

As we lost more businesses, our local tax burden increased, making it even harder to attract new commerce.





The combination of high taxes and the national housing crisis forced many residents to move elsewhere.

Increasingly, people spoke about what Park Forest was rather than what Park Forest is,

and then there was no question about it.

What Park Forest once was is something of which we should be exceedingly proud. Can you name another town with its own exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.? How many cities can you name that have won All American City designations twice?

From its earliest days, sociologist William White wrote about it in

his book "The Organization Man", his acclaimed study of urban life in America. Park Forest has held the admiration and respect of



people across the nation, and I'm proud of that.

Who wouldn't be proud to be the 12th mayor of this humble Village?

While I burst with pride, I've given special attention to our past and reached the conclusion that the secret sauce that made Park Forest what it was and what it is today is its people. It was the citizens who gathered at a tent meeting 75 years ago to create our Village. It was the citizens who came together to build our first schools. It was the citizens



who build the Aqua Center, who donated funds to build this place we call Freedom Hall, who organized the 10-mile run and the annual art fair, our strength was and remains the citizens. So, I look forward to the next 75 years and beyond — knowing that most of us will not be here. But you won't be forgotten.





I have prayed that the citizens of our great Village will continue their commitment and work to preserve and build a loving community of



which we are proud. As the mayor of our town, I pledge to you and this board pledges to you their commitment and involvement in all levels consistent with citizen's involvement, which is our 75-year history.

Every single one of you is the reason why Park Forest is — in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. — words that were reiterated by the late Congressman John

Lewis on a visit to Freedom Hall in the year 2000 — It is indeed a beloved community.

Happy birthday, Park Forest. And if you ever get lost or your GPS isn't working, know that we're located deep south Cook, nestled beside goodwill, east of legacy, and west of morning dew.

Written by Mayor Joseph A. Woods



# The Park Forest Police Department presents Officer of the Year and Civilian Employee of the Year Awards

The Park Forest Police Department honored two officers with special awards at a board meeting earlier this year.

Police Chief Brian Rzyski presented the department's annual awards for top civilian employee and officer of the year.

The Civilian Employee of the Year Award honors non-sworn members of the Park Forest Police Department whose roles are vital in helping the department's daily operations.

The recipient of the Civilian Employee of the Year Award, Joel Oyola, began with the department as a part-time community service officer in 2022. In his role, Oyola is tasked with a host of duties including assisting with animal and traffic control, making regular trips to the Markham Courthouse to pick-up sensitive documents, along with enforcing parking ordinances. Oyola's impact was felt almost immediately after his hire, going on to become full-time in 2023.



"Throughout 2023, [Oyola] exceeded expectations as a new full-time community service officer and has proven to be an invaluable asset to the department and Village," Rzyski said. "His thoroughness in investigating complaints and violations ensures that violators are abated by way of either compliance or enforcement."

Rzyski also presented the Officer of the Year Award for 2023 to Giovanni Goycochea.

The award – voted on by all members of the department – is given to an officer who best exemplifies performance, principles, purposes of the law, and the Park Forest Police.

Goycochea, who was hired in 2022, has been eager to learn since joining the department and remains positive regardless of the assignment, according to Rzyski.

In 2023, Goycochea "conducted approximately 200 traffic stops, made 15 self-initiated misdemeanor arrests, six self-initiated felony arrests, and seized several vehicles related to gun and DUI arrests," Rzyski said.

Rzyski added that fellow officers admire Goycochea's positive attitude and professionalism and consider him a leader.

"[Goycochea] should be commended for consistently being self-motivated and hardworking," said Rzyski. "He is aggressive in producing a high amount of self-initiated activity and hardworking."



# Join the police department's Private Security Camera Incentive Program

The Park Forest Police Department rolled out a Private Security Camera Incentive Program in April to help deter and solve crime within the Village.

Under the program, an individual, business, or nonprofit can apply to the Park Forest Police Department for a rebate of up to \$200 to offset the cost of one forward-facing security camera on the applicant's property.

Park Forest Police Chief Brian Rzyski said the program aims to prevent crime without invading anyone's privacy.

"The goal is to make our community safer by having our residents participate in the program, which will make criminals think twice before committing a crime here in Park Forest," Rzyski said.

The Park Forest Police Department will not have access to live video from the cameras. Additionally, the police department will collect, disseminate, and use the footage for official law enforcement purposes only.

Rzyski said the Park Forest Police Department has allocated \$20,000 to fund this program. He's hopeful many people will participate and purchase a camera so the department can continue to offer rebates once the current funding is exhausted.

Interested parties are encouraged to review camera requirements and complete the application. Rzyski said applicants must provide proof you purchase within 90 days of applying and provide the camera's

## PARK FOREST POLICE DEPARTMENT PRIVATE SECURITY CAMERA INCENTIVE PROGRAM

SPONSORED

This program provides residents the opportunity to receive a rebate to cover half the cost of one front-facing camera per residence, business, or non-profit, not to exceed \$200.

### How do you apply?

Online or in person Application



Proof of Purchase



Verification of Installation



Photo ID



SCAN ME  
TO APPLY!



make, model, and serial number.

A Park Forest Police officer will verify the installation of the camera.

Those who are interested can apply by visiting [villageofparkforest.com/securitycameraprogram](http://villageofparkforest.com/securitycameraprogram).



For questions regarding the Park Forest Police Department contact Chief Brian Rzyski at 708-748-4701 or email [brzyski@vopf.com](mailto:brzyski@vopf.com)

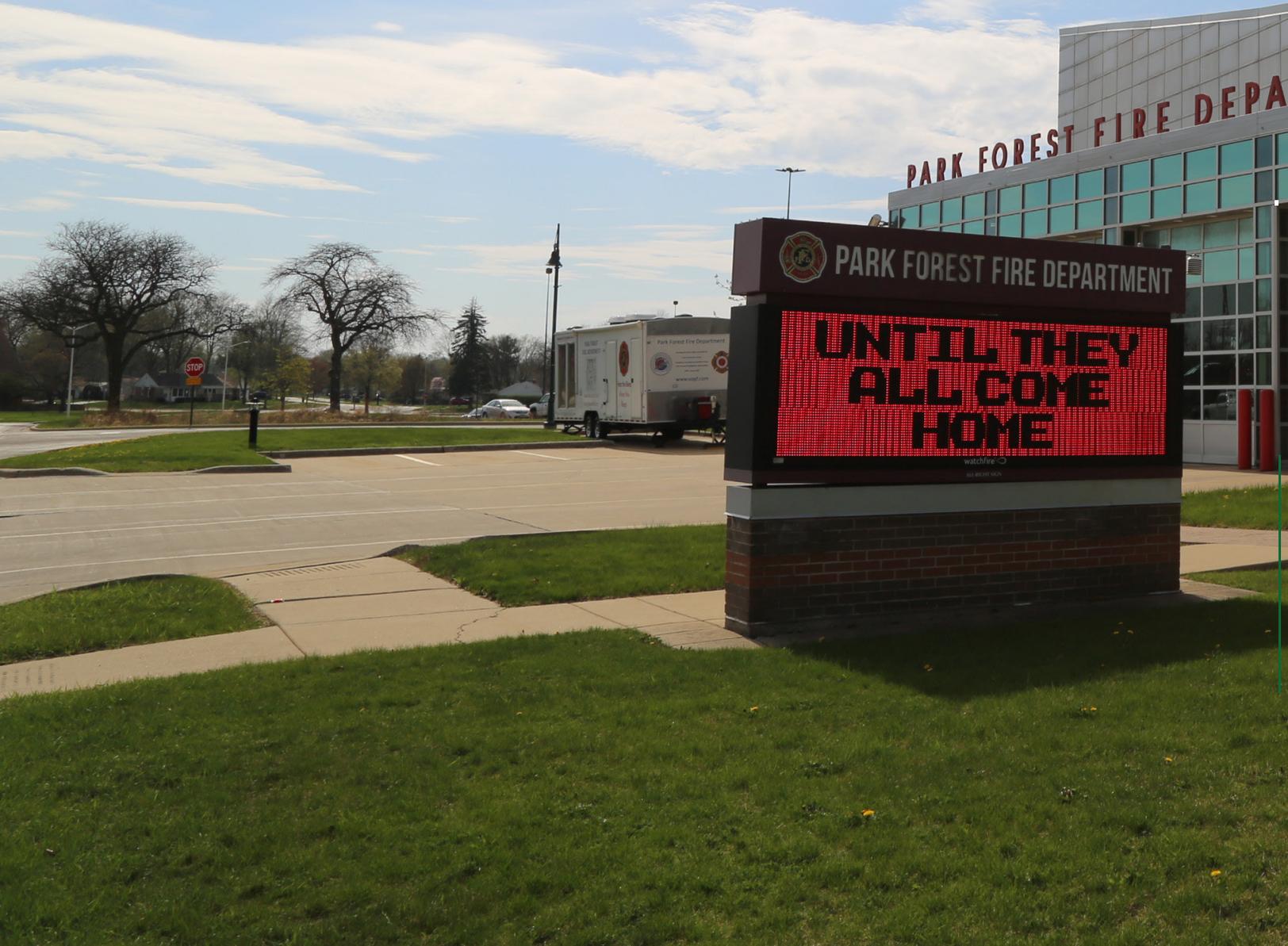


### Top Tips for Fire Safety

- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, inside bedrooms and outside sleeping areas.
  - Test smoke alarms every month. If they're not working, change the batteries.
  - Talk with all family members about a fire escape plan and practice the plan twice a year.
  - If a fire occurs in your home, GET OUT, STAY OUT and CALL FOR HELP.
- Source: The American Red Cross

### Fires reported in Park Forest

2015	834
2016	911
2017	907
2018	1,043
2019	1,140
2020	1,038
2021	994
2022	1,110
2023	1,148





## Firefighter of the Year

**F**irefighter/Paramedic Cory Murdoch of the Park Forest Fire Department is the recipient of the 2023 Firefighter of the Year Award.

The annual award is given to someone who exemplifies the characteristics of a firefighter with an outstanding record of fire service achievements. Murdoch, a 23-year department veteran, was formally recognized at Freedom Hall during the annual Park Forest Fire Department awards ceremony earlier this year.

Park Forest Fire Chief Tracy Natyshok credits Murdoch for his leadership skills and always being dependable.

"Cory takes great pride in the work he does. Just like a Marine, he can be counted on to carry out whatever task is given to him, big or small," Natyshok said. "Cory is usually the first one to work in the morning. As the senior engineer of his shift, Cory likes to ensure his rig is completely ready for his shift and that he can safely get the crew to calls and provides them with water for the fire, hoses, tools, ladders, or whatever equipment they may need to operate safely and that it is ready."

Natyshok said Murdoch is a valued Park Forest Fire Department member who brings along hard work, dedication, and knowledge. He added the 23-year veteran has knowledge of several different disciplines and does not hesitate to pass his knowledge on to younger members of our team. Murdoch, who's been with the Park Forest Fire Department since 2001, exemplified that most in 2023, hence why he was awarded Firefighter of the Year, Natyshok said.



Firefighter of the Year  
Cory Murdoch



## Park Forest Aqua Center returns for 68th season

**P**ick an adjective: gem, iconic, or staple—all of those words can describe the Park Forest Aqua Center.

The Chicago Southland is gearing up for the Aqua Center's 68th season. With three swimming pools for various ages, a 160-foot-slide, and a 15-foot-high aquatic climbing wall, the Aqua Center offers something for everyone and is particularly popular with families.

Recreation, Parks & Community Health Director Kevin Adams said the Aqua Center is in a league of its own.

"It's one of the only community pools with an adult pool," Adams said. We're a very unique place that also has a sand play area and a concession stand onsite."

Adams said the Aqua Center has various amenities, including locker rooms, bathrooms, ADA-accessible hot showers, and a concession stand. USCG-approved flotation devices, such as pull buoys, pool noodles, and kickboards, are available for shared use. No towel service is available. Lifeguards are certified and provide supervision during regular hours and events.

The Aqua Center will roll out new offerings for young children and families this summer.

"Each year, we try to roll out new activities at the Aqua Center," Adams said. "We'll have three Wibit Wednesday events, and we're hosting two Membership

Appreciation Days, Movie Trivia, and a fan favorite - Christmas in July."

Some of the main events this summer are as follows:

- June 8 — Opening Day
- July 23 — Christmas in July
- Aug. 18 — Float Tube Derby



The Aqua Center also plans to recognize active duty and retired service members and their families. On Independence Day, admission will be reduced to \$2 for qualifying patrons. Season passes are available for \$100 for residents and \$135 for nonresidents. Regular summer hours, from June 8 to August 18, are from 11:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday. The Friday through Sunday hours are from 11 a.m. until 7 p.m.

The Park Forest Aqua Center is located at 30 N. Orchard Drive. For more information, call 708-503-7729 or visit [pfaquacenter.com](http://pfaquacenter.com).



## Village parks in your backyard

**P**ark Forest is known for its rich veteran history and beautiful parks. The Village owns or manages 1,688 acres of parks, woods, and open land, affording an impressive 76.5 acres per 1,000 residents, more acres of parks, and open space per capita than most communities of its size in Illinois. The Department of Recreation, Parks & Community Health is responsible for more than 380 acres of parks and open lands, including 17 dedicated parks, five active tennis courts, seven ball fields, 11 playgrounds, four picnic pavilions, two skate parks, a Rail Fan Park, a dog park, and more.

Although the Village's most notable parks are Central Park, Somonauk Nature Adventure Park, and Logan Park, Village Arborist Todd Cann said there are other hidden gems that residents should check out.

"Did you know the Village has a rail park nearby?" Cann asked. "Many probably didn't know this, but right here, across from property owned by Park Forest, you can see a highway cloverleaf-like interchange for trains."

Cann added, "The Rail Fan Park is near the Matteson Metra train stop on Homan Avenue. You can see trains going in every direction—a junction that only exists in a few other places in the country."

Cann said that near the Rail Fan Park, residents can enjoy the Old Plank Road Trail. It's a 30-mile-long public trail that cuts through the heart of the Village, and it's an excellent way to enjoy nature in town.

"Over a mile of the trail runs right through Park Forest," Cann said. "In the fall, you can enjoy the foliage, and when it's warm, it's a great way to stay

cool and enjoy the sounds of nature."

Parks Foreman Kevin Rogge said the park system allows all residents to access a park in less than a ten-minute walk. He said residents should appreciate the accessibility to green spaces.

"We work hard to maintain and oversee over 1,000 acres of land here in the Village, 400 of which are parks," Rogge said. Park Forest is truly unique in the south suburbs, providing over 76 acres of green space per 1,000 residents."

Rogge added that in 2018, the Village received a \$30,000 Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The grant helped fund a project to convert over 2.5 acres of turf into demonstration rain gardens in Marquette, Shabbona, and Onarga parks.

A demonstrative rain garden is specifically designed to showcase the benefits of rain gardens and how they work. They serve both educational and functional purposes. Rogge said the project aims to inspire residents and business owners to create rain gardens.

Rogge said the gardens would positively impact rain and storm water quality by retaining water and allowing it to filter through several native plants and trees before discharging to Thorn Creek.

"That's what makes Park Forest special," Rogge said. "The Village is always looking for ways to improve our community and engage its residents."



*For questions regarding Recreation, Parks & Community Health contact Director Kevin Adams at 708-748-2005 or email [kadams@vopf.com](mailto:kadams@vopf.com)*

# Let me say it once again. The problem is...

**A**rea media have been reporting over the last several months regarding a Cook County study done of how various property tax exemptions in some communities of the South Suburbs are having more of a negative effect for some residents than a positive one.

What the article purports regarding the negative effect on the overall tax picture of exemptions as regards communities lacking in industrial and commercial property, i.e. Park Forest and Dixmoor as examples used in the article, is accurate. However, it must be noted that the article also points out that such a negative impact is not felt in Cook County communities with strong commercial and industrial bases. Although the article doesn't make reference to it, the problem is caused by the two-tiered property tax-rate system uniquely present in Cook County. I have been preaching this for too many years now to count, but nobody seems to be listening! As I have said before, it all makes me feel, if a Biblical allusion might be employed, like "a voice crying in the desert!"

## **Current System Benefits Tax-rich Communities**

The current system benefits the tax-rich communities by allowing them continually to levy lower amounts and still gain more in revenue. The lower rates likewise make it more attractive for even more industrial and commercial growth to occur within their confines. Meanwhile, the communities poor in commercial and industrial bases suffer even more because they need to keep their rates high – much, much higher than those tax-rich communities – in order to provide even basic local services.

The intention of the two-tiered system is to provide less of a burden on homeowners, who pay at a lower rate, than on businesses that pay at the higher rate.

However, in locales where the commercial-industrial base is low, obviously less business-related revenue



is being generated, which just makes the burden on homeowners and the handful of businesses that much greater because they must make up the difference. And in the process, the whole situation allows the tax-strong locales to be increasingly more attractive for business development while the tax-weak ones are increasingly less attractive.

## **Tax Exemptions Do Not Cause High Property Taxes**

What develops because of the various tax exemptions is NOT the cause of the high-property-tax situation in the Southland communities; rather it merely is a symptom. Because so many exemptions occur in regions with more moderately-priced housing, especially given the fact that the exemption process mostly is designed for the benefit of persons with lower to moderate incomes – e.g., older people and others on fixed incomes – the impact is even more significant than it might be elsewhere. It's because the moderately priced housing is located in areas that have less commerce and industry, and because the Cook County differential already has created a burden on those homeowners that is disproportionately high. So it becomes, so-to-speak, a double whammy!

# Where do my taxes go?

Close to five-eighths of the taxes you pay go to fund the services you receive from the Village of Park Forest?



\* 5% Library | 1% Cook County | 1% Rich Township & Other

## Cook County's Formula for Disaster

Here's the formula for the current disastrous situation: (1) the unique Cook County system forces communities without strong business and commercial bases to collect more from homeowners and from the small number of existing businesses than is the case elsewhere in the county; (2) the State of Illinois allows a number of exemptions to benefit some of those homeowners who have need but not others; (3) the two elements combine so that other homeowners and the limited number of businesses in the communities with poorer industrial-business bases suffer the highest burden of property taxes of anyone in Cook County proportionate to their assets and incomes.

## The Solution: A Special District of Four Townships

Only one solution will begin to address this problem: create a special district in the region affected – I have proposed that it consist of the four townships of Bloom, Bremen, Rich and Thornton – where the property tax rate is the same for homeowners and for businesses, just as it is throughout the rest of Illinois. In the interim period while the balance is achieved through the more attractive landscape for gaining a more beneficial business-industrial base for the region, give special State assistance to municipalities of the special district, similar to what is done in providing disaster-relief to some communities when the need exists, in order to give homeowners some relief.

Once a suitable balance is achieved, the County can develop a sliding scale to slowly increase the business-industrial rate and lower the homeowner rate until things are equal to what exists elsewhere in the Cook County. This is the only way, in my mind, that equity can be achieved, and it no doubt will take quite some time to level out, since it has been over a period of quite some time that the problem has developed.

I know that some will say that creating a policy that establishes a different process for four Cook County townships by contrast to all the others would cause a logistic nightmare and be costly beyond imagination. I would just remind those folks that we live in the Information Era! It is a time when programmers can learn from the slightest of information we post in the most obscure of Internet sites what might be our preferences in some regards, and then create programs to direct special pieces of information toward us relating to what we might want to buy, who we might want to vote for, etc. By comparison, what I suggest is the proverbial "piece of cake."

## This Solution Causes No Negative Impact On Anyone

Please note that what I suggest in no way causes a negative impact on anyone; rather, it all is positive. No one loses anything, but those who currently have less are given the opportunity to gain more. None of this is rocket science! But it does take fortitude and clear-sightedness on the part of decision-makers. Sadly, I have little confidence that those who are able to remedy this situation will listen to what I suggest now, given my status simply as aging private citizen, since they hadn't been listening through 30 years while I was serving as a local and state elected official and saying the same thing. But maybe, just maybe, if I keep preaching long enough, the message will get through to someone!



Former mayor and Park Forest resident John Ostenburg. The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official position of the Village of Park Forest.

## Village officials demand answers about 'unfair' property evaluations

**P**ark Forest officials held a Zoom meeting with the Cook County Assessor's Office (CCAO) in late February to confront the agency on what Village leaders believe are unfair property value assessments.

Village board members spoke out about the discussion with the Assessor's Office at a recent Village board meeting, vowing to continue to hold Cook County Assessor Fritz Kaegi and his office accountable.

"We had a Zoom meeting with the Cook County Assessor to really discuss the frustration as it relates to how our properties are assessed and the formula in which they use," Woods said at the March 4 meeting. "We continue to still have these kinds of meetings, as immediate as possible, to really address the situation."

Others joining Woods for the meeting included Trustee Erin Slone, Village Manager Tom Mick, Economic Development & Planning Director Sandra Zoellner, and Assistant Director of Economic Development and Planning Director Andrew Brown. As part of the discussion, Village leaders provided a report comparing the assessed values in Park Forest to the assessed values in other communities over the past ten years.

Village officials highlighted that Park Forest's current equalized assessed value (EAV) has fallen to its lowest point in 30 years while the tax rate, assessed by Cook County, stands at 43.8%. Park Forest leaders suggested that the tax rate



is a consequence of value while the Assessor's Office asserted that the values were a consequence of the tax rate.

The group asked for guidance from the Assessor's Office but concluded that the Assessor's Office could not clearly answer why there were so many disparities in property assessments.

One example Park Forest officials pointed to was a disparity

between two properties in the Village, located next to each other. With the triennial



reassessment,

the value of the property at 56 South Street decreased by 45% while the value of the property at 49 North Street increased by 59%.

Speaking on her takeaway from the meeting, Slone said she'd like to see a consistent evaluation.

"[We're not having these conversations] just to be speaking, but we're exchanging data back and forth to make sure that what the assessor has jives with what we have in the Village of Park Forest," Slone said. "[I want residents to know] we are working hard to get to some sort of resolution."

Mindful of the issue of tax in Park Forest, Village leaders approved a zero percent increase to the Village tax levy four of the last six years. The last increase occurred in 2020.

Park Forest officials believe it is time for the Assessor's Office to do its part to provide Park Forest property owners with relief.

"We are fighting diligently and vigilantly when it comes to the assessment of our properties, especially in Cook County," Woods said.

"This is one of many conversations that we will be having," Slone added.





## Rebuilding Together - Metro Chicago and the Village of Park Forest

**H**undreds of volunteers descended on the Village of Park Forest on an unseasonably warm Saturday, on the last day of April, to help renovate about 33 homes.

The renovations were part of National Rebuilding Day, coordinated and managed by Rebuilding Together - Metro Chicago and its network of 1,500 volunteers from local unions, businesses, and non-profits who work in partnership with local communities last Saturday of April each year.

More than 30 homes in Park Forest had repairs completed. Work ranged from installing mobility aids like grab bars to overhauling large parts of electrical and plumbing systems. Many of the bigger jobs had gotten underway earlier in the spring to help facilitate completion by the end of April.

Among the hundreds of volunteers in Park Forest was Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle. Preckwinkle joined Village board members at a Park Forest home where work was being completed.

Assistant Director of Economic and Development Andrew Brown said the partnership and initiative with Rebuilding Metro-Chicago were a great example of how community partners,



trade unions, jurisdictions, and agencies can come together for those in need to help ensure everyone in the community has a high quality of life.



"This was the first time Rebuilding Together – Metro Chicago and the Village have partnered," Brown said. "Their coordination facilitates two programs: National Rebuilding Day and Safe At Home. Both are inherently valuable to the Village in their own way."

Brown continued, "Together, those programs allow income-eligible residents to complete repairs that they may not have been able to otherwise, comprehensively raising the quality of life in Park Forest for homeowners."

Residents had to apply, meet income qualifications, and have properly scoped repairs for the program. The residents noted they are grateful the improvements were made to provide a better quality of life.

Brown said that though the repairs for National Rebuilding Day are mostly completed, Rebuilding Metro-Chicago will continue its work through the Safe at Home Program, which aims to provide low-cost, high-impact home modifications and minor repairs, enabling residents to live safely in their homes.

## Neighborhood meetings return

The Village of Park Forest resumed its Neighborhood Meeting Program earlier this year after a four-year hiatus brought on by the pandemic.

The program, which began in 2004, brings the Village's leadership team into different areas of the community at various times throughout the year to dialogue on topics specific to each neighborhood.

January's meeting held inside of Freedom Hall's Nathan Manilow Theater was attended by residents of Area E, Area J, Garden House, Juniper Towers, and Legacy Square. Close to 900 addresses were mailed invitations to the meeting with nearly 40 residents turning out.

Village Manager Tom Mick said that although the Village hosts board meetings three Mondays and one Saturday per month, the Neighborhood Meeting Program takes civic engagement to another level.

"At the meetings, we have our entire leadership team, the mayor and board of trustees, and we go to the community, making ourselves even more accessible," Mick said. "So the Neighborhood Meetings offer a really unique way for Village officials to meet residents where they are."

Those who braved the cold to attend the meeting heard welcoming comments from Mick followed by personal introductions from each elected official and department head seated on the theater's stage. The floor was then turned over to the audience to inquire on any topic they so chose. Questions ranged from

how to reduce speeding in the community to what efforts are underway to attract new business. Village leaders provided answers to questions for just under two hours in total.

Mayor Joseph A. Woods closed Thursday the meeting by thanking residents for their input noting that feedback from neighborhood meetings has often been used to implement changes that have successfully addressed areas

of concern in the community.

Mick said additional meetings are planned for

different neighborhoods in the coming months. He said residents who live in the neighborhoods where the upcoming meetings will be held will receive mailed invitations.





# PEOPLE WHO CARE [ LIVE ] HERE

What many enjoy about Park Forest is the abundance of tree-lined streets, well-manicured parks and parkways, and the care taken by thousands to create a picturesque landscape. But when litter lands on Park Forest streets, it detracts from the beauty of the community and gives the wrong impression about the Village and its residents.

If you have trash – if you see trash – please dispose of it and help convey the message that

*WE CARE*

# CODE RED™

**Emergency Communication Made Easy.**

The CodeRED Emergency Notification System is an ultra high-speed telephone communication service designed to deliver emergency messages and distribute information considered to be important in all or specific areas of the Village.

This system allows the Village to telephone targeted areas across Park Forest or the entire Village within minutes. It then delivers a pre-recorded message describing the situation to you directly or an answering machine in the affected area. When necessary, you will be given specific instructions which may require immediate action on your part.

If you see 866-419-5000 displayed, you will know the call was from CodeRED. If you would like to hear the last message delivered to your phone, simply dial the number back.

Residents interested in receiving CodeRED notifications should visit the CodeRED page on the Village website to enroll. Visit [villageofparkforest.com/CodeRED](http://villageofparkforest.com/CodeRED) or call Village Hall at 708-748-112 to enroll or to receive assistance with enrollment.

## The Tall Grass Art Fair returns for its 68th year

The Park Forest Art Fair, slated for Sept. 21 and 22, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., is the second oldest juried art fair in the Chicago area. The finest artists in the Midwest show a variety of artworks including paintings, prints, photographs, ceramics, glass, wood, sculpture and fiber arts. The fair includes the Kids Art Alley which offers a variety of hands-on craft activities. A music fest will be held on Saturday and Sunday. Don't miss this annual showcase of fine art and music. Food vendors will also be on hand. This event is free to attend. Questions can be directed to the Tall Grass Arts Association at by calling 708-748-3377.



Tall Grass Arts Association  
presents:

The 68th Annual Park Forest  
**ART FAIR**  
September 21 & 22, 2024  
10:00AM to 5:00PM

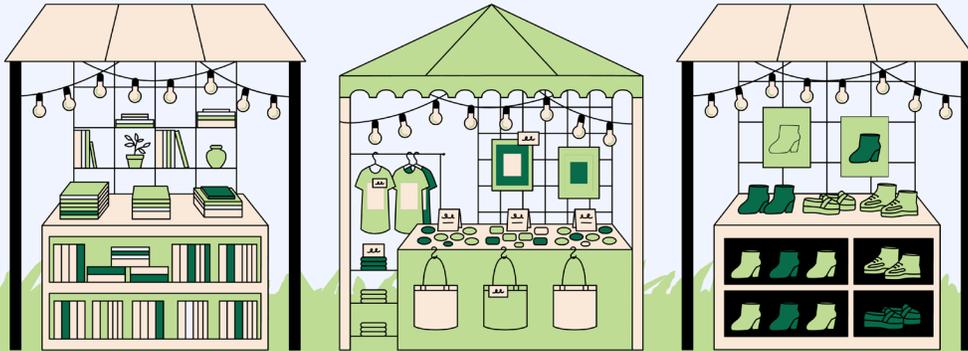
Downtown Park Forest, IL  
on Main St. between  
Western Ave. and Orchard Dr.

708.748.3377  
[www.tallgrassarts.org](http://www.tallgrassarts.org)





# VILLAGE-WIDE GARAGE SALE RETURNS



## SEPT. 21-22

### MORE INFORMATION TO COME

Questions? Contact Communications Specialist James Guirguis at 708-283-5603 or email [jguirguis@vopf.com](mailto:jguirguis@vopf.com)

## Park Forest continues growing green

### What does sustainability mean?

Sustainability focuses on growing for the future while maintaining the positives of the present. That means making the best environment, the most fiscally responsible, and fairest community possible.

### Environment & Exercise

If you've had the opportunity to notice, Park Forest's bike and walking paths have been considerably spruced up with kiosks added to advertise opportunities and sustainability campaigns in town. Residents are encouraged to walk and bike these paths to not only discover nature, but to also increase neighborhood connectivity, and to improve health.

### Did you know?

Fewer than 50% of Americans meet the minimum guidelines for moderate physical activity. Walking is the easiest way to burn calories.

### Want to save money?

Nicor Gas and ComEd offer many savings and rebate opportunities for residents interested in upgrading to newer, more efficient equipment. Renters can also benefit by informing their landlords of cost savings opportunities. To learn more visit [nicorgasrebates.com/your-home](http://nicorgasrebates.com/your-home).



## LEED and SolSmart Certification

Every year, the Village of Park Forest analyzes its progress on the Village's Climate Action and Resiliency Plan and updates two monitoring organizations: the US Green Building Council, who gives LEED certifications, and the Department of Energy's SolSmart program (STAR Communities merged with LEED in Summer 2019). While the Village received recognition in 2019 as a LEED Certified City, Park Forest will continue to track metrics and try to receive a Platinum Rating during its next evaluation.



- **LEED Certified | LEED for Cities and Communities (2019)**
- **4-STAR Community Rating | STAR Communities (2019)**
- **SolSmart Gold | SolSmart (2018)**



## Saving with green energy and growing green

**T**he Village of Park Forest has already seen the benefits of installing roof and ground-mounted solar arrays, a group of solar panels, at the Park Forest Water Treatment Plant.

In September 2022, the Village held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the two-year project at the forefront of its solar plan. The plan consists of 1086 panels with an estimated electricity production of 636,000 kWh annually, offsetting 45% of the energy. Sustainability Coordinator Carrie Malfeo said the goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26% by 2025.

Malfeo said the Village installed the roof and ground array at the Park Forest Water Plant to offset energy from its largest energy-consuming facility. She noted that the solar plan is saving Park Forest money.

"At the time of writing this, the system has produced 899.97 megawatt hours of energy, saving the Village nearly \$42,000 on electric bills and reducing our kWh over 418,750," Malfeo said. "This is equivalent to planting 15,735 trees."

Malfeo said a real-time solar production dashboard on the Sustainability home page on the Village website. Additionally, she said a sign at the Water Plant entrance, 100 Park Street, has been installed

to help communicate to the public the Village's commitment to renewable energy and cost savings.

Malfeo added that this solar project is estimated to save the Village \$1.4 million in 25 years.

Another sign was installed on Orchard Drive to connect the project with the solar arrays visible at times in the background. For more information about this project or anything regarding sustainability, Malfeo said residents can call her at 708-503-9372.



*For questions regarding Sustainability contact Sustainability Coordinator Carrie Malfeo at 708-503-9372 or email [cmalfeo@vopf.com](mailto:cmalfeo@vopf.com)*

# Recycling education

Currently, only 11% of waste in Park Forest gets recycled. The Sustainability Office is working to make Park Forest better at identifying recyclables, locating recycle bins, and stopping contamination in order to efficiently use resources and protect the environment.

To help address low recycling rates and recycling contamination, which happens when non-recyclable material — think food, trash, dirt, and non-recyclable plastics — get into the recycling bin, the Sustainability Office has engaged the staff at Village Hall, conducted outreach during Main Street Nights, and published a Reuse and Recycling Guide. Recycling education resources are available online at [villageofparkforest.com](http://villageofparkforest.com). If you have questions about what you can and cannot recycle in your curbside bin, check the sustainability page on the Village's website. If you'd like the Sustainability Office to come do a talk about recycling and waste management at your co-op, business, or school, please feel free to contact the Sustainability Coordinator Carrie Malfeo at 708-503-9372 or [cmalfeo@vopf.com](mailto:cmalfeo@vopf.com).



## *Why drive when you can fly?*



Did you know that the Village of Park Forest operates a Metra commuter lot? Enjoy close-to-home parking options for only \$1.25. You'll save time and money. Never again pull up at a Metra commuter lot driving around for so long looking for a space that you miss your train.

At Park Forest's Metra commuter lot, parking is a cinch.

**Time and money are valuable. You shouldn't have to waste either.**

### *Pull up, park, and fly.*

**Lot 2** | At 3500 North Street Matteson Station on the east side of the rail line. This lot consists of 555 parking spaces including 14 handicapped spaces, 10 bike lockers, and 3 bike racks.

#### **BIKE LOCKERS**



#### **NEAR OLD PLANK ROAD TRAIL**



For questions, call the Department of Public Works at 708-503-7702.

## Giving them a shot at the American Dream

**O**n a mild day in April, a Park

Forest woman named Flora received the keys to her home in the 400 block of Wilshire. Over the last three years, she's been a part of the Chicago South Suburbs Habitat for Humanity program, contributing over 275 sweat equity hours to get to this point. Flora and her four children will now have a decent, safe, affordable place to call home.

Flora's story exemplifies the work and partnership between the Village of Park Forest and Habitat for Humanity. The nonprofit has set up a shop in town to assist others with the American Dream of homeownership, like Flora.

Habitat said its framework of bringing affordable homeownership, neighborhood revitalization, and affordable home repair to communities worldwide is only as successful as its local community partnerships.

The nonprofit held discussions with many municipalities in the southland and praised Park Forest for its commitment to its residents and Habitat's mission — which made the Village a "perfect" home for Chicago South Suburbs Habitat for Humanity's next focus area.

"We are deeply grateful for Park Forest's partnership and their ability to see the vision," said Executive Director Jennifer Taff. "There have been many displays of support and teamwork already. From the constituents coming to our community conversations to faith groups and the village staff — I believe wonderful

and life-altering things are happening in Park Forest."

Taff continued, "We have



accomplished so much already. This is a perfect example of what can happen when the government, nonprofit, and private sectors work together for the betterment of the people."

Habitat's Director of Community Outreach and Partnerships, James Escortt Jr, explained that his organization has a home ownership program aimed at low-income people in the southland who can afford a mortgage through the program but do not qualify with traditional lenders.

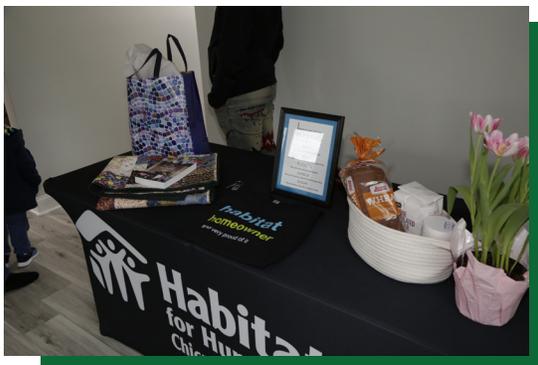
Applicants must meet specific income requirements. They aim to build/rehab one to three houses yearly in Park Forest, Lansing, and Sauk Village.

Habitat for Humanity Chicago South Suburbs has six homes in Park Forest, three newly acquired via the Village partnership that began in 2022.

Escortt Jr. said that Habitat for Humanity continues to work on several properties in the Eastgate community, where they do plumbing and electrical work. Additionally, volunteers have installed new HVAC systems and rehabbed many homes.

Escortt Jr. said the goal is to allow people to become homeowners.

"Our messaging is that we give a hand up and not a handout," Escortt Jr. said. "The families are still putting in the effort and the work; we're just giving them a shot at the American dream."



Village of Park Forest presents...

# \$75 Water Bill Credit

## Raffle Give-A-Way



**Starting  
Jan 1- Dec 31  
Enter Today!  
Winners will be  
announced by the 2nd  
business day of each  
month.**

Park Forest is celebrating its 75th Year Anniversary!

For the entire year of 2024, residents can enter a raffle to receive a \$75 dollar credit towards their water bill.

10 winners per month for 2024. Entries can be submitted in the lobby! Enter monthly!



Enter in the Village Hall Lobby, 350 Victory Drive. Must be a resident to enter. Questions? Call 708.283.5621.



OUTDOOR FREE SUMMER CONCERT SERIES  
**MAIN STREET NIGHTS 2024**  
DOWNTOWN PARK FOREST, IL

**BEST SUMMER EVER!**

**WED JUN 12 / RESIDENT APPRECIATION NIGHT**  
7:30PM WINDY CITY RAMBLERS  
HIGH ENERGY CAJUN ZYDECO BAND FROM CHICAGO

**WED JUN 19 / JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION**  
7:30PM ANIBA & THE SOL STARZ  
BLEND OF SOUL & NEO SOUL. VERY SMOOTH & FUNKY

**WED JUN 26 / CHICAGO BLUES NIGHT**  
7:30PM MARTY BIG DOG MERCER  
SOULFUL SOUND OF CHICAGO BLUES

**WED JUL 10 / ROCKIN' THE 80'S**  
7:30PM BILLY ELTON  
CELEBRATION OF THE MUSIC OF BILLY JOEL & ELTON JOHN

**THU JUL 4 / INDEPENDANCE DAY CELEBRATION**  
7:30PM THE LONDONKAY EXPERIENCE  
MUSIC FROM R&B, SOUL, NEO-SOUL, GOSPEL, AND JAZZ  
9:15PM FIREWORKS DISPLAY  
COMMUNITY CELEBRATION OF OUR NATION'S BIRTH

**WED JUL 17 / GOVERNORS STATE UNIVERSITY BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION**  
7:30PM SANDY REDD  
SOULFUL VOICE, & CAPTIVATING "ROCK SOUL" ENERGY

**WED JUL 24 / WORLD MUSIC CELEBRATION**  
7:30PM MUCCA PAZZA  
BLEND OF FUNKY MARCHING BAND & STREET THEATER

**WED JUL 31 / CONCERT & MOVIE NIGHT**  
6:30PM BLOOZE BROTHERS  
MUSIC FROM THE MOVIE W/ BLUES, SOUL, & ROCK  
8:30PM "TROLLS BAND TOGETHER"

**WED AUG 7 / NATIONAL NIGHT OUT**  
7:30PM FREDI TAYLOR & NU SOURCE BAND  
HIGH ENERGY CLASSICS AND CONTEMPORARY R&B HITS

GRAB A BLANKET AND JOIN US IN PARK FOREST DOWNTOWN VILLAGE GREEN (CUNNINGHAM AND MAIN STREETS) FOR 9 FREE NIGHTS OF ENTERTAINMENT, VENDORS, & SUMMER FUN!

CAR CRUISE NIGHTS every week!  
Jun 12 - Aug 7 / Wed 6-8 pm 351 Main St



## Upcoming Events

July 4, 7:30 - 9 p.m.

### Independence Day Celebration

Celebrate the 4th of July on the Village Green with a free live performance from The London Kay Experience, and then turn your chairs 180 degrees towards Central Park and watch the evenings firework show!

July 27, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m.

### Recycle Fest

The annual Recycle Fest will take place in the Village Hall parking lot. Any hard to recycle items like TV's, bikes, housewares, styrofoam, prescription drugs, and many more will be accepted. Questions? Contact Sustainability Coordinator Carrie Malfeo at 708-503-9372 or by email at [cmalfeo@vopf.com](mailto:cmalfeo@vopf.com).

All of August

### Resident Appreciation Month

August is the month when the Village celebrates YOU! Resident Appreciation Month is a month-long party to celebrate Park Forest residents for everything they do for the Village throughout the year. The Village celebrates by hosting events all month and providing the opportunity to win raffle prizes. To learn more about Resident Appreciation Month, visit [villageofparkforest.com](http://villageofparkforest.com).

Aug. 10, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

### DownTown Music Festival

Experience the heartbeat of the city at the DownTown Music Festival on the Village Green! Join the Village for an electrifying day filled with live music from talented artists and a vibrant array of vendors showcasing delicious food, unique crafts, and more. Don't miss this unforgettable celebration of music, culture, and community in the heart of DownTown Park Forest! Karyn White, Javon Experience, and more. Start off the day with a latin dance lesson and a drum circle experience. For more information, call 708-283-5621 or email, [erandle@vopf.com](mailto:erandle@vopf.com). Visit [villageofparkforest.com](http://villageofparkforest.com) for more information.

Sept. 21-22, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

### Tall Grass Art Fair

The Park Forest Art Fair is held in collaboration with the Tall Grass Arts Association every year for 68 years. The art fair allows residents and visitors the opportunity to shop one-of-a-kind pieces from vendors across the nation who make their way to Park Forest to showcase their art. Questions? Contact the Tall Grass Arts Association at 708-748-3377.

*Dining*  
Banquets, Weddings, Meetings & Events  
*on the*  
*Green*

*Event  
Rental Space*

*Our Services:*

- Banquets
- Meetings
- Repasts
- Birthday Celebrations
- Weddings
- Special Events
- Baby Showers
- and much more....

**Call for a showing and quote today, 708.283.5648!**

Dining on the Green, 349 Main Street, Park Forest, IL 60466



## What permits do you need for home improvement projects?

As the warm season settles in, some Park Foresters will take on summer projects, including work on their homes and properties.

Code Enforcement Manager Eshe McGee said some work might require residents to get a permit to comply. She said it's best to call and ask before to be sure.

"You'll need a permit if you're doing roof installation or repairs and replacements," McGee said. "Some people may not know that even if you aren't using a contractor, you'll still need a permit from the Building Department."

McGee said permits are required for a variety of improvements, from above-ground swimming pools to building a fence to the installation or replacement of a residential central air cooling unit.

"When residents make improvements to their homes and properties, it makes our community that much better," McGee said. "That's why it is crucial to ensure you get the proper permits to confirm the work is done properly." McGee said though some might find the process burdensome and time-consuming, building permits allow the Village to ensure that construction and renovation work is code compliant.

McGee reiterated not all projects require a permit; whether or not you need one can depend on the location, size and scope of the work being done. She said if you're not sure whether your project requires a permit or not, consult with the Building Department and call 708-503-7703.



## The ins and outs of garage sales in Park Forest, what you need to know

Many Park Foresters are looking to declutter by having a garage sale.

Code Enforcement Manager Eshe McGee said that before a resident starts setting up a table with vintage lamps, they need to know a few do's and don'ts about garage sales.

"We want people to have garage sales because they help the community connect," McGee said. However, we have some Village ordinances to ensure they're done correctly." McGee said you don't need a permit to host a garage sale. You can have a maximum of four garage sales per year, and each one can be conducted on up to three consecutive days.

"For example, if you plan to have a three-day garage sale in June, you can have three more garage sales in the year," McGee said. But a person can't have one sale going from Monday through Wednesday and then say their second garage sale is Thursday through Sunday—as that would be consecutive days."

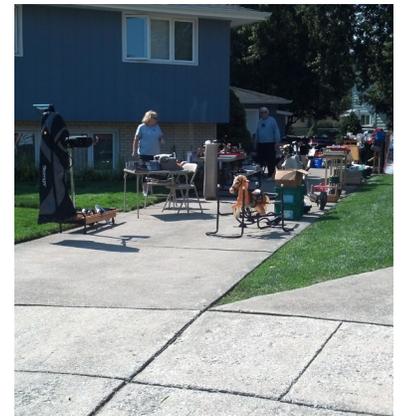
McGee said garage sales can only happen between 9 a.m.

and 8 p.m. and that residents cannot put

items on the sidewalk

or public parkway. Additionally, she said that only one sign is allowed in your yard to broadcast the sale. She said directional signs and/or banners are not permitted throughout the Village, and signs are also not permitted to be placed in the parkway.

In addition to residents hosting their own garage sales, the Village hosts a biannual Village-wide Garage Sale that will be held this September.



## Common faces, new roles, changes in the Building Department



*Jerry Martin*

Jerry Martin started working for the Village in July of 1994 as a police/fire dispatcher and remained dispatching until 2005 when he transferred to the Department of Community Development (Building/Code Enforcement/Housing) as a housing inspector. He was promoted to a supervisory role as a code enforcement officer in 2011, and then to code enforcement manager in 2014. In 2024, Jerry was promoted to Director of Community Development. Jerry graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies, from Governors State University. This program allowed for the integration of coursework in construction, business and social sciences, providing a well-rounded education. He holds several certificates from the International Code Council: Certified Property Maintenance and Housing Inspector, Certified Residential Building Inspector, Certified Commercial Building Inspector and Certified Building Inspector.

Eshe McGee's career started with the Park Forest Police Department in March 2003 when she applied to become a part-time dispatcher. Initially, her dream was to become a Park Forest police officer, and she was convinced by her mother to take the job as a dispatcher to learn what policing was like from the inside. McGee dreams to become an officer were deferred after giving birth to her first daughter, Olivia in 2004 and her second daughter Ryleigh in 2010. She then continued her work at the police department for the next ten years. In 2013, McGee transferred to the Department of Community Development, where she worked as a housing inspector. In March 2024, she was promoted to code enforcement manager. McGee, is a south-suburban native, a Bloom High School graduate and attended classes at both Robert Morris in Orland Park and Prairie State College in Chicago Heights. She also holds several certifications from the International Code Council and has a certificate for Section 8 HCV Housing Quality Standards Specialist.



*Eshe McGee*

## What you should know about Park Forest's yard waste ordinance

Residents can dispose of yard waste on Tuesdays by using 30-gallon biodegradable paper bags available at most local hardware stores. A Star Disposal sticker must be purchased and placed on those yard waste bags for them to be collected. Star Disposal stickers are available at Village Hall. The current sticker price (2024) is \$3.15/each which usually increases every year on January 1st. Call 708-503-7700 for more info.

Residents in single-family homes also have the option to rent a blue 95-gallon yard waste bin from Star Disposal. Information about pricing and renting additional blue bins can be provided by calling Star Disposal at 708-748-8381.

Tree branches are acceptable for collection based on the following methods and conditions.

Small branches, twigs and broken down branches can be placed in lawn waste bags or blue bin.

Otherwise, branches can be bundled and tied. Bundled branches must be, no longer than five feet in length,

bundled/tied together (for easier pick up and employee safety), and no branch may be greater than four inches in diameter.

Branches bigger than 4 inches in diameter need to be disposed of by other means and methods. Call a local landscaping or tree removal service for pricing and options.

For questions regarding the Refuse/Garbage Collection Program, please call Village Hall at 708-503-7702. Other inquiries can be made directly to Star Disposal at 708-748-8381.





# 4<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY

PARADE, MAIN STREET  
NIGHTS, FIREWORKS, AND  
FAMILY FUN ACTIVITIES

**THURSDAY, JULY 4**

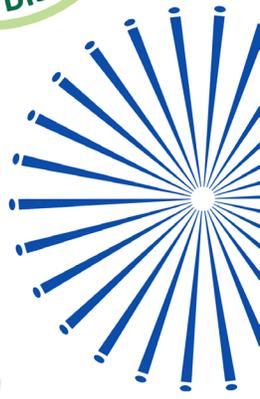
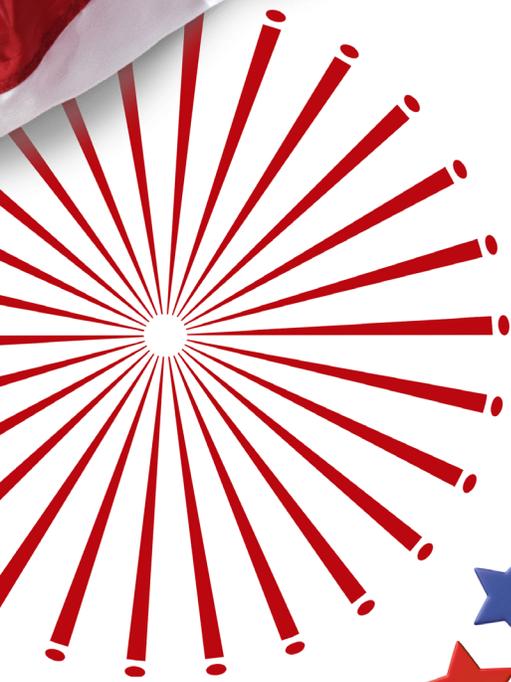
6-9 P.M.

**FREE**

Main Street Nights **THE VILLAGE GREEN**

Fireworks at **CENTRAL PARK**

For more information contact Recreation, Parks  
& Community Health at 708-748-2005



# Hometown heroes banner program

## What is it?

The Park Forest Hometown Heroes Banner Program is an opportunity for residents to honor local military members and those who have served their country. For its inaugural year, the Project placed up to 50 banners along light poles in Downtown Park Forest.

## Who is eligible?

Each banner will honor an individual service member, including active-duty service members, retired and honorably discharged veterans, and memorials to service members who are no longer with us.

## How can I participate?

If you would like to have a banner dedicated to a service member in your family, please complete a form available at the Village Managers Office or the Veteran's Closet. The cost for each 18×36-inch banner is \$150. Cost includes banner, hardware, and installation. All applications must be completed and submitted by March 31 to allow time for printing and installation by Memorial Day. Applications accepted from July 1 - March 31 are to be considered for



installation in May.

## To process the application, please submit the following:

Completed application and signed photo release statement proof of Park Forest residency for service member of an immediate family member. (Example: copy of utility bill, driver's license, etc.) Verification of active-duty status.

(Example: military orders, military i.d., etc.) Verification of military service (DD214 or Honorable Discharge Certificate) High resolution (200-300dpi) photo of hero in their military uniform. Digital photos will be accepted. Check or money order for \$150 payable to Village of Park Forest (please add "PF Hometown Heroes" in the memo line) MAIL TO:

Village of Park Forest  
ATTN: Veterans Commission  
350 Victory Drive  
Park Forest, IL 60466



## For All Questions & Inquiries:

Veterans Commission Staff Liaison and Village Manager Tom Mick at [tmick@vopf.com](mailto:tmick@vopf.com) or 708-748-1129. Park Forest Veterans Closet: 708-748-2829 or Downtown Park Forest Property Manager Heather Jones at [hjones@vopf.com](mailto:hjones@vopf.com) or 708-503-8153.

## Additional Information

For more information, visit the Veteran's Closet & Resource Center at 351 Founders Way in Downtown Park Forest.



For questions regarding the Veterans Commission contact Staff Liaison Tom Mick at 708-748-1129 or email [tmick@vopf.com](mailto:tmick@vopf.com)



# Investing in Park Forest

## Hemlock Street Reconstruction

The Village of Park Forest Public Works Department owns and maintains over 70 miles of roadway. Much of the Village's roadway network requires repair. However, with road reconstruction estimates near \$1 million per mile, it isn't easy to address every road where work is warranted. However, the Village aggressively pursues grants from the federal and state governments and other outside entities. In the past year, the Village has secured \$3.7 million in Federal Surface Transportation funds for the reconstruction of Westwood Drive and \$3 million in Illinois Enhancement Program funds for the reconstruction of Forest Boulevard. Expect these projects to start in the upcoming years.

For this year, the Village secured \$350,000 from the Illinois Department of Economic Opportunity for the reconstruction of Hemlock Street. This road is located in the center portion of the Village and has some of the worst pavement conditions. Work started



in April and will include drainage improvements, curb and gutter replacement, sidewalk improvements, and full pavement reconstruction. The project is expected to last through the fall of 2024. The Public Works Department runs a Facebook page that provides daily construction updates. Please visit and like the "Village of Park Forest Department of Public Works" Facebook page.

## Monee Road and Elm Street Water Main

The Village of Park Forest Public Works Department owns and maintains over 72 miles of water main. The water system is nearing 70 years old and is past the expected life cycle of much of the infrastructure in the ground. As a result, the Village experiences numerous main breaks, with over 100 per year on average. Similar to roadways, the Village aggressively peruses grants and loans from the federal and state governments.

The Village recently secured \$750,000 from the Army Corps of Engineers and \$5 million in low-interest loans from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency for water main replacement work.

This year, the Village will replace the water main on Monee Road from Western Avenue to Blackhawk Drive -this section of the main experiences numerous breaks that affect water distribution to multiple homes on the south side of the Village.

Additionally, the Village is replacing a small section of water main crossing Western Avenue at Elm Street. Work started in April and is expected to last through the fall.

Water outages are communicated via e-mail through our CodeRed system and the departments Facebook. Residents will receive a phone call and text for Village emergencies, such as boil orders. Please sign up for CodeRed on the Village's website or call 708-503-7702.

Follow DPW on Facebook! 



Village of Park Forest Department of Public Works

164 likes • 246 followers

 Liked

 Search

### "S" Streets Sanitary Sewer CIP Lining

The Village of Park Forest Public Works Department owns and maintains over 72 miles of sanitary sewer. Similar to the water system, the sanitary sewer system is nearing 70 years old and is past the expected life cycle of much of the infrastructure in the ground. Additionally, the Village experiences some of the same maintenance issues as homeowners with backups caused by roots, grease, or disposable wipes. Public Works routinely cleans these pipes to ensure system reliability.

For aging mains, sewer lines can be rehabilitated through a system called Cured-in-place (CIP) Lining. A flexible tube is inserted into the host pipe and cured with resin. The result is similar to a brand-new pipe within the original old sewer main. This year, the Village was able to secure \$200,000 in Cook County Community Development Block Grant Funds to line sanitary sewer pipes in the "S" Streets of the

Village, located in the southwest portion of the Cook County section of Park Forest. Sanitary sewer lining is a trenchless technology, and residents will be minimally impacted. Residents in this area should expect to receive further communication from the Village as the project begins. Work is expected to start this summer and last through the fall of 2024.



### Forest Brook Lift Station Replacement

The sanitary sewer system generally flows downhill by gravity to the Thorn Creek Treatment Plant. However,

occasionally, sewage needs to be pumped uphill to maintain service. Pumping is done at facilities the Village refers to as lift stations, and Public Works maintains four such facilities throughout the community.

Lift Stations generally run on their own without supervision. Public Works only needs to maintain them when they fail due to clogging from disposable wipes, grease, sanitary napkins, rags, and other materials that should not be flushed into the sewer. Over time, pumps and other components wear out and need to be replaced.

The Public Works Department maintains a lift station on Abby Lane in the far southeast section of the community within the Forest Brook Townhome Development.

This lift station will be replaced starting in the fall of 2024. Residents in this area should expect further communication from the Village as the project begins. Work is expected to last through the spring of 2025.



For questions regarding Public Works projects, contact Director Roderick Ysaguirre at 708-503-7702 or email [rysaguirre@vopf.com](mailto:rysaguirre@vopf.com)

# Storm drains and how you can help

## What are storm drains?

The grated storm drains that you see on almost every street corner allow rain water to drain from village streets. The drains are especially important during storms when the high volume of water would otherwise cause flooding. Also known as catch basins or inlets, storm drains are the entryway for water to enter the sewer system and represent the first step in stormwater collection and disposal. Park Forest has 1,800 storm drains in town.

## How do storm drains get clogged?

Storm drains have grids to prevent large objects from falling into the sewer system. However, the bars are fairly widely spaced so that the flow of water is not blocked. Many objects do however fall through the grids on occasion.

## What are the consequences of clogged storm drains?

When storm drains get clogged with leaves and debris, water can no longer be drained from the street. As a result, water can flood streets causing hazardous conditions and can also flood homes. It is important to monitor and clean catch basins to prevent street flooding, property damage, and other hazards.

## How can you help keep storm drains clean?

Stand on the curb and use a rake or pitch fork to clear leaves, limbs, and debris from the catch basin. Do not attempt to remove the grate, only the debris on top of the grate. Place leaves into a yard waste cart or yard waste bags for disposal. The best time to inspect the storm drain in front of your property is before a rain storm. Monitor and clean the inlets in the fall when the trees are shedding their leaves. When the forecast calls for heavy rainfall or snow and ice, remove debris from the inlets before a storm. After a storm, maintain the openings to inlets by clearing away any snow or ice. Create a 10 to 12-inch path along the curb for melting snow and ice to drain to the inlets.

## How should you dispose of leaves and debris?

Do not rake or blow leaves or grass clippings into the street when you clear your yard, sidewalk, or driveway. The leaves and clippings can clog storm sewer drains and become a slippery hazard on streets and sidewalks. Place collected leaves and grass clippings in your rented 95-gallon yard waste cart for pickup by your recycling and

garbage hauler. If you have too much for one yard debris container, bag them in the brown paper yard waste bag and affix a yard waste disposal sticker. Waste disposal stickers are available at the Village Hall for \$3 each. The yard waste bags are available at hardware or home improvement stores.

## How You Can Help

The Village of Park Forest relies heavily on citizen involvement to help keep streets safe and storm drains clean. Please regularly inspect storm drains in front of or near your house and remove debris. Should you see a catch basin filled with debris which you cannot clear yourself, contact Park Forest's Department of Public Works. Never attempt to remove storm drain grate, only the debris on top of the grate.

## Managing stormwater in Park Forest

The Clean Water Act authorizes the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and states, which are delegated the authority by EPA, to regulate stormwater runoff from drainage systems that discharge pollutants into water. Park Forest is required by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to be permitted under the National Pollutant



Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program. The NPDES program regulates discharges from municipal storm sewer systems, construction activities, industrial activities, and those designated by the EPA due to water quality impacts. Park Forest is responsible for maintaining catch basins and inlets and responding to street flooding and other safety concerns.

The Village is working diligently to improve stormwater quality and protect watersheds, rivers, streams and drinking water resources. With the exception of storm drain maintenance, the IEPA requires the Village to have a NPDES permit to reduce stormwater pollution. The Public Works Department oversees the programs that responds to water quality requirements and promote private stormwater management efforts. To report a clogged storm drain or stormwater drainage problem contact the Department of Public Works at 708-503-7702.

If you witness anyone dump anything into a storm sewer, please call Public Works immediately at 708-503-7702.

What's the best way to  
make things better in  
**Park Forest?**



## Get Involved.



Kate Baker has lived in Park Forest for ten years and has volunteered for the Environment Commission for the last seven years. She says she understands the impacts of the changing climate and joined the commission to help residents learn about changes they can make in their own lives that will benefit them in the future and help mitigate the impacts of climate change. The Environment Commission advises the Village on ordinance proposals and amendments related to the environment. It also educates residents on the changing climate and hosts many events, such as RecycleFest, Shred and Prescription Drug Take Backs, and the Local Food System Expo. Park Forest relies on the participation of residents to fill important volunteer roles critical to the community.

- Beautification Awards Committee
- Board of Fire and Police Commissioners
- Commission on Human Relations
- Economic Development Advisory Group
- Environment Commission
- Housing Authority
- Planning & Zoning Commission
- Police and Fire Advisory Council
- Recreation and Parks Advisory Board
- Senior Citizens Advisory Commission
- Veterans Commission
- Youth Commission

To apply, visit the Village Manager's Office at Village Hall  
or go to [villageofparkforest.com/volunteer](http://villageofparkforest.com/volunteer)



**Mayor**

Joesph A. Woods

**Trustees**

Tiffani Graham  
Maya Hardy  
John V. Moore  
Theresa M. Settles  
Erin Slone  
Randall White

Local Customer  
Park Forest, IL 60466

**Manager**

Tom Mick

**Clerk**

Sheila McGann

Please Recycle



**EQUAL HOUSING  
OPPORTUNITY**

The Village of Park Forest is in support of fair housing. Fair housing is the right for all people to live wherever they choose, to have access to housing (seek, purchase, sell, lease or rent) and enjoy the full use of their homes without unlawful discrimination, interference, coercion, threats, or intimidation by owners, landlords, real estate agents, or any other persons. Concerns or mediation needed? Call 708-283-5621.

**PARK FOREST**  
*Main Street Market*

**The Park Forest Main Street Market returns for its 51st year!**

<b>EVERY SATURDAY</b>	
152 MAIN STREET PARK FOREST, IL	8 A.M. - 1 P.M.

Villageofparkforest.com/mainstreetmarket  
708-748-2005