

DISCOVER

Magazine



Tear out the
Community Calendar
in the center spread

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Mayor's Message

As we look toward a new year, I want to speak directly to you about several issues that have shaped our community conversations over the last year . . . and some for several years. These topics—the recent Cook County property tax bills, the challenges at the Autumn



Ridge apartments, the Forest Boulevard reconstruction project, and the future of the Park Forest Aqua Center—have stirred concern, debate, and uncertainty. But they have also shown, once again, the strength and resilience of our Village.

I won't sugarcoat it: these are trying times! And they are not unique to Park Forest. Communities across our region and across the nation are facing similar pressures—aging infrastructure, changing housing markets, rising costs, and new demands on local government. But as Park Foresters, we know that what will set us apart from other communities is how we respond amid adversity.

Today, I want to offer a clear picture of where we stand. And throughout this message, I'll be pointing you to full feature stories included in this edition of Discover Magazine, which provide deeper detail about each topic.

Property Taxes: Transparency in Challenging Times

Many of you were surprised—even alarmed—by the property tax bills sent out by Cook County in November. I hear you. I'm mad. I'm frustrated. And I want you to know that the Village will continue to fight for our residents for equity as it relates to property taxes. I've talked to residents on phone calls and at community meetings. The concern is real. And I want to be absolutely clear about what happened.

For six of the past nine years, the Village of Park Forest has passed **ZERO** increases to our Village levy! Let me repeat that. **The Village has NOT raised its tax levy in years**—yet our residents are steadily seeing budget-breaking tax bills. With that being said, we've worked diligently to keep our portion of the tax bill steady. Yet, the Village's share of your bill still rose this year by about 13 percent.

The reason: Cook County is required to collect not only our levy, but also any revenue that went uncollected in prior years due to non-payments, expansion of exemptions or successful appeals. That shortfall is spread across all

taxpayers—and the Village does **not** receive any additional money beyond what we originally levied.

On top of that, the Village represents less than half of your total tax bill. The remainder is controlled by school districts, the county, the township, and other entities over which the Village has no authority.

We continue to advocate for reform—and we won't stop until communities like ours are treated more equitably. I encourage you to read the full breakdown of this issue in the tax story featured in this magazine.

Autumn Ridge Apartments: Standing Up for Residents

A major issue this summer was the deteriorating conditions at Autumn Ridge. When tenants came forward to share the difficulties they were facing—from failed air conditioning during extreme heat to building-maintenance problems—it was painful to hear. No resident of Park Forest should endure unsafe or undignified living conditions.

So, we took more action.

I called for meetings with the out-of-state owner, management companies, and several prospective buyers. Subsequently, Village staff continued with ongoing meetings. Through these efforts, air conditioning was restored in every building. A new fire alarm system was installed. Elevator reconstruction began. These improvements matter—and they happened because residents spoke up and the Village stood with them.

But our work isn't done. Our goal remains to secure new ownership, ideally with local ties, who will reinvest in the property and bring Autumn Ridge back to the quality housing it once was.

Forest Boulevard: A Major Infrastructure Renewal

If you've driven along Forest Boulevard recently, you've seen early signs of a long-awaited transformation. After years of planning, the reconstruction project officially began this year—though much of the work so far has taken place underground. Just because you don't see it, doesn't mean it isn't happening. AT&T has been relocating facilities, with ComEd and Nicor close behind.

We made the strategic decision to begin visible roadway work in spring 2026 rather than tearing up pavement late this year and leaving residents with a partially demolished roadway through the winter. It was the right call for safety, cost, and stability.

Next summer, you'll begin to see Forest Boulevard evolve into a modern, pedestrian-friendly gateway—a project worthy of its name. For a full overview of the timeline and design, be sure to read the Forest Boulevard feature in this magazine.

Aqua Center Redevelopment: A Forward-Looking Vision

Perhaps no topic has generated more discussion than the future of the Park Forest Aqua Center. After more than two years of assessments, community surveys, financial analysis, and public feedback, the Village Board took an important step forward in November.

We approved a \$10 million redevelopment plan that reflects both community priorities and fiscal responsibility. The plan includes a new multi-use, ADA-compliant pool facility, as well as renovations to the East Pool to maintain programming throughout construction. Work is scheduled to begin in 2026, with a projected reopening in summer 2027.

This proposal represents the balance we've been striving to achieve: modern amenities, long-term sustainability, and a realistic financial plan supported by reserves, grants, and a modest levy adjustment—approximately \$50 per year for a home with a \$10,000 tax bill.

Most importantly, this plan incorporates your voices. More than 600 residents participated in the community survey—one of our largest engagement efforts to this date. Your input directly shaped the design and the final decision. The complete story about the Aqua Center redevelopment is featured in this issue, and I encourage you to explore it.

Looking Ahead with Resilience and Hope

Across all these topics—taxes, housing, infrastructure, and recreation—I know that uncertainty can feel overwhelming. But uncertainty does not define Park Forest. Our level of community engagement and participation does. Park Forest has always come together during times of uncertainty.

WE face challenges head-on. **WE** speak honestly about what's happening. **WE** advocate fiercely for fairness. **WE** plan with discipline. And above all, **WE** take care of one another. **WE** are our own advocate! I shudder to think the outcome of a village, a community, a nation where one person declares he or she is the sole advocate for all people. Beware of them!

The issues we're navigating as I've said are not entirely unique to us—but the way we meet them, the unity we bring to them, and the hope we carry into each decision, that is what sets Park Forest apart.

I ask you to take some time with this edition of Discover Magazine. Inside, you'll find detailed reporting on each of these topics—the tax bill impacts, the progress on Forest Boulevard, and the future of the Aqua Center. These stories reflect not just challenges, but the work we're doing each day to move our Village forward.

Thank you for your trust, your partnership, and your belief in this community. Together, we will continue to build a Park Forest that is strong, compassionate, and resilient—today and for generations to come.

A message from Mayor/Village President Joseph A. Woods

Park Forest neighbors form ‘Cut Thru Crew’ to restore Village’s hidden pathways

When Park Forest resident Michele Johnson saw a Facebook post in early July complaining about an overgrown “cut-through,” she didn’t scroll past it or add her voice to the criticism.

“I saw someone on Facebook griping about one of them, and it was pretty overgrown,” Johnson said. “I thought, wow, I wonder if other people would want to get together and do something about this.”

That simple thought became the seed of the **Cut Thru Crew**, a volunteer group that has grown into a community-wide effort to maintain some of the Village’s most unique spaces — and as of this fall, they’ve officially completed what they set out to do.

The cut-throughs are narrow, tree-lined grassy paths that connect streets and blocks throughout Park Forest. Originally designed as part of the Village’s midcentury plan, these green corridors were intended to provide residents with small pockets of nature in their daily lives, while maintaining connectivity. For decades, homeowners maintained them, but as the Village evolved and new families moved in, many residents were unaware the spaces were public rather than private. Over time, some paths became overgrown, making them difficult to walk through and hiding the charm of the Village’s original design.

Johnson, who has lived in Park Forest since 1967 and still resides in her childhood home, recognized

both the problem and the opportunity. Rather than simply “making a fuss” online, she said decided to invite her neighbors to take a hands-on approach.

“I don’t want to complain on social media,” Johnson said. “I just want to do something if I can. I thought, well, this is something I can do. I love living here, so why not do something fun with my neighbors who also like living here?”



The Cut Thru Crew clearing the path.



The Cut Thru Crew poses with shurbs after cutting them.

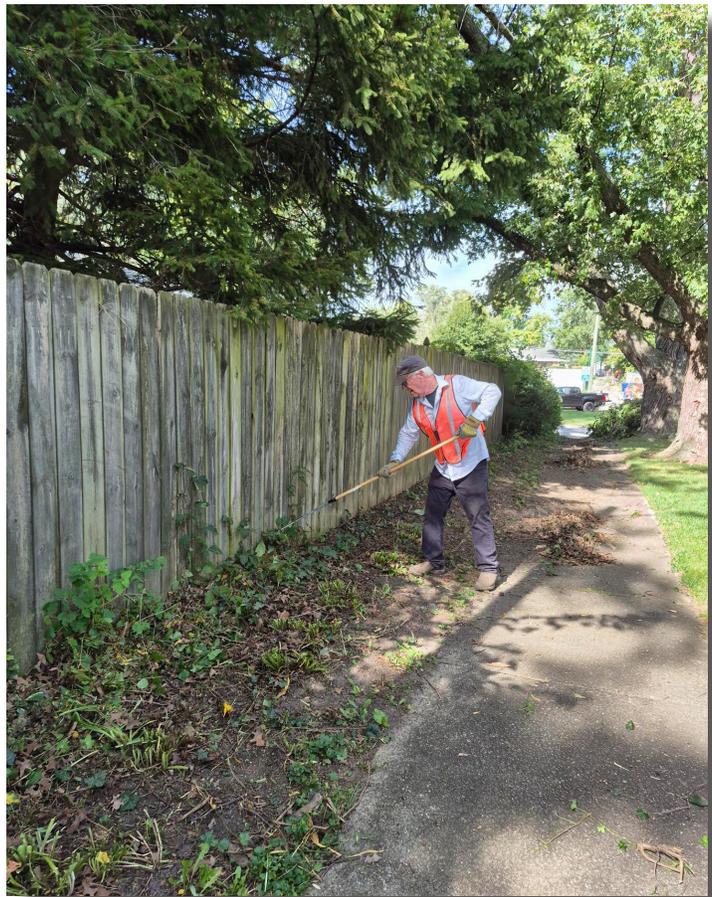
Johnson acted on her idea and contacted Park Forest Public Works Director Roderick Ysaguirre. The two soon met, and a letter was developed inviting residents near cut-throughs to attend a meeting at the Park Forest Public Library to discuss forming a group. Close to a dozen turned out for the Aug. 14 meeting and later began communicating by email to coordinate weekly cut-through cleanups.

The group's work was both practical and symbolic. Volunteers trimmed bushes, removed weeds, and cleared debris, restoring the walkability and aesthetic appeal of the paths. Each session was limited to about two hours, making it manageable for busy residents while still producing visible results. Before-and-after photos from each cleanup were shared on social media, inspiring others to get involved.

“When you have a lot of people, you get a lot done in just two hours,” Johnson said. “We’ve received so much support on social media after posting the photos, and that makes us want to work even harder because we’re seeing the difference that’s been made.”

By mid-November, the Cut Thru Crew had completed all 34 of the Village’s cut-throughs — just four months after their first meeting. With the original goal now achieved, the group plans to continue meeting periodically in 2026 to

maintain the paths and assist with other beautification projects around the community.



The Cut Thru Crew clearing a pathway along the fence.



The Cut Thru Crew edging shrubs and bushes near the sidewalk.



Members of the Cut Thru Crew pose for a selfie after a hard day of work.

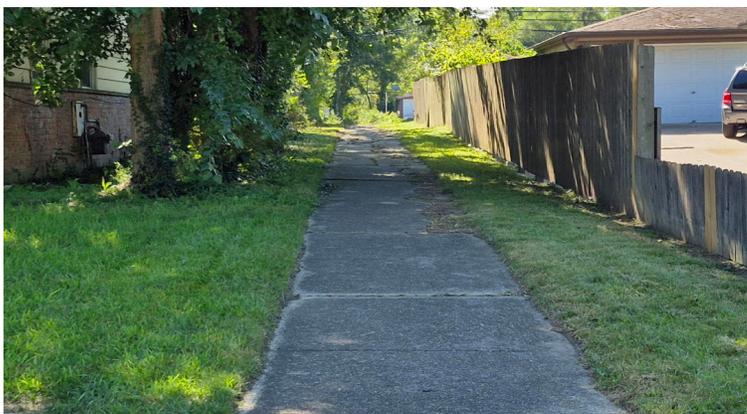
For Johnson, the initiative has been about far more than landscaping. It's about building connections, fostering civic pride, and demonstrating how small acts can create meaningful change. Neighbors who had never met before now work side by side, share stories, and develop friendships while improving their surroundings. The visible progress — transformed cut-throughs, cleaner paths, and social media recognition — reinforces that residents can make a

tangible impact when they come together.

Johnson said the Village of Park Forest has supported the effort from the start, encouraging volunteers and providing resources where possible. Ysaguirre said the Village is always eager to collaborate with residents who take initiative to improve their surroundings and strengthen community pride. When the Cut Thru Crew would complete a job, Public Works crews would pick-up the piles.

This collaboration between residents and local government exemplifies the type of engagement that helps a community thrive. Johnson sees the group as a model for how civic involvement doesn't always require large commitments — just consistency and teamwork.

The cut-throughs themselves are a reminder of the Village's thoughtful design, offering a quiet retreat and a connection to nature that many suburban communities lack. By restoring and maintaining these spaces,



This is an after photo following work done by the crew.



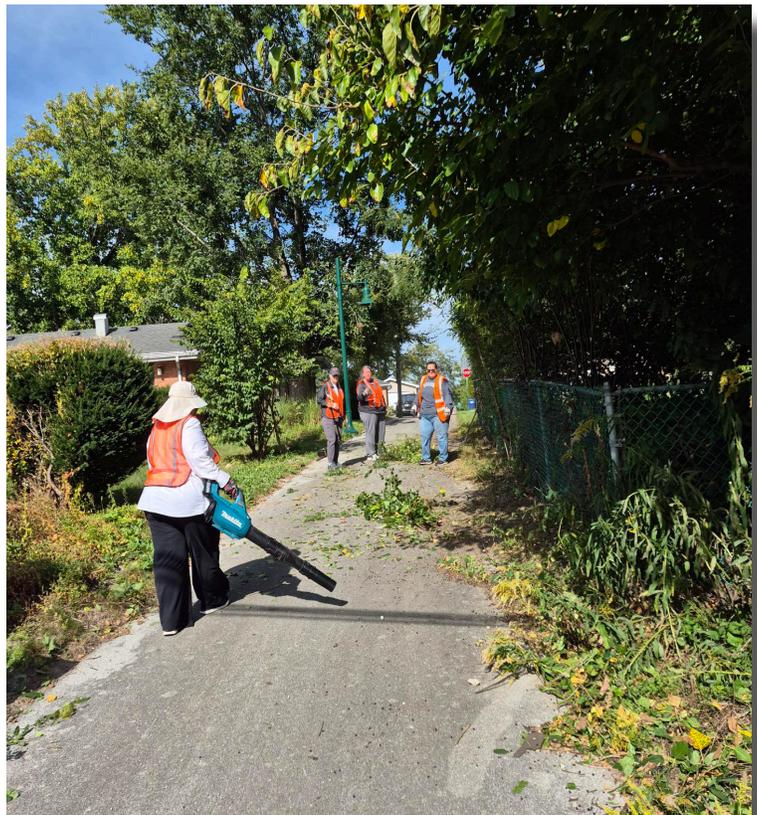
The cut through clear of shrubs and overgrowth after the Cut Thru Crew cleaned up the area.

the Cut Thru Crew has not only beautified the Village but also preserved a piece of its history and identity.

For Johnson, the most rewarding aspect is seeing neighbors come together with a shared purpose. The work is satisfying, but the relationships and community spirit it fosters are just as important. The Crew has shown that when residents take responsibility for their surroundings, the effects extend far beyond the immediate task.

“It’s been amazing to see what we’ve accomplished together,” Johnson said. “When we started, we just wanted to clean up a few paths. Now we’ve finished them all — and we’ve built something even better in the process.”

Special thanks Michele Johnson, Michael Wiley, Sue Blatchford, Tom Falkentha, Tracy and Tom Mick, Jen Whitson, Pam Schmeckpeper Brownlee, Diana Cruz, and Phil Knight.



A Cut Thru Crew member is blowing leaves.

An eye in the sky - Park Forest Police use drone technology to enhance public safety



Since 2019, the Park Forest Police Department has taken to the skies—using drone technology as an extra set of eyes to help fight crime, locate missing people, and assist during community events.

What began with four trained operators has grown into a dedicated drone team of nine, with a tenth officer set to complete certification by the end of the year. Sgt. Haytham Elyyan, who helps oversee the program, said the goal is to ensure the department can deploy the drone at any time, day or night.

“It’s become a tremendous asset to our department and to the community,” Elyyan said.

The department’s DJI drone, valued at roughly \$17,000 when purchased, functions like a miniature helicopter. Equipped with infrared and night-vision capabilities, it can hover over scenes, scan large areas, and provide live video feeds to officers on the ground—all while improving safety and response times. The drone was paid from asset forfeiture funds.

Extensive training and licensing

Becoming a certified drone operator is no simple task. Each officer must complete a four-day course, typically offered at the College of DuPage, and pass the Federal Aviation Administration’s Part 107 certification exam. The 60-question test, drawn from a 600-question pool, covers everything from airspace rules to weather conditions.



Sgt. Elyyan flying the PD’s drone over the Village.

“It’s quite an extensive process,” Elyyan said. “You really have to study. And once you’re licensed, you must pass a renewal test every two years to stay current with FAA laws.”



Sgt. Elyyan shows his wings.

To help offset training costs, the department secured a \$2,500 grant from the Illinois Risk Management Association, the Village's insurance provider. The funding covers course fees and testing for new operators, allowing the department to continue expanding the program.

Technology and partnerships

The Park Forest Police currently operate one drone but plan to expand their fleet through future grants and donations. Partnerships with local businesses have already helped strengthen the program.

Last year, the solar company Jackery donated approximately \$6,000 worth of portable solar generators to the department. The equipment allows officers to recharge drone batteries in the field, extending flight operations without returning to the station.

“Normally, batteries last around 30 minutes, but wind and hovering can shorten that time,” Elyyan explained. “The solar generators act as portable charging stations, letting us stay in the field for hours if needed.”

A regional leader in drone policing, Park Forest was one of the first south suburban police departments to adopt drone technology, and its success has inspired neighboring agencies in Matteson, Richton Park, and Chicago Heights to follow suit.

“Other departments often reach out to us for assistance,” Elyyan said. “We’ve helped in several joint operations where visibility and time were critical.”

The drone’s live-feed capabilities also enhance coordination during large-scale incidents. Supervisors can monitor real-time video from a command center, helping them make informed decisions before officers

move in on the ground.

Enhancing safety and community engagement

While drones are a valuable investigative tool, they also play an important role in community engagement. The department regularly uses its drone to capture aerial photos and video during events like Unity Day and House Music Night.

Residents, especially children, often gather to watch the device in action. “It’s a great engagement tool,” Elyyan said. “People love seeing how it works, and it helps them understand that this technology is here to keep the community safe.”

The drone also improves safety for officers by giving them a bird’s-eye view before approaching potentially dangerous situations. “We can locate suspects or hazards from above and guide officers safely,” Elyyan said. “Sometimes, just seeing the drone overhead is enough for a suspect to surrender.”

A versatile tool for modern policing

Elyyan described the drone as “an invaluable tool” that has already proven its worth in critical situations. In one case, the department assisted another agency in locating an armed suspect who fled into a large forest preserve.

“To properly search that area with officers, you’d need a lot of manpower and time,” Elyyan said. “With the drone, we pinpointed exactly where he was and guided officers right to him.”

Beyond crime-fighting, the department is exploring ways to integrate more advanced features, such as spotlights, loudspeakers, and software capable of creating 3D accident reconstructions. Some agencies, Elyyan noted, already use drones to automatically map crash scenes—a tool Park Forest hopes to add in the future.

Looking ahead

For Elyyan, the drone program represents how innovation can strengthen community policing. The technology gives officers a safer, smarter way to respond to emergencies while also connecting with residents in positive ways.

“If technology can make our jobs safer and help us keep the community safer,” he said, “then it’s worth the investment.”

A new chapter in leadership: Jon Kindseth named Park Forest's eighth village manager

Last year, after more than two decades with the Village, Village Manager Tom Mick announced his plan to retire in 2024. Mayor Joseph Woods created a selection committee made up of village trustees and hired a professional executive recruiting firm to conduct a nationwide search to ensure Park Forest would attract the best possible candidates.



Village Manager Jon Kindseth poses for a headshot photo.

More than 60 applicants applied for the position, demonstrating a high level of interest in the Park Forest community. In June, Mick officially retired, and the Village of Park Forest named Jon Kindseth as its next village manager — only the eighth person to serve in the role since the Village's incorporation more than 75 years ago.

Kindseth was born into a large family, and his father, a military veteran, died when Jon was young — a tragedy that had a profound impact on his life. He was in and out of homeschooling and public schools before ultimately dropping out in ninth grade to work full time in construction. After a work accident, Kindseth decided to return to school to earn his high school diploma. That experience inspired him to continue his education while working full time.

Kindseth began his college studies at North Carolina Central University, one of the oldest and largest historically black colleges and universities in the nation. After two years, he transferred to Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, to be closer to family. While pursuing his bachelor's degree, Kindseth interned in the Town of Normal's Manager's Office, where he discovered his interest and later his passion for local government management. Kindseth went on to earn a master's degree in public administration

from Northern Illinois University, focusing on city management.

With two degrees and local government internship experiences, Kindseth was hired as assistant to the city manager in Highwood, a north shore suburb. After a couple years, he became the third village administrator for Beach Park, where he served nearly seven years. During that time, he established the first municipal contracted garbage service, implemented rental licensing to protect and improve the housing stock, and led the village to become nearly debt-free with significant cash reserves — all without levying a municipal property tax.

In 2019, with a third child on the way and a desire for a more rural lifestyle, Kindseth accepted the position of deputy city manager for Decatur. There, he gained experience in modernizing public transit, economic development, neighborhood revitalization and property value stabilization, while also helping the community transition between city managers.

When the Park Forest village manager opportunity was announced earlier this year, Kindseth welcomed the chance to return to the Chicagoland area to be closer to his wife's family in McHenry County. While he admits he didn't know much about Park Forest before applying, he was drawn by the community's strong reputation throughout the southland suburbs, and the level of community participation in governance through the numerous boards and commissions that the Village has.



Village Manager Jon Kindseth greeting the board after being selected for the role.



Village Manager Jon Kindseth and Mayor/Village President Joseph A. Woods at the NICI check signing.

Kindseth said the two issues he hears about most from residents are economic development and property taxes.

“Residents want to shop for goods and services within their own community, but right now they do not have much of that opportunity,” Kindseth said.

Kindseth hopes to build on the Village’s past work

to attract new retail, restaurants and housing, which would not only meet residents’ needs but also help reduce the community’s property tax burden.

When asked about his message for Park Forest residents, Kindseth said, “I work for the residents. It’s my job to take the policies and direction established by the mayor and village board, and to work alongside



Village Manager Jon Kindseth attending the "push-in" of Engine 50.

Village leadership and staff, to achieve the desired results. I have always been one to ask if there’s a better way. Our government needs to change and adapt with our community. Park Forest looks nothing like it did 20, 40, or 60 years ago. Similarly, the services we provide and the expectations our residents have of us have changed dramatically. Leading Park Forest through this change into the future is exciting — and it’s why I’m here. I look forward to getting to know the community more, our people and our businesses, in the months and years ahead. I have had such a warm welcome from the community, so for this I say thank you. I am here to serve each and every one that calls Park Forest home.”



Park Forest survey shows strong resident interest in Aqua Center redevelopment

The Village of Park Forest recently surveyed residents to better understand community priorities, affordability expectations, and overall support for redeveloping the Park Forest Aqua Center. The results show that while residents value the facility and want to see it revitalized, affordability and tax stabilization remain key factors in shaping the future of the popular summer destination.



The Village received 635 verified responses, reflecting broad engagement across generations and length of residency. About 33% of respondents have lived in Park Forest for more than 30 years, while 15% are new residents who've lived in the community

three years or less. The majority of participants were between ages 35 and 64 (52%), with 34% identifying as seniors — highlighting the Aqua Center's intergenerational appeal.

Why is the Village doing a survey?

The decision to launch a community survey followed months of discussion about the future of the 70-year-old Park Forest Aqua Center and the rising costs associated with its upkeep. After assessments by Williams Architects and Councilman-Hunsaker revealed significant structural issues — including leaks, corrosion, and mechanical failures — projected renovation costs ballooned from \$3.5 million to more than \$7 million. Faced with options ranging from a full \$20 million redevelopment to permanently closing the facility, trustees asked staff to gather resident feedback before moving forward.

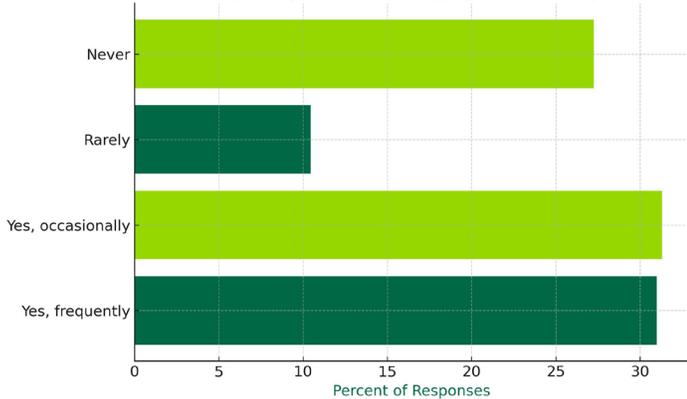
Village officials said the survey was designed to ensure that any future investment reflects what residents want and are willing to support.

The goal was to better understand how the community values the Park Forest Aqua Center, what amenities they prioritize, and what level of financial contribution—whether through membership fees or taxes—they consider reasonable. The findings, officials noted, would help shape future design, funding strategies, and public discussions about how to keep one of Park Forest’s most recognizable amenities sustainable for generations to come.

Strong interest, cautious spending

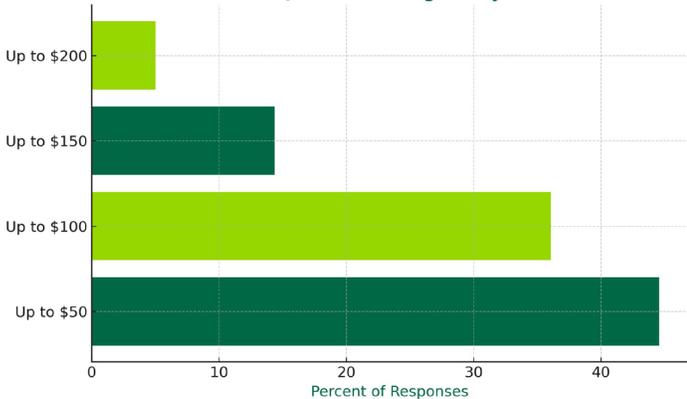
More than six in 10 residents (62%) said they used the Aqua Center at least occasionally between 2021 and 2024, and 76% expressed interest in future membership. Of those, 47% preferred family memberships, 25% individual, and 32% senior.

Q4 - Aqua Center Usage (Past 4 Years)



Nearly half of respondents said they would pay up to \$50 per person for membership, while another 36% said they’d pay up to \$100, suggesting that residents value the facility but remain price sensitive.

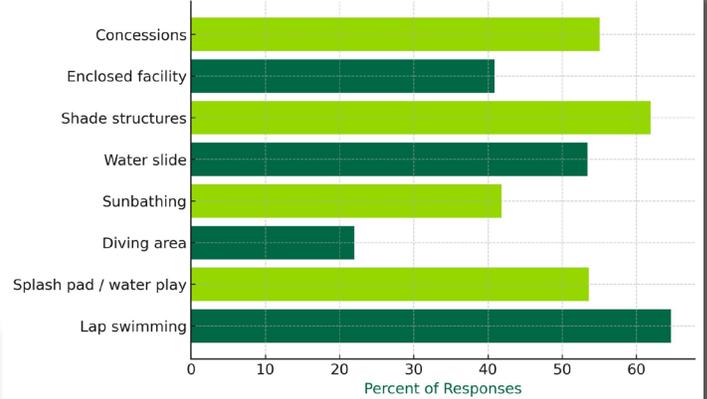
Q6 - Max Willing to Pay



What residents want

When asked about preferred features, lap swimming (65%), shade structures (62%), and food concessions (55%) ranked among the top priorities. Residents also favored splash pads or water play areas (54%) and water slides (53%), reinforcing the desire for family-friendly recreation and comfort amenities.

Q7 - Desired Features

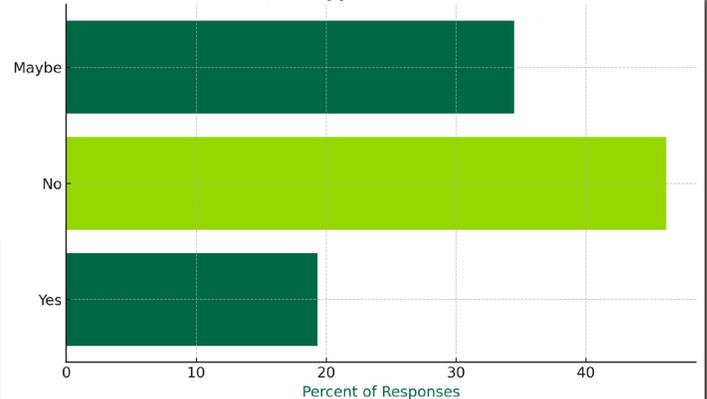


Interest in an enclosed facility was lower, at 41%, indicating that many residents prefer traditional outdoor aquatic experiences. The Village did explore an indoor facility, but it was cost prohibitive, with starting cost at \$10 million for a single pool.

Funding opinions split

The survey also revealed mixed views on funding options. Only 19% of respondents said they would

Q8 - Support Tax Increase

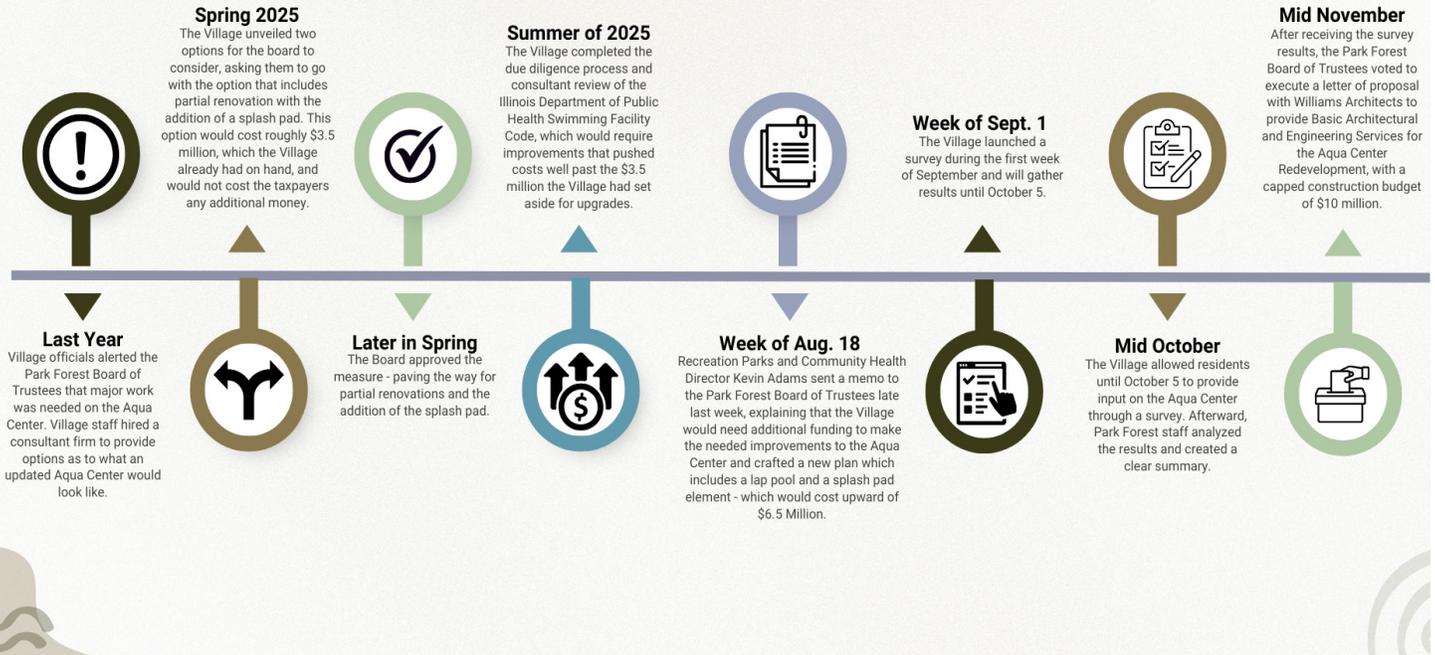


support a tax increase to fund improvements, while 34% said maybe and 46% opposed the idea.

Among those open to higher taxes, 44% would pay up to \$50 annually, and 35% up to \$100, highlighting what officials described as limited tax tolerance and the need for creative funding or phased redevelopment strategies.

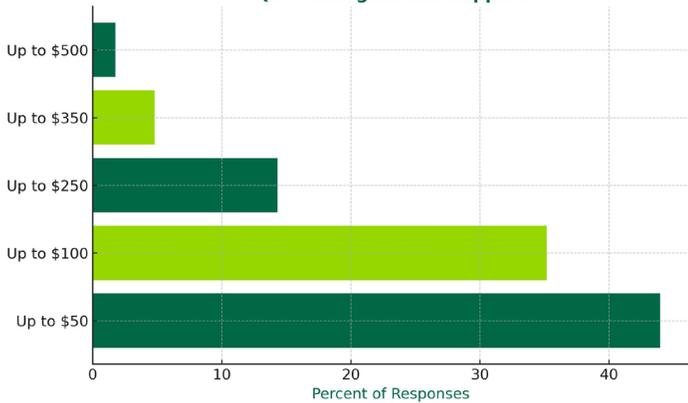
AQUA CENTER RENOVATION

Discussions and Timeline



A timeline depicting what has transpired with the Aqua Center since last year.

Q9 - Willing Annual Support



Preferred redevelopment options

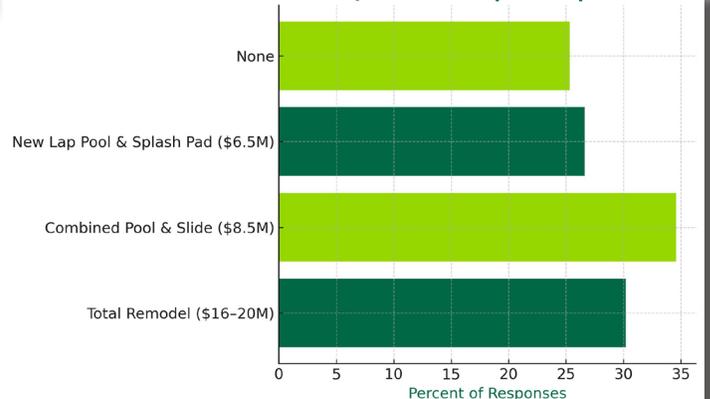
When asked to choose among potential redevelopment options, 34% supported an \$8.5 million combined pool and water slide concept, while 30% favored a full remodel or rebuild estimated at \$16–20 million. Another 26% preferred a \$6.5 million lap pool and splash pad option, and 25% selected “none of the above.”

Looking ahead

According to Village officials, the results will help guide discussions on how best to balance community desires with financial sustainability.

The Park Forest Aqua Center, long considered a hallmark of summer in the Village, remains a point of community pride. As planning continues, officials say they will focus on maintaining transparency, evaluating funding options, and prioritizing family-focused amenities that align with residents’ expectations.

Q10 - Redevelopment Option



Park Forest Board approves \$10M Aqua Center redevelopment after years of rising costs, residents' feedback

After more than two years of assessments, rising cost estimates, residents' concerns, and shifting design proposals, the Park Forest Board of Trustees approved a major step forward in the long-debated future of the Park Forest Aqua Center.

In November, trustees voted to approve a Letter of Proposal from Williams Architects to begin architectural and engineering work on a \$10 million redevelopment plan. The measure authorizes Village Manager Jon Kindseth to execute the contract, officially setting the project on a path toward a potential summer 2027 reopening.

The approved plan reflects months of community feedback, financial analysis, and re-evaluation of earlier concepts. Under the proposal, the Village will construct a new \$8.5 million Combined Pool facility—an ADA-compliant, multi-use pool that preserves popular features such as the facility's iconic water slide. The plan also includes a \$1.5 million remodel of the existing East Pool to maintain limited operations while the new complex is built.

The decision marks the Village's most significant action since 2024, when early inspections revealed the Aqua Center required far more work than originally anticipated. Assessments from Williams Architects and aquatic consultant Counsilman-Hunsaker

uncovered widespread leaks, mechanical failures, and necessary code updates throughout the 70-year-old facility. Repair estimates that began between \$300,000 and \$500,000 eventually climbed past \$7 million, prompting the Village to explore multiple replacement and renovation options.

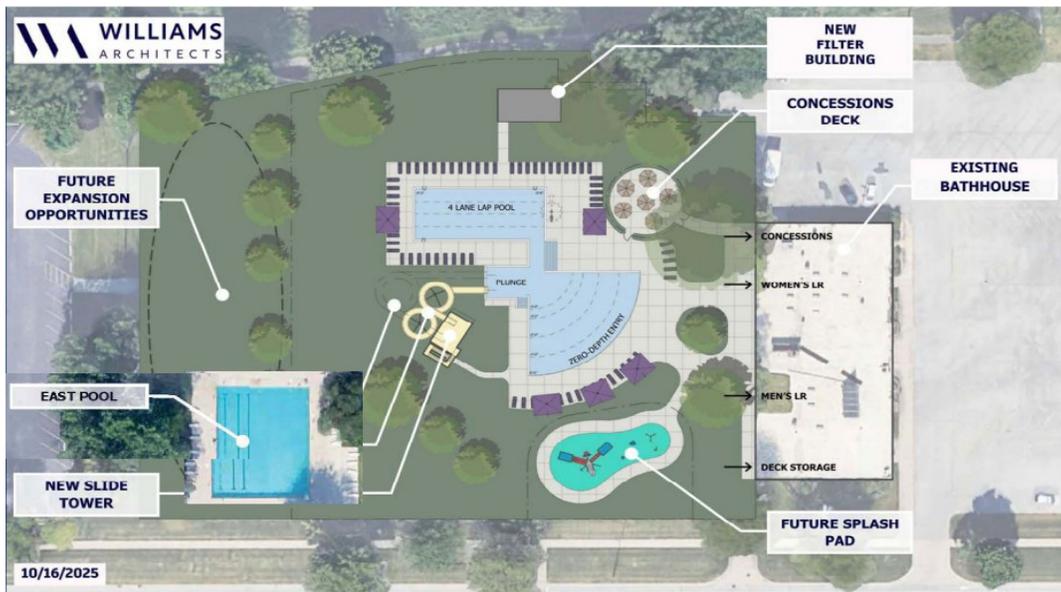
Resident input played a key role in shaping the final direction. A fall 2025 community survey drew 635 verified responses—one of the Village's largest participation efforts. Residents expressed strong support for family-friendly features such as lap swimming, shade structures, concessions, and the water slide, while also signaling limited tolerance for major tax increases. Survey results showed broad preference for a mid-range investment between \$6.5 and \$8.5 million, aligning with the components of the new plan.

To fund the project, the Village will use \$2.5 million in reserves, \$500,000 in state grants, and issue \$7 million in bonds. The plan includes a 1.25% increase in the Village's tax levy, which amounts to roughly \$50 more per year for a homeowner with a \$10,000 property tax bill, in a future year.

Design work will begin immediately, with schematic plans expected by early 2026. Construction is scheduled from late 2026 through summer 2027.

There is a reasonable expectation that the East Pool

reopens ahead of the new facility, providing some continuity for residents and aligning with a 2027 opening of the new pool. With this approval, Park Forest moves into its first major Aqua Center reinvestment in decades—an effort intended to deliver a modern, sustainable, and community-centered aquatic experience for future generations.



Above is an illustration of what the final design "may" look like.

New leadership team rises within Park Forest Fire Department

The Park Forest Fire Department is moving forward under new leadership following a series of promotions that highlight the experience and dedication of its members.

Deputy Chief Mark Cotrano has been appointed as the Village's new fire chief, bringing more than two decades of service to the role. Cotrano began his fire service career in 2003 and joined the Park Forest Fire Department in 2007. Over the years, he has advanced through the ranks as lieutenant, shift commander and deputy chief. He holds a bachelor's degree in fire service management from Southern Illinois University and numerous officer and specialty certifications.

Succeeding Cotrano as deputy chief is Taylor Bordewyk, who began with the department in 2007 as a firefighter/paramedic. A former U.S. Army sergeant, Bordewyk has 18 years of experience and holds a bachelor's degree in fire science management from Columbia Southern University. He said he



Fire Chief Mark Cotrano



Deputy Chief Taylor Bordewyk

is honored to continue serving the residents of Park Forest and the members of the department.

Shift Commander Kevin Grove was promoted from lieutenant/paramedic. Grove, who started his career in 2006 with the Crete Township Fire Protection District, joined Park Forest in 2011. He oversees emergency response coordination, federal fire reporting and the department's radio communications.

Rounding out the promotions, Lieutenant Tom Marconi began his service as a paid-on-call firefighter in 2009 and became a full-time member in 2015. He holds an associate's degree in fire science and serves as the training officer for the department's Gray Cart team.

These leadership changes follow the retirement of longtime Fire Chief Tracy Natyshok and mark a new chapter for the department. The promotions reflect the continued strength, professionalism and dedication of the Park Forest Fire Department and its commitment to serving the community.

The department looks forward to building upon its strong foundation under new leadership. These transitions ensure that residents will continue to receive the same high standard of service and safety they've come to expect from the Park Forest Fire Department.



Shift Commander Kevin Grove



Lt. Tom Marconi

Civic Leadership Academy opens doors to village government

The Park Forest Civic Leadership Academy is marking its 10th year of helping residents better understand how their local government operates.

Launched in 2015, the nine-month program was developed to connect community members with leaders and decision-makers across the Village. Since then, it has provided over 130 participants, many who currently serve on boards and commissions, with firsthand experience in the workings of government, education, housing, and other key community sectors.

The academy was created to address what Village officials viewed as a lack of local leadership development opportunities.

“One of the greatest challenges facing the community is ensuring that residents are informed and engaged with how local government functions,” said James Guirguis, strategic communications and engagement manager for the Village of Park Forest. “The program gives residents direct access to learning about the decisions and processes that shape their community.”

Open to high school students, college students, and adults, the academy offers behind-the-scenes access to municipal operations. Monthly sessions on the first Friday of the month cover topics such as public services, economic development, social equity, recreation, education, and the arts. Each session includes presentations, facility tours, and workshops illustrating the realities and challenges facing the Village.

More than an educational program, the academy emphasizes open communication between residents and officials. Participants meet with elected officials, department heads, and community representatives in candid discussions.

Guirguis said conversations are often direct.

“Residents will ask direct questions like, ‘Why doesn’t Park Forest have certain types of businesses?’ or ‘Why are property taxes so high?’” he said.



The 2025/26 Civic Leadership class poses for a photo in Central Park.

“Village staff answer truthfully and explain the challenges Park Forest faces and the efforts being made to confront them.”

This dialogue helps participants understand the people and processes behind local policies.

“It allows residents to see how decisions are made and why certain approaches are taken,” Guirguis said.

Over the past decade, many graduates have gone on to serve on Village commissions, volunteer for local initiatives, or take leadership roles in community organizations.

“The program equips residents with knowledge and skills to participate in civic life more effectively,” Guirguis said.

Applications are open to residents of all backgrounds. Applicants submit a resume, a personal letter of interest, and a letter of support from an employer or school. A small program fee is required to ensure participants are committed to completing the course.

The academy also offers unique opportunities for younger residents. Students gain exposure to civic operations that can inform career paths, while adults often use the experience to become more active in local affairs.

“As Park Forest continues to grow and change, it’s important that residents understand how government works and how they can contribute,” Guirguis said.

Information about future sessions, including how to apply, is available on the Village of Park Forest’s website.

Park Forest remains financially strong, earning national recognition amid economic challenges

Even as communities across the country navigate inflation, supply chain disruptions, and shifting state and federal economic conditions, the Village of Park Forest continues to demonstrate financial stability and accountability — a record that has earned it national recognition once again.

Finance Director Mark Pries said Park Forest remains on solid financial footing, thanks to decades of conservative budgeting, strong reserves, and a focus on long-term planning.

“The Village is in very stable financial condition,” Pries said. “There are some challenges that it will face soon, the main one being the Aqua Center and determining the extent of the work to be done along with the amount of money to spend on the project.”

Pries acknowledged that inflation and tariffs have had a noticeable impact on the Village’s operations, particularly on supplies and materials sourced from outside the United States. While inflation has eased somewhat over the past year, he said the effects continue to shape how Park Forest approaches purchasing and budgeting.

“These two items will have a lasting impact on the Village as costs will not go down; rather, they will moderate and become the ‘new normal’ the Village can expect to pay for its supplies,” he said.

Despite these pressures, Pries said the Village has avoided cuts to programs or services. The current budget includes no reductions, and in some areas, resources have actually increased — often supported by grant funding.

“The current Village budget did not see any cuts to programs or services and there are no current plans to do so,” he said.

One of the Village’s largest financial priorities this year is determining the future of the Park Forest Aqua Center. The aging facility requires significant

upgrades, and Village officials are weighing how to balance those capital investment costs while maintaining other essential services.

Building stability through prudent planning

Pries credited the Village’s ability to maintain stability through careful long-term financial planning and a commitment to maintaining healthy reserves.

“The most important step the Village takes every year is ensuring there are sufficient reserves, or money in the bank, so if any surprises do happen — like Cook County delaying the second installment of property tax bills this year — the Village has enough cash to continue providing services to its residents without any cuts,” Pries said.

That approach, Pries said, extends back to the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Park Forest chose to invest one-time federal relief funds in infrastructure rather than ongoing operating costs.

“When the Village received several million dollars during COVID, we did not use that money to hire new employees or start new programs,” Pries said. “The Village used those funds for one-time improvements to infrastructure that did not increase day-to-day costs.”

Aside from the Aqua Center, no major programs or infrastructure projects have been affected by current economic conditions. Previous adjustments, such as sunseting the Village Health Department and changes to Metra parking lot operations due to declining ridership, were made as part of broader strategic financial planning efforts.

National recognition for transparency and accountability, Park Forest’s financial discipline and transparency continue to be recognized nationally. The Village recently earned the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) for its Fiscal Year budget — marking 31 consecutive years and 33 total awards from the organization.



According to the GFOA, the award reflects the Village’s commitment to the highest standards of transparency, accountability, and public communication in budgeting. Fewer than 2,000 governments across the U.S. and Canada earn the honor each year.

“Earning this award year after year underscores Park Forest’s dedication to fiscal responsibility and clear communication with residents about how their tax dollars are being used,” Pries said. “Our budget isn’t just numbers on a page — it’s a roadmap that aligns financial decisions with the Village’s long-term goals.”

Budget documents are evaluated in 14 mandatory criteria across four major categories and must be rated “proficient” in each to qualify.

“Receiving this recognition for over three decades demonstrates the professionalism and integrity of our finance team and the continued support of our elected officials,” Pries added. “It reflects our shared commitment to maintaining trust and transparency with the community.”

A continued focus on resident confidence

Pries encouraged residents to review the Village’s financial reports and stay informed about local finances through the Village’s website.

“We have professional staff that work every day to make sure the Village’s financial stability is maintained and any challenges are met with options that consider the needs of the residents,” he said.

Park Forest has also submitted its most recent audit to the GFOA for the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting — a distinction it has earned 28 consecutive times.

“These recognitions are not easy to achieve or maintain,” Pries said. “There are very few governments in Illinois and in the country that have received these awards for as long as the Village of Park Forest has.”



For questions regarding Park Forest finances contact Finance Director Mark Pries at 708-748-1112 or email mpries@vopf.com

Below is a breakdown of Park Forest’s tax levy increases by year since 2010.

2010	3.1%
2011	3.4%
2012	2.7%
2013	1.9% *
2014	1.4%
2015	2.8%
2016	2.2%
2017	1.12 %
2018	0.0%
2019	2.0%
2020	0.85%
2021	0.0%**
2022	0.0%**
2023	0.0%***
2024	0.0%***
2025	0.0%***

*The increase in 2013 included a zero percent increase in the General Corporate Levy. The entire increase is related to pension funds.

**There was no increase in the tax levies of 2021 and 2022 due to significant increases in income and sales tax revenues during the pandemic. Due to several factors like working from home, federal unemployment benefits allowed property taxes not to grow. Also, salary costs decreased during this time, so overall expenditures did not increase at the same levels the Village was experiencing in prior years.

*** Both the 2023, 2024, and 2025 tax levies increased by zero percent due to increased income tax revenues as well as departmental expenditures remaining relatively flat during this time frame. 2025 was the sixth time in the last nine years the Village adopted a zero percent increase in its portion of the tax levy.

Learn more about Park Forest’s finances at villageofparkforest.com/finance

New businesses bring fresh energy to DownTown Park Forest



The entrance to Swanqee on 301 Main St.

Downtown Park Forest is buzzing with new life as several locally owned businesses open their doors, each bringing a unique blend of creativity, healing, and mentorship to the community.

Among the newest additions is Swanqee, a clothing boutique at 301 Main Street, founded by DJ and entrepreneur Clifton Pickett. What began nearly a decade ago as a personal fashion brand has now evolved into a storefront that blends style, art, and community.

“I took the word ‘swanky,’ meaning elegant or fashionable, and changed the spelling to Swanqee,” Pickett explained. “Now it represents positivity — something I want to share with this community.”

After years of pop-up shops and a stint at Navy

Pier, Pickett chose Park Forest for his next chapter, drawn by the potential of the Village’s DownTown. His store features original apparel, artwork, and boutique pieces, along with small-batch printing services for local businesses.

Also in the DownTown, La’ Paca Austin has opened Imishe Massage at 218 Forest Boulevard. A former warehouse worker turned massage therapist, Austin found her calling after helping a coworker in pain — a moment that changed her career and life.

“Someone once told me I had a gift for healing,” Austin said. “Now I get to use it to help others every day.”

Her business offers traditional massage therapy and stretching sessions, along with a “forever discount” for seniors.

JANUARY

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
1-9	Accepting Nominations for PF Oscar Awards	9am-5pm	Free	VH	708.283.5621	ECON
1-16	Holiday Tree Recycling	24/7	Free	PL	708.503.9372	ECON
1-30	Accepting Nominations for Businessperson of the Year (2025)	9am-5pm	Free	VH	708.283.5623	ECON
11	Freedom Hall Family Series: South of Chi Family Improv	3pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH
19	Freedom Hall Series: MLK Gospel Celebration	3pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH
23	Park Forest Oscar Awards	6pm	Free	FH	708.283.5621	ECON

FEBRUARY

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
2-13	Accepting Nominations for Businessperson of the Year (2025)	9am-5pm	Free	VH	708.283.5623	ECON
14	Freedom Hall Series: Valentine's Day Experience featuring LaTanya Hughes	7:30pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH
22	Freedom Hall Family Series: I'm Your Puppet	3pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH
28	Freedom Hall Family Series: Hollywood Swinging	7:30pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH

MARCH

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
3	Freedom Hall Family Series: Charlotte's Web	10am & 12:15pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH
7	Fire Department Awards Ceremony	10-11am	Free	FH	708.481.4549	FD
14	Freedom Hall Series: Ladies Night featuring The Voices	7:30pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH
21	Youth Commission presents... Job Readiness Workshop	11am	Free	VH	708.748.2005	RPCH
28	Freedom Hall Series: An Evening with Keys Trammell	7:30pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH

APRIL

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
1	Youth Commission presents... Job Readiness Workshop	11am	Free	VH	708.748.2005	RPCH
1	Youth Commission presents...Glo Party	3:30pm	\$	RC	708.748.2005	RPCH
3	Egg-Stravaganza Hunt	11am	Free	OTG	708.748.2005	RPCH
4	Community Clean-Up	9am-11am	Free	TBD	708.503.9372	ECON
4	Fair Housing Workshop	10am	Free	VH	708.283.5621	ECON
11	Commission on Human Relations presents... Job Fair	10am	Free	VH	708.283.5621	ECON
11	Freedom Hall Series: Gold Dust: Tribute to Fleetwood Mac	7:30pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH
12	Freedom Hall Family Series: The House on Mango Street	3pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH

14	Freedom Hall Series: The Four C Notes Tribute to Frankie Vallie & The Four Seasons	11am	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH
25	Spring Shred/Drug Take-Back Event	10am-12pm	Free	PL	708.503.9372	ECON
25	Freedom Hall Series: Better Together: Sounds of Philadelphia	7:30pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH

MAY

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
1-29	Plastic Garden Pot & Tray Recycling	9am-5pm	Free	VH	708.503.9372	ECON
2	Main Street Market	9am-2pm (every Saturday)		ML	708.748.2005	RPCH
2	Community Bus Tour	10am & 1pm	Free	VH	708.283.5621	ECON
8	Freedom Hall Specialty Programming: Mother's Day Serenade featuring Javon Watson	6pm	\$	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH
16	Veterans Commission presents... Female Veterans Informational Tea	10am-2pm	Free	DOTG	708.283.5608	ADMIN
16	Housing Fair & House Tour	10am	Free	CH	708.283.5621	ECON
17	Freedom Hall Specialty Programming: Malcolm X Movie Screening & Panel Discussion	7pm	Free	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH

JUNE (RESIDENT APPRECIATION MONTH)

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
1-5	RAM: Week One: Water Bill Giveaway	9am-5pm	Raffle	VH	708.283.5621	ECON
1-30	Plastic Garden Pot & Tray Recycling	9am-5pm	Free	VH	708.503.9372	ECON
6	Main Street Market	9am-2pm (every Saturday)		ML	708.748.2005	RPCH
6	Thrive!	10am-3pm	Free	ML	708.748.2005	RPCH
6	LGBTQ Brunch	11am	Free	DOTG	708.283.2005	ECON
6	Youth Commission presents... Summer in the Park	1pm	Free	TBD	708.748.2005	RPCH
7	Freedom Hall Specialty Programming: Purple Rain Movie Screening – Prince's Birthday Celebration	7pm	Free	FH	708.747.0580	RPCH
8-12	RAM: Week Two: GC Giveaway	9am-5pm	Raffle	VH	708.283.5621	ECON
10	Resident BBQ	5:30pm	Free	OTG	708.283.5621	ECON
10	Main Street Nights 2026: J Grant Experience	6pm	Free	OTG	708.747.0580	RPCH
13	Pioneers Brunch	10am	Free	TBD	708.283.5621	ECON
15-19	RAM: Week Three: Paraphernalia Giveaway	9am-5pm	Raffle	VH	708.283.5621	ECON
17	Main Street Nights 2026: Juneteenth Celebration featuring: Simone Green	6pm	Free	OTG	708.747.0580	RPCH
22-26	RAM: Week Four: Random Acts of Kindness	9am-5pm			708.283.5621	ECON
24	Main Street Nights 2026: Maurice Mahon	6pm	Free	OTG	708.747.0580	RPCH
27	House Music on the Lawn	10am-10pm	Free	OTG	708.283.5621	ECON

JULY

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
1	Plastic Garden Pot & Tray Recycling	9am-5pm	Free	VH	708.503.9372	ECON
4	Main Street Market	9am-2pm (every Saturday)		ML	708.748.2005	RPCH
4	Village of Park Forest Public Safety 4th of July Parade	5pm	Free	OTG	708.748.9536	PD
4	Main Street Nights 2026: N Deep (Fourth of July Celebration)	6pm	Free	OTG	708.747.0580	RPCH
8	Main Street Nights 2026: Gizzae – Caribbean Reggae Night	6pm	Free	OTG	708.747.0580	RPCH
11	Bus Tour	10am-1pm	Free	VH	708.283.5621	ECON
11	Commission on Human Relations presents...Ice Cream Social	12pm	Free	OTG	708.283.5621	ECON
15	Main Street Nights 2026: Maggie Speaks (GSU)	6pm	Free	OTG	708.747.0580	RPCH
18	Sunset Soiree: All White Outdoor Dining Experience	6pm	\$	OTG	708.283.5621	ECON
22	Main Street Nights 2026: Ronnie G – Jazz Night	6pm	Free	OTG	708.747.0580	RPCH
25	Recycle Fest	8am-Noon	Free	PL	708.503.9372	ECON
25	Youth Commission presents... Youth Day	1pm	Free	OTG	708.748.2006	RPCH
29	Main Street Nights 2026: Blooze Bros/ Movie Night	6pm	Free	OTG	708.747.0580	RPCH

AUGUST

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
1	Main Street Market	9am-2pm (every Saturday)		ML	708.748.2005	RPCH
5	Unity Day	5pm	Free	OTG	708.748.9536	PD
5	Main Street Nights 2026: Freddi Taylor & Nu Source Band	6pm	Free	OTG	708.747.0580	RPCH
8	Local Food Tasting & Business Crawl	1pm	Free	VH	708.283.5621	ECON
20	Senior Health Fair	10am-2pm	Free	DOTG	708.748.2005	RPCH

SEPTEMBER

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
3	Senior Picnic	10am-2pm	\$	OTG	708.748.2005	RPCH
5	Main Street Market	9am-2pm		ML	708.748.2005	RPCH
12	Commission on Human Relations presents...Newbie Social	10am	Free	VH	708.283.5621	ECON
19-20	Art Fair	10am-5pm	Free	OTG	708.748.3377	
26-27	Village-wide Garage Sale	9am-9pm	Free		708.283.5603	ADMIN

OCTOBER

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
1-30	Accepting Nominations for Businessperson of the Year (2026)	9am-5pm	Free	VH	708.283.5623	ECON
3-31	Main Street Market	9am-2pm (every Saturday)		ML	708.748.2005	RPCH

3	Fall Fest	11am-2pm	Free	SP	708.748.2005	RPCH
3	Fall Shred/Drug Take Back	10am-12pm	Free	PL	708.503.9372	ECON
9	Fire Department Open House	5-9pm	Free	FS	708.481.4549	FD
31	Safe Halloween & Trunk or Treat	11am-1pm	Free	DT	708.503.8153	ECON

NOVEMBER

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
2-30	Accepting Nominations for Businessperson of the Year (2026)	9am-5pm	Free	VH	708.283.5623	ECON
7	Main Street Market	9am-2pm (every Saturday)		ML	708.748.2005	RPCH
8	Veterans Commission presents... Veterans Day Event	10am-2pm	Free	FH	708.283.5608	ADMIN
16-30	Winter Windows Contest			DT	708.503.8153	ECON

DECEMBER

DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	CONTACT	DEPARTMENT
1-14	Winter Windows Contest		Free	DT	708.503.8153	ECON
1-30	Accepting Nominations for Businessperson of the Year (2026)	9am-5pm	Free	VH	708.283.5623	ECON
5	Main Street Market	9am-2pm (every Saturday)		ML	708.748.2005	RPCH
5	Commission on Human Relations presents... Winter Give-a-way	TBD	Free	TBD	708.283.5621	ECON
11	Holiday Market & Tree Lighting	4pm-7pm	Free	DOTG DT	708.503.8153 708.283.5605	DT ADMIN

LOCATIONS

ABBREVIATION	LOCATION	ADDRESS
DOTG	Dining on the Green	349 Main Street
DT	DownTown Park Forest	Main Street
FH	Freedom Hall	410 Lakewood Boulevard
FS	Fire Station	156 Indianwood Boulevard
ML	Market Lot	152 Main Street
MPR	Multi-Purpose Rooms	350 Victory Drive (Lower Level of VH)
OTG	Outside on the Green	349 Main Street
PL	Parking Lot	Lakewood/Forest Boulevard
RC	Recreation Center (Rear)	530 Lakewood Boulevard
SP	Somonauk Park	266 Somonauk Street
VH	Village Hall	350 Victory Drive

DEPARTMENTS

ADMIN	Administration
ECON	Economic Development & Planning
FD	Fire Department
RPCH	Recreation, Parks & Community Health
PD	Police Department





The entrance to Imishe Massage at 218 Forest Blvd.

After recovering from a serious car accident earlier this year, Austin says the opening of Imishe Massage represents perseverance and purpose. “This business isn’t just for me — it’s for the community,” she said.

Also joining the downtown revival is Mission 007w Mentorship, a nonprofit founded by Shauntia “Shante” Vasquez at 316 Forest Boulevard. The

organization serves young adults ages 16 to 25, offering mentorship, academic support, and career guidance.

“As a teen, I didn’t have a mentor to help me make life decisions,” Vasquez said. “Now I want to be that person for someone else — to give them the little push I didn’t receive.”

Vasquez, who has more than 20 years of experience mentoring youth, hopes Mission 007 will empower the next generation of leaders and changemakers.

Together, these three business owners are helping reshape the heart of Park Forest — one boutique, one healing touch, and one mentorship session at a time.



The Park Forest Village Board attends ribbon cutting for Mission 007.

2026

SOMONAUK PARK

Resident Only PARK PERMIT 3-DAY ONLY PRE-SALE

MONDAY
FEBRUARY 2
9AM-7:30PM

TO

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 4
9AM-4PM

The Park Forest Recreation, Parks and Community Health Department will hold a Resident's Only Park Permit 3-Day Only Pre-sale on Monday, February 2, 2026 to Wednesday, February 4, 2026. The event is held to allow Residents a first come, first serve opportunity to secure their preferred Park Forest Park Pavilion at Central Park, Somonauk Park or Logan Park.

Starting Thursday, February 5, 2026 at 9am Park Permit rentals will be open to the public.

Please bring a State ID to verify residency.

Please note that individuals are restricted to one picnic date per person, one super cooker and one picnic kit during pre-sale dates. Full payment is due at time of reserving a permit. No phone orders.



CENTRAL PARK



LOGAN PARK



708-748-2005



350 Victory Drive, Park Forest, IL



- NOMINATIONS**
1. Accepting nominations now thru Jan. 2
 - 2.
 3. Email/call for entry form 708.283.5621 or erandle@vopf.com
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.

Community Relations & Commission on Human Relations present...

PARK FOREST *Community*

OSCAR *awards*

SATURDAY, JANUARY 24, 6PM
FREEDOM HALL, 410 LAKEWOOD BLVD.

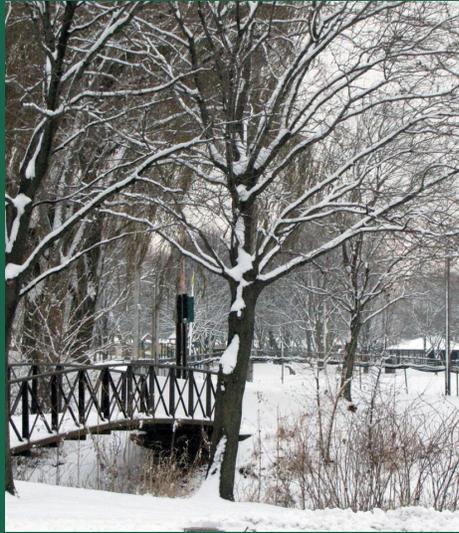


Trustee John V. Moore Trustee Erin I. Slone Trustee Tiffani Graham Mayor Joseph A. Woods Trustee Theresa M. Settles Trustee Maya Hardy Trustee Randall White

2024 WINTER WONDERLAND PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS



LINDSAY GLADSTONE



GARY KOPYCINSKI



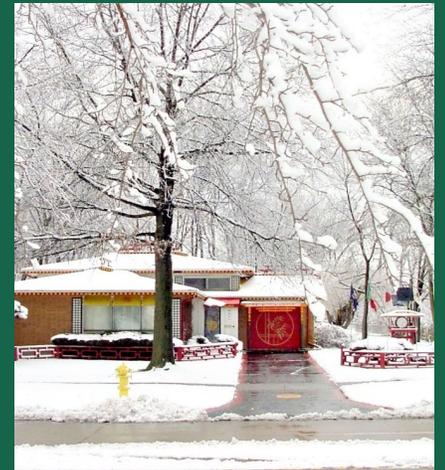
JANETTE WOOD



SEBASTIAN LOWISZ



RIKK DUNLAP



MARK REED

Park Forest

2026 Tuesday Pick Up Schedule

Garbage - Brown Carts – Garbage will be picked up every week on Tuesday. Pick up days are outlined in red.

Recycling - Green Carts – Recycling is picked up every other week. Pick up days are marked in yellow.

Yard Waste - Blue Carts – Yard waste is picked up weekly on Tuesday from April 1 - November 24.

JANUARY						
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NOVEMBER						
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Holidays are marked with Pink squares. Pick ups that fall ON or AFTER the holiday will be delayed one day that week ONLY. Only four times a year.

What Should I Recycle?
 Learn the Basics



Park Forest's Adina McCollough takes AI expertise to national stage

When Recreation Supervisor Adina McCollough first joined the Village of Park Forest more than a decade ago, she never imagined she would one day be teaching hundreds of professionals from across the nation about artificial intelligence. But this fall, McCollough did just that — representing the Village’s Recreation, Parks & Community Health Department at the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Conference in Orlando, Florida, where she presented to a packed room on how recreation professionals can use AI to improve their work.

“It was standing-room only,” McCollough said. “There were nearly 300 people in the room, and I was proud to share how Park Forest is using AI to better serve our residents.”

McCollough’s presentation, titled “DIY-GPT for Parks and Rec Professionals,” introduced recreation leaders from across the country to the growing potential of artificial intelligence. Her session focused on how staff can create personalized AI tools—known as “custom GPTs”—to streamline operations, enhance communication, and better understand community demographics.

McCollough’s journey with the Village began in



McCollough at work training her AI to be better.

2012, when she joined the Park Forest Public Library as a youth services coordinator. Her early work centered on connecting with local teens, who she noticed needed a safe and engaging place to gather.

“I saw that the teens needed somewhere to go — someone to look after them,” she said. “So I asked the director if I could start a program for them, and that’s how Teen Zone began.”

The Teen Zone initiative started at the library but quickly grew beyond its walls. In 2014, McCollough helped transition the program under the umbrella

of the Recreation and Parks Department, through a partnership that included the library and the Park Forest Police Department. From there, her career flourished. She was promoted to Recreation Supervisor in 2018, and earlier this year, she became recreation manager, overseeing community health programming and coordinating community trips.

While her focus remains on building community engagement, McCollough’s passion for technology has shaped her unique approach



McCollough in her office at Village Hall.

to public service. About three years ago, she began exploring the possibilities of artificial intelligence after discovering OpenAI's ChatGPT.

"I've always been someone who loves technology," she said. "I have a degree in graphic design, so I've always tried to keep up with new tools and teach myself as much as I can. When AI came along, I saw right away how it could make our work more efficient."

McCullough began experimenting with AI in everyday tasks—from analyzing data and writing grants to drafting program descriptions and marketing materials. She also introduced her colleagues to these tools, helping the entire department embrace AI to save time and strengthen communication with residents.

Her innovative use of technology caught the attention of Recreation Director Kevin Adams, who shared her work with other leaders through NRPA's Director School program. Impressed by her presentation, national organizers invited McCullough to participate in a panel on AI last year—and based on the feedback she received, she decided to submit her own session to present at this year's conference.

Despite being one of just a few virtual presenters among more than 200 speakers, McCullough's session drew major interest from professionals eager to understand how to integrate AI into parks and recreation management.

"People often think of AI as something far away from our field," McCullough said. "But it's really about helping us work smarter—learning about our



McCullough showing off hoodies she designed using AI.

residents, understanding data, and communicating more effectively."

Her approach involves training AI models to understand Park Forest's community demographics, surrounding cities, and programming needs. The goal, she said, is to create systems that "know who we are and who we serve," allowing the Village to tailor its outreach and program planning more effectively.

McCullough now shares that expertise locally through her monthly AI Basics class, held on the first Monday of each month from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The workshop introduces residents to the fundamentals of AI and how they can use it in their everyday lives.

"I encourage people to come in, ask questions, and learn," she said. "We're living in an AI revolution—much like the automobile or industrial revolutions. If you don't attempt to learn the technology, you'll be left behind, like someone using a rotary phone in the age of the iPhone 17."

Looking ahead, McCullough is already preparing for her next opportunity to showcase Park Forest's innovation. In January, she'll speak at the Illinois Recreation and Park Association Conference, continuing to champion the role of AI in public service.

"I think it's a big deal for our small department to be seen as industry leaders," McCullough said. "It shows that we're not only keeping up with technology but using it to better serve our residents. I'm proud to represent Park Forest on such a large stage."



The picture above shows hoodies designed by McCullough using AI.

Building better homes: Understanding Park Forest's inspection and permitting process

Whether you're selling your home, buying a rehab property, or planning a few upgrades, Park Forest officials want residents to know the importance of following the Village's inspection and permitting process before changing occupancy or making improvements.

The Residential Change of Occupancy Inspection program is one of the Village's main tools to help maintain safe, high-quality housing and preserve the community's character.

"This program exists to forewarn and protect homeowners from dangerous or unsatisfactory housing conditions," said Eshe McGee, Assistant Director of the Department of Community Development. "It's also designed to prevent deterioration of our housing stock and promote a safe, attractive living environment throughout Park Forest."

Every time a dwelling changes occupants—whether it's being sold or rented—the Village's Building Department conducts an inspection to ensure compliance with local housing, building, and health codes.

According to McGee, sellers, agents, or landlords must apply for the inspection. The application requires a \$100 inspection fee and a copy of the signed sales contract or lease agreement. Inspections are conducted on weekdays between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

"Inspections (rental and sale) are valid for six months. If the property does not pass the inspection within that time, the seller or landlord will have to start the inspection process over again, including



paying the \$100 fee," McGee said. "Occupancy can only occur after a Certificate of Occupancy has been issued, confirming that all code requirements have been met."

McGee added that it's highly recommended buyers also obtain a private professional home inspection to protect their interests. "A private inspection gives the buyer another layer of assurance and helps identify any hidden issues," she said.

What Inspectors Look For

The Village's inspection checklist includes a wide range of safety and maintenance items. Inside the home, inspectors check for operational smoke detectors on every level and in each sleeping area, carbon monoxide detectors within 15 feet of every bedroom, properly functioning plumbing fixtures, and safe electrical systems.

"As of Jan. 1, 2023, Illinois requires all newly installed smoke alarms to have a 10-year sealed battery," McGee noted. "Things like exposed wiring, broken windows, or missing GFCI outlets can seem minor, but they're important safety issues."

"We find a lot of work completed without building permits," McGee explained. "Most investors or homeowners want to change the original layout for an open concept—often by removing a wall. We're also seeing more people add bathrooms or convert half baths to full baths, which require proper permits and inspections."





Exterior inspections focus on overall property maintenance. Peeling paint, damaged siding, cracked driveways, or overgrown lawns can all result in required repairs before a Certificate of Occupancy is granted. Accessory structures such as garages, sheds, and fencing are also inspected to ensure compliance with Village codes.

“We encourage property owners to make sure their homes are ready for inspection when they apply, with all utilities turned on,” McGee said. “An inspection is only valid for 180 days, so timing and preparation are key.”

Permits, Property Transfers, and FOIA Requests

In addition to occupancy inspections, homeowners are reminded that permits are required for most types of residential work. That includes roofing, siding, driveways, windows, fences, sheds, and even central air conditioning units.

“Even if you’re hiring a contractor, you need to make sure the proper permits are obtained before the work begins,” McGee said. “Failing to get a permit can delay your sale, inspection approval, or transfer stamp processing.”

Permit fees vary depending on the type of project and the cost of work, ranging from \$40 for smaller improvements to higher amounts for large structural projects. Sewer repairs and driveway work both require a \$60 permit.

When it comes time to transfer property, sellers must also purchase real estate transfer stamps through the Building Department. These stamps are required before the new deed can be recorded. The cost is \$5 per \$1,000 of the property’s purchase price and must be paid by cashier’s check, certified check, credit card, or cash. Personal checks are not accepted.

McGee also encourages buyers to file a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request when purchasing a property “as-is.” “That way a buyer knows what they’re investing into,” she said. “Permits, inspections,

and violations can all be requested with a FOIA. I’ve seen cases where a three-bedroom, one-bath home was altered into a two-bedroom home without a permit. The new buyer is then responsible for bringing the property up to code—which could include hiring an architect, electrician, plumber, and more, plus paying additional permit fees.”

Signage, Dumpsters, and Storage Containers

The Village also regulates temporary signage and storage to preserve neighborhood aesthetics. “For Sale,” “Garage Sale,” and “Open House” signs may be displayed only in the front yard—not on the parkway—and cannot exceed five square feet. Balloons, flags, banners, and illuminated signs are not allowed.

Homeowners may also place a dumpster on their property for up to 30 days per year without charge. After that, there is a \$50 fee for each additional 30-day period, up to a maximum of 90 days. Temporary storage containers, such as PODs, are permitted for up to 14 consecutive days with a permit.

Encouraging Residents to Reach Out

McGee emphasized that while the guidelines can seem detailed, the Village’s Building Department is always ready to help residents navigate the process.

“These are some of the most common things people should know when buying or selling property in Park Forest,” McGee said. “But every situation is unique, and our staff is available to provide guidance and answer any questions.”

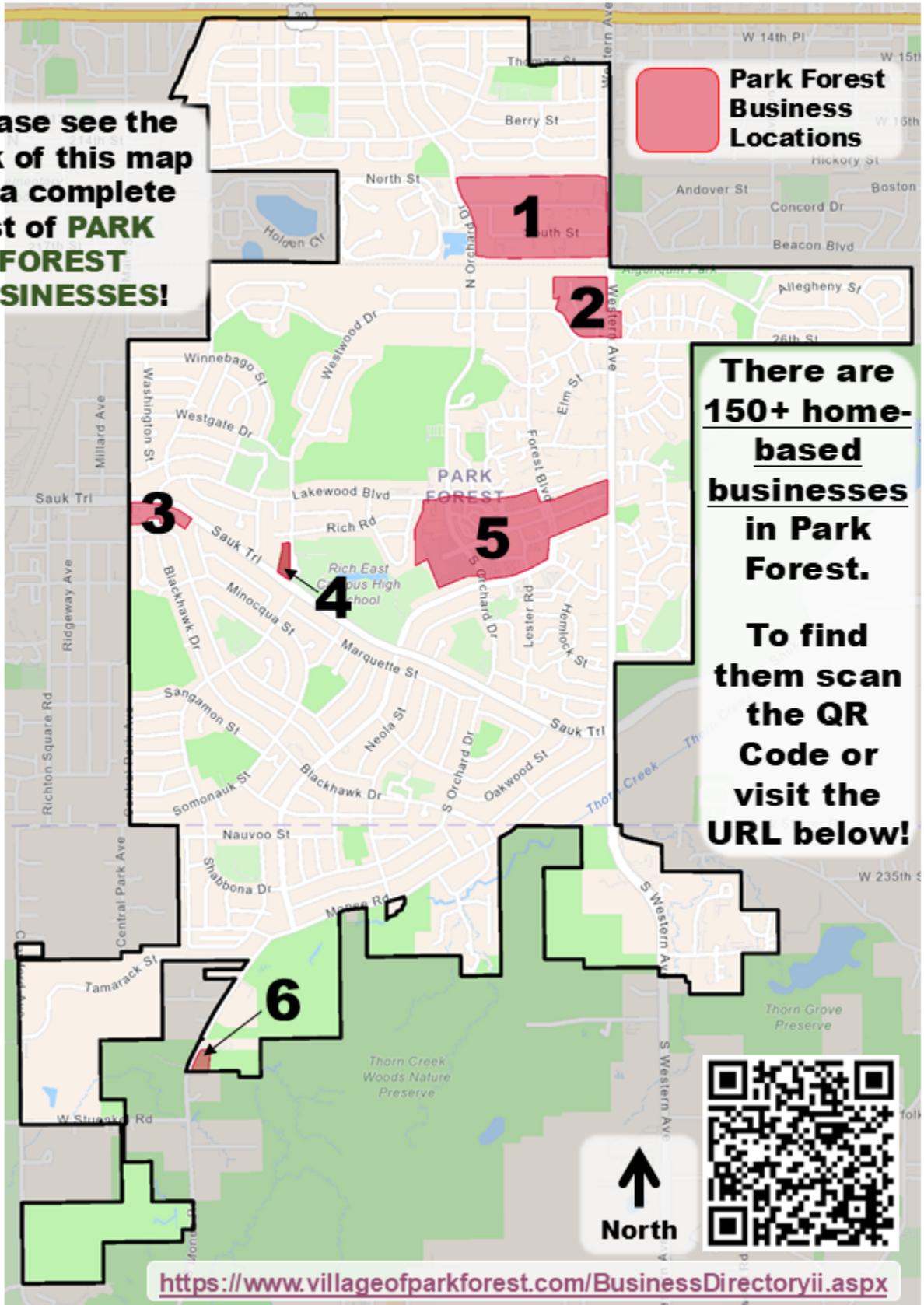
Residents can contact the Building Department at 708-503-7703 or visit the Village’s website for applications, forms, and detailed permit information.

“Our goal,” McGee added, “is not just enforcement—it’s education. We want to ensure residents have safe homes and that property transfers happen smoothly, with everyone on the same page about what’s required.”

Village of Park Forest Commercial Areas Map



Please see the back of this map for a complete list of **PARK FOREST **BUSINESSES!****



There are 150+ home-based businesses in Park Forest.

To find them scan the QR Code or visit the URL below!

<https://www.villageofparkforest.com/BusinessDirectoryii.aspx>

Accountant

Carroll, Joseph Tax Services	5
Kirby Ashley & Associates	5
South Suburban Tax Pros	5

Administrative Office

The Nest - Robin Kelly for Senate coming soon	5
Becker Limited Partnership	1
Cornerstone Community Dev Corp	5
Crossroads Church of the Nazarene	5
Downtown Management Office	5
East Gate Energy, Inc.	5
Empire Property Solutions LLC	5
Life Transformation Ministries	5
Park Forest/Richton Park Neighborhood Network	5
William Simpson Essay Scholarship Foundation	5

Animal/Pets

Foster's Kennel	2
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Auto Services

Auto-Lab Express	2
Caliber Collision Centers	1
Emissions Testing	1
Kassem Auto Sales, Inc.	5
Kennedy Auto Repair	1
Lifetime Auto Services Repair	2
Make It Straight Auto Body & Paint	1
SAB Auto coming soon	6
Stacy's Auto Services Repair Co.	5
Sterdy Built Auto Services	5

Bakery/Juice Bar

Dulce by Dori	5
Danie's Natural Juice Bar and Wellness	5

Bank

U.S. Bank	5
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Banquet Hall/Party Facility

Dining on the Green	5
Elane Luxurious Events Party Room	5
Royal Creations Banquets coming soon	5

Barber/Beauty/Massage/Spa

Cindy's Nails Inc.	5
CQ's Nails	5
CQ's Nails Massage Therapy	5
Forever Nails by Jennifer NOW OPEN!	4
Imishe Massage NOW OPEN!	5
L3vel3	1
Legendary Cutz & Stylez Studio Inc.	5
Nabada Massage	5
Nulavish Salon and Spa	5
Oasis Salon Studio	5
Rahima's Palace Co.	3
Shakin My Head Salon	5
Tabitha Hair Braiding Salon	5

Transitions Salon	5
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Caterer/Food Truck

Juancho's Tacos	2
Poppin' Plates, Inc Commercial Kitchen	5
Tacos Los Camaradas	5
Tasty Love Catering LLC	5

Childcare

Base Child Care	1
First Years University	5
Jump In Playpen	5
PK's Christian Learning Site 2	1

Cultural Arts/Artist/Gallery

Hudzik, Maribeth Studio	5
Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra	5
Tall Grass Arts Gallery	5

Dry Cleaner/Laundry/Tailor

Olympia Fields Cleaners	5
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Education/Lessons

Muzicnet School of Music	5
OAI, Inc.	5
Reach A Village	5
Road Runner Driving School	5
Sierra House	5
South Works Maker Lab	5
Tall Grass Arts School	5

Event Planner & Supplies

Elane Luxurious Events Party Room	5
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Fitness/Pickleball/Tennis

Be Better Than Yesterday NOW OPEN!	4
Downs Fitness	5
Park Forest Tennis and Health Club	4

Gas Station

Shell Park Forest	3
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Home Improvement & Repairs

Chicago Pests	5
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Manufacturer

Champion Sportswear	1
Imageworks Manufacturing, Inc.	1
M And M Pallet Inc.	1

Medical/Health/Home Healthcare

4s Wellness Services	5
Aunt Martha's Health & Wellness	5
Chicago Therapeutic Interventions coming soon	5
Dynamic Healthcare Services Inc.	5
Forest Home Healthcare, Inc.	5
Healing Steps Counseling P.C.	5
Imperceptible Healing NOW OPEN!	5

Park Forest Chiropractic Ltd	5
Park Forest Podiatry	5
Pream Homecare Solutions	5
Step By Step the Spa for Your Mind P.C	5

Professional Services

Cook County Southland Juvenile Justice Council	5
Destiny Housing (CILA)	5
Diversified Technology Inc.	5
Kin Care Home Care coming soon	5
King's House of Vision & Faith	5
L. Upshaw Realty, Inc.	5
Lain-Sullivan Funeral Home	2
Mark of Excellence Tattoos	5
Mission 007 NFP NOW OPEN!	5
Relativity Resources	5
Rich Township Senior Center	5
Rich Township	5
Rosie Mae Home Care	5
State Farm Insurance – B. Breedlove	2
State Farm Insurance – D. Dixon	5
Up N Arms	5
Wilson Realty Group	5

Restaurants/Bars/Take Out

All Out Smoke Pit	5
Bixby Inc.	5
Good Times Gaming Café coming soon	5
Gourmet Butter Delights	3
Subway	3
Taco Bell	3
Wings Galore new location NOW OPEN!	5

Retail

7-Eleven	3
CVS/Pharmacy	5
Dollar General Store	5
Family Dollar	5
Ken's Liquor	2
Swanqee NOW OPEN!	5
Sweetly Repeated	5
Windy Spot coming soon	2

Sales/Distribution/Logistics

Comcast Cable	1
U-Haul Co. Of Illinois, Inc.	1
Windland Inc.	1

Venue/Entertainment/Station

Nathan Manilow Theatre @Freedom Hall	5
Park Forest Historical Society	6
John Ruffin's Theater 47	5
Thorn Creek Nature Center	6
WVTC Gospel Radio Network coming soon	5

Shop Local First!

If you cannot find what you are looking for here, look at homebased businesses, too.

Park Forest Tool Lending Library helping residents build, grow, and connect

What started as a long-discussed idea to promote sustainability and community sharing in Park Forest has now become a thriving new resource for residents. The Park Forest Tool Lending Library, which officially opened its doors earlier this year, is already empowering residents to tackle home and garden projects without the cost of buying new equipment.

Located inside the Discovery Center Room at the Park Forest Aqua Center, 30 N. Orchard Drive, the library is open every Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon. The free program allows Park Forest residents age 18 and older to check out a variety of tools for home maintenance, gardening, and other improvement projects.

“This project has been years in the making, and seeing residents come in every weekend and put the tools to use has been incredibly rewarding,” said Sustainability Coordinator Carrie Malfeo, who helped lead the initiative alongside the Park Forest Environment Commission. “It’s a great example of how collaboration and community effort can bring an idea to life.”

The Tool Lending Library launched as part of the Village’s Climate Action and Resilience Plan, which encourages resource sharing, waste reduction, and sustainable living. Since opening, dozens of residents have checked out tools ranging from hedge trimmers and shovels to drills and other tools.

Malfeo said the library’s success is thanks in large part to the dedication of volunteers who help staff the facility, maintain equipment, and assist borrowers. “We’ve built a really strong



volunteer team,” she said. “People love being part of something that gives back and supports sustainability in a tangible way.”

The program also continues to grow. The initial inventory was funded by the Park Forest Sustainability Office and the Environment Commission, and new or gently used tool donations are now being accepted to expand the collection.

“This is an organic process,” Malfeo explained. “We started small, but every month we’re adding more tools and seeing more residents take advantage of the program. It’s a sign that people really value this kind of community resource.”

Beyond its practical benefits, the Tool Lending Library is helping strengthen neighborhood ties and promote environmental awareness. By giving residents access to shared tools, the Village hopes to reduce unnecessary consumption while fostering a culture of connection and cooperation.

“A tool lending library empowers residents to take on their own projects, promotes resource sharing, and helps reduce waste,” Malfeo said. “It’s not just about the tools—it’s about building a stronger, more sustainable community.”

Residents interested in borrowing tools or volunteering can contact the Park Forest Sustainability Office at 708-503-9372 or visit the library during its Saturday hours.



Tool Lending Library volunteers celebrating the grand opening.

Access South Cook brings 44 new, in-demand apartments to Downtown Park Forest

Construction on Access South Cook, a new affordable and accessible housing development in Park Forest, is on pace to be 80 percent complete by the end of the year, with full completion expected by May 2026.

The project, which broke ground in September 2024, will feature 44 apartments, shared green space, a rain garden, and a community building. Located on the Park Forest Village campus, the site is surrounded by retail businesses, government offices, restaurants, banks, and the Park Forest Farmers Market.

Each apartment will include central air conditioning, in-unit laundry, high-quality cabinetry and flooring, and energy-efficient appliances and lighting. All first-floor units will be fully accessible to residents with disabilities.

The property will incorporate landscaping designed to complement the nearby prairie garden at Village Hall and will introduce new permeable stormwater management features to Park Forest. These include a large bioswale rain garden at the center of the site and permeable concrete and pavers along walking areas to improve drainage and sustainability.

Access South Cook is being developed by IFF's in-



An image of the Access South Cook apartments nearing completion.

house development team, Home First, which focuses on creating inclusive housing options for people with disabilities while revitalizing underused properties. The Park Forest project marks Home First's 11th development in Illinois.

According to Village officials, the project fulfills a long-term goal to expand residential development in the community. IFF began discussions with the Village in late 2021 and worked collaboratively with local leaders and partners over the following two and a half years to bring the development forward.

Development partners include Blackwood/Crane Construction as the general contractor and WJW Architects as the design firm. Funding and financial support were provided by the Illinois Housing Development Authority, the Illinois Department of Human Services, ComEd, First Merchants Bank, PNC Bank, IFF, and FHLBank Chicago.

Leasing for Access South Cook ended in November, and property managers have begun contacting prospective tenants who expressed interest through an online survey. All units are expected to be leased by June 2026.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony is planned for next summer to celebrate the completion of the development.



A rendering of the interior of the new Access South Cook apartments.

Preperations underway for major Forest Boulevard reconstruction

While Park Forest residents haven't seen much "road work" this summer along Forest Boulevard, significant behind-the-scenes activity is underway to prepare for a major infrastructure project that will transform the roadway over the next two years.

According to Assistant Public Works Director Nick Christie, construction is expected to begin in spring 2026. For now, commercial private utilities are preparing the area for the large-scale reconstruction effort.

"We are anticipating construction to begin in the spring of 2026," Christie said. "Currently, work is beginning by some private utilities to relocate conflicts with the upcoming project. AT&T, Nicor, and ComEd are all anticipated to be doing work throughout the winter to prepare for construction."

Christie added that some tree removal associated with the project may also take place this winter.

The Forest Boulevard Reconstruction Project has been years in the making. The initiative dates back to 2018, when the Village of Park Forest received a \$252,000 "Invest in Cook" grant from Cook County to fund a Phase 1 engineering study conducted by V3 Engineering Consultants. That study assessed the feasibility of rebuilding Forest Boulevard and explored options to improve accessibility, drainage, and aesthetics.

Early cost estimates exceeded \$6 million, leading Village staff to pursue additional grant opportunities. Because Forest Boulevard is classified as a local road, it was ineligible for most state and federal infrastructure programs. Village officials pivoted by reimagining the corridor as a "complete street"—a roadway designed to safely accommodate all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers.

"The complete streets concept not only makes the corridor more accessible and livable, but it also opened doors to funding sources that weren't available before," Christie said.

Under this plan, the western two lanes of Forest Boulevard between Indianwood and Lakewood Boulevards will be removed and replaced with a linear park and multi-use path extending to Westwood Drive, with future plans to reach Allegheny Street.

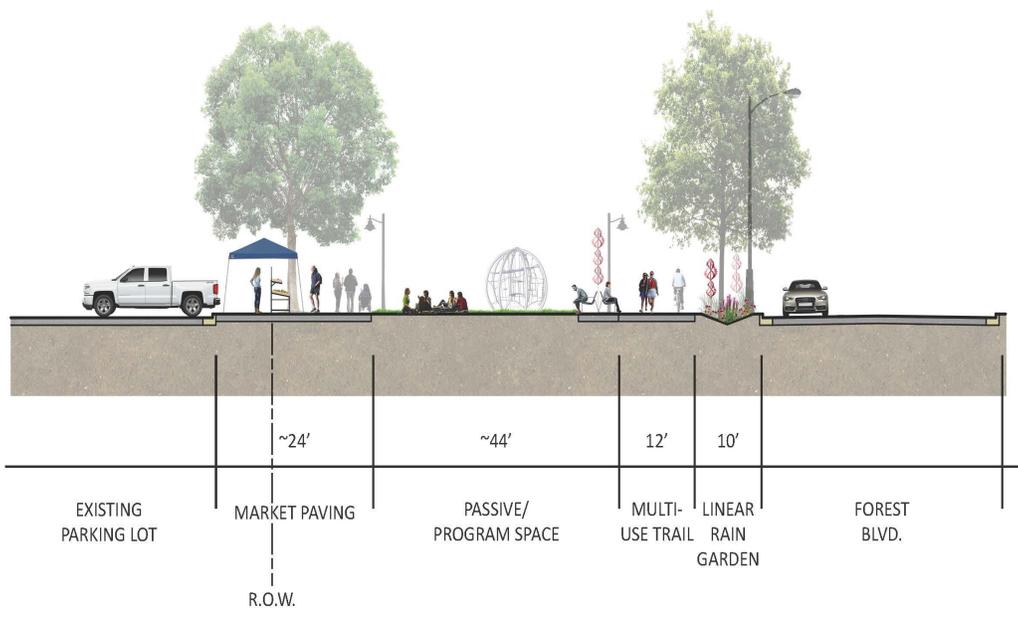
The project gained momentum in 2020, when the Village received another \$480,000 Invest in Cook grant for Phase 2 engineering design. Later, the Village secured \$3 million from the Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program, which made the project financially feasible.

In total, the Village has now received more than \$4.2 million in grant funding for the Forest Boulevard project, including a final \$480,000 award from Cook County for construction engineering.

When completed, Forest Boulevard will

feature modernized ADA-accessible infrastructure, improved drainage, new curbs and gutters, and additional parking to serve nearby Park Forest Co-op communities.

"This project is a major investment in Park Forest's infrastructure and quality of life," Christie said. "It's been a long process to get to this point, but residents will see the benefits for decades to come."



A cross-section of what the Forest Boulevard update will look like.

Park Forest prepares major infrastructure projects for 2026

The Village of Park Forest is gearing up for a series of significant infrastructure improvements in 2026, focusing on water main replacements, street reconstructions, sewer upgrades, and water tower rehabilitation. Village officials say these projects reflect a continued commitment to maintaining and modernizing the community's essential services.

"We're making strategic investments that will benefit residents for years to come," said Nick Christie, Assistant Director of Public Works. "From water reliability to safer streets, these projects address critical infrastructure needs across the Village."

Water Main Replacements

Park Forest will replace several water mains throughout the community, funded by grants and low-interest loans from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA). The IEPA-supported projects include:

- Miami Street, from Suwanee to Indianwood (1 mile)
- Somonauk Street, from Shabbona to Mantua (0.45 miles)
- Douglas Street, from Indiana to Springfield (0.34 miles)
- South Street, from South Street to the Village Water Plant (0.15 miles)

The Village received a \$1.54 million IEPA grant for these improvements.

"Replacing aging water mains ensures our residents continue to have safe and reliable water service," Christie said. "These upgrades also reduce the risk of leaks and service disruptions, as well as improving fire flows, which is a major benefit for the community."

Additional water main replacement on Neola Street, from Indianwood to Oswego (0.25 miles), will be funded through a grant from the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE). "It's a small section, but it's crucial to maintaining consistent and adequate water flow in that area," Christie added.

Water Tower Rehabilitation

The Village also received a \$471,000 IEPA grant, paired with a low-interest loan, to rehabilitate the

water tower near Tamarack Drive and Crawford Avenue. "As our oldest water tower is more than a local landmark—it's a vital part of the Village's water system," said Christie. "Rehabilitating it improves both safety and service reliability."

Street Reconstruction

In addition to the ongoing Forest Boulevard project, the Village will reconstruct Talala Street, from Tampa to Nauvoo, and Towanda Court (0.6 miles). Christie noted that the work includes repaving, repairing curbs, and improving drainage.

"Street reconstruction is about a lot more than just smooth pavement," he said. "It's about making streets safer for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians, and ensuring proper drainage to prevent long-term damage."

Sewer Improvements

Park Forest will also use a \$400,000 Cook County Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to install approximately 10,951 linear feet of Cured in Place Pipe (CIPP) liner in sanitary sewers south of Sauk Trail, northwest of Indianwood Boulevard, north of Blackhawk Drive, and primarily in the "M" Street neighborhoods.

"This CIPP lining is a modern, cost-effective solution to prevent sewer backups and extend the life of our system," Christie said. "It's minimally disruptive but highly effective, and residents will see fewer issues over time."

Looking Ahead

Christie emphasized that the combination of grants, low-interest loans, and local planning allows the Village to tackle multiple projects simultaneously without overburdening taxpayers. "We're using every tool available to invest in the infrastructure that keeps Park Forest running smoothly," he said. "2026 is going to be a big year for improvements, and our residents will directly benefit from safer streets, stronger water systems, and upgraded sewer infrastructure."

Residents are encouraged to follow the Village's website and social media channels for updates on construction timelines and temporary street closures.

Keeping Park Forest moving: How public works prepares for winter weather

As another Midwest winter approaches, Park Forest residents know that snow is never far behind. Each year, the Village's Public Works Department takes center stage when the flakes begin to fall — working around the clock to ensure that roads remain safe and passable for residents, school buses, and emergency vehicles.

Public Works Director Roderick Ysaguirre and his team maintain more than 65 miles of roadway across the Village. That includes everything from major multilane thoroughfares such as Orchard Drive and Indianwood Boulevard to neighborhood streets that connect families, schools, and businesses.

“Our goals are simple — Safe roadway surfaces and protecting our environment,” Ysaguirre said. “When snow starts to accumulate, we follow a strategic plan that prioritizes the roads most essential for travel and emergency response. We also apply various Best Management Practices to protect the environment.”

That plan kicks in as soon as the forecast calls for measurable snow. Typically, plowing begins once two inches of snow have accumulated. The department assigns two groups of three 2.5-ton snow trucks plowing in tandem, to clear the Village's two main salt and plow routes. Once those priority routes are open, crews split into three teams of two to begin clearing secondary and local streets throughout the community.

“It takes around three to four hours to make one pass along main routes and another three to four hours to make one pass along secondary and local routes. So, it's a process that takes time, especially during large or prolonged snowfalls,” Ysaguirre explained. “But our crews work continuously until the job is done — often through the night — to make sure residents can travel safely.”

Park Forest's main plow routes include well-traveled corridors such as Blackhawk Drive, Westwood Drive, Wildwood Drive, Indiana Street, Illinois Street, Shabbona Drive, Lakewood Boulevard, North Street, Dogwood Street, Alleghany Street, and Algonquin Street. These are cleared first to maintain access for emergency vehicles, followed by side streets and cul-de-sacs.

Ysaguirre said community cooperation is key to an

efficient snow removal operation. “The biggest help residents can provide is moving vehicles off the street during snow events,” he noted. “When the roads are clear, our plows can work faster and more effectively.”

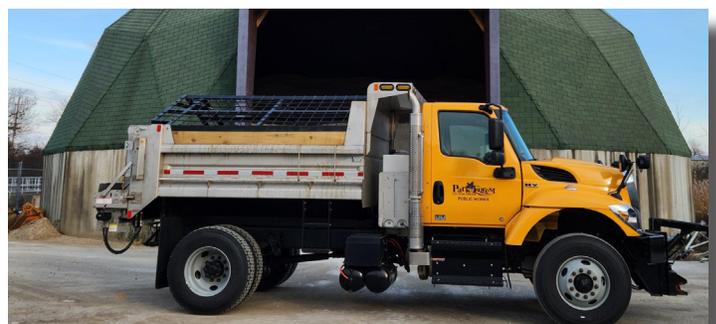
To support that effort, Park Forest enforces a Snow Route Parking Ban whenever two inches or more of snow or ice accumulate on Village streets. The ban remains in effect until all snow and ice from the storm have been completely removed. Cars left on the street during this time may be ticketed or towed, as they can prevent plows from properly clearing the area.

For residents living in multi-family areas, co-ops, condos, or homeowners associations, Ysaguirre reminds everyone that snow removal in those areas is often handled by private contractors. “If you're not sure who's responsible for plowing your area, contact your property management office or HOA for clarification,” he advised.

While Park Forest's winters can be unpredictable, preparation is always the department's best tool. Ahead of the season, crews inspect and service all plows, salt spreaders, and other equipment, and stock up on salt brine and road salt to ensure readiness for the first storm.

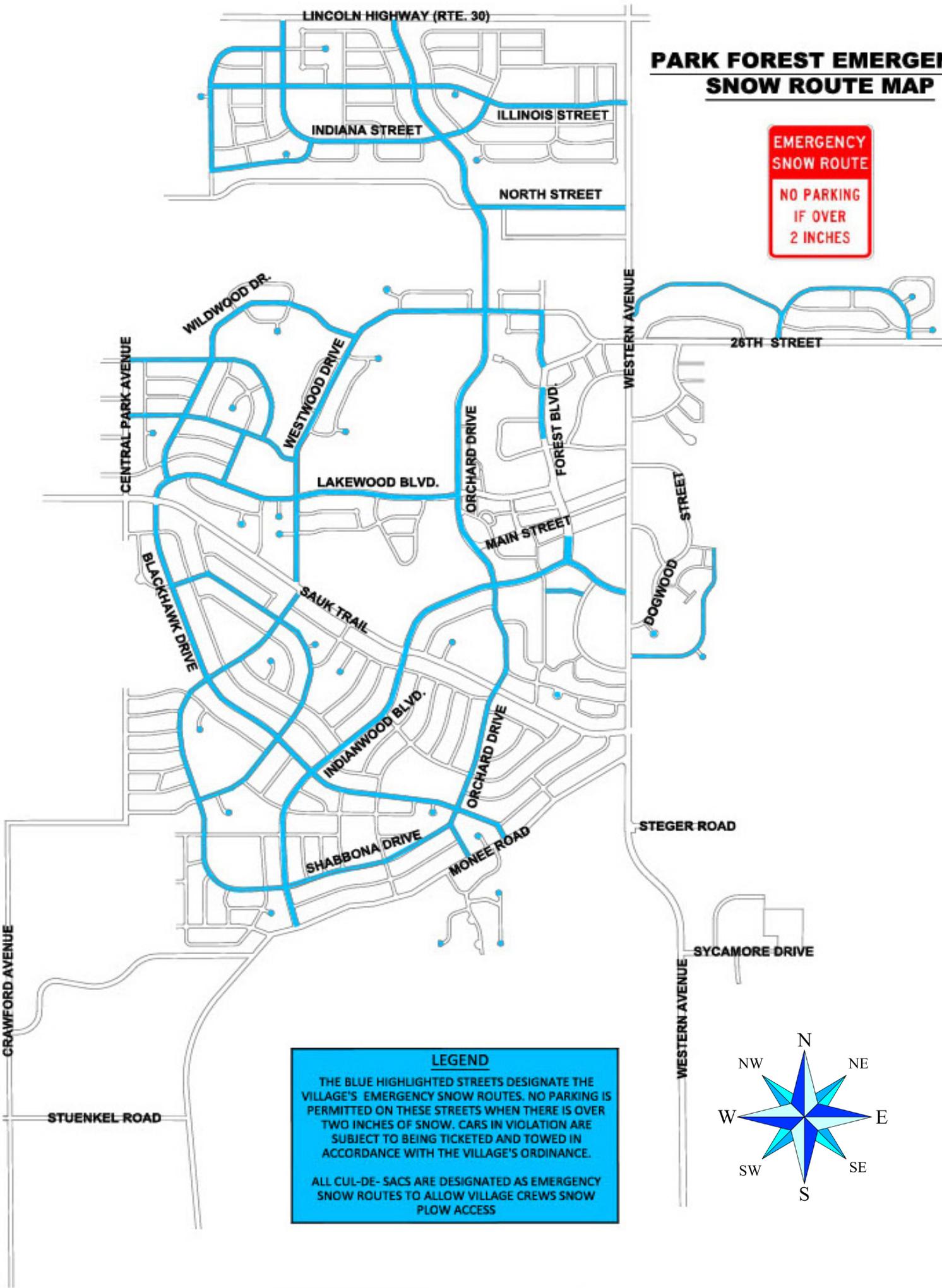
Ysaguirre said that despite the challenges, his team takes pride in their work each winter. “Snow removal isn't just about clearing roads — it's about keeping the community connected,” he said. “When residents can get to work, kids can get to school, and emergency services can respond quickly, that's when we know we've done our job.”

As winter 2025–2026 unfolds, Park Forest residents can count on their Public Works team to be ready — plows down, lights on, and dedicated to keeping the Village moving safely through whatever the season brings.



PARK FOREST EMERGENCY SNOW ROUTE MAP

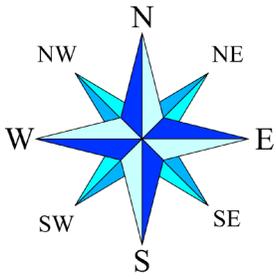
EMERGENCY SNOW ROUTE
NO PARKING IF OVER 2 INCHES



LEGEND

THE BLUE HIGHLIGHTED STREETS DESIGNATE THE VILLAGE'S EMERGENCY SNOW ROUTES. NO PARKING IS PERMITTED ON THESE STREETS WHEN THERE IS OVER TWO INCHES OF SNOW. CARS IN VIOLATION ARE SUBJECT TO BEING TICKETED AND TOWED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VILLAGE'S ORDINANCE.

ALL CUL-DE-SACS ARE DESIGNATED AS EMERGENCY SNOW ROUTES TO ALLOW VILLAGE CREWS SNOW PLOW ACCESS



The below is an advertisement. Local group. Contact Pathlights for more information.

Pathlights - supporting the community as it ages

Caring for an older loved one is one of the most meaningful gifts you can give. But for many caregivers—particularly those caring for someone living with Alzheimer’s disease or another dementia related disorder—the emotional, physical, and mental demands can be overwhelming.

It is easy to focus entirely on the person you love, but your own health and well-being are just as important. The truth is simple: when caregivers take care of themselves, they can provide better, safer, and more compassionate care for those who depend on them.

These numbers make it clear - caregivers need care, too.

- More than 53 million Americans are unpaid caregivers, and about 83% of them care for an older adult.
- Approximately 11.5 million family members and friends are currently caring for someone living with Alzheimer’s or another dementia. Together, they provide over 18 billion hours of unpaid care each year—an economic value of nearly \$340 billion.

- The average dementia caregiver spends about 27 hours per week providing care

Pathlights understands that caregiving for an older adult—especially one living with dementia—can feel like a full-time job. Our goal is to make sure caregivers never have to do it alone. Self care isn’t selfish – it is necessary.

Pathlights Caregiver Resource Center offers a range of supports and services designed to help you care for yourself while caring for others:

- o One-on-One Supportive Counseling
- o Respite Services
- o Support Groups
- o Memory Cafe
- o Educational Events

You don’t have to navigate caregiving alone. You are the foundation of the care - your health, strength, and wellness matter.

Call Pathlights, 708-361-0219, to learn more about the resources and supports available to meet your unique needs.



Pathlights 50 YEARS

**Enriched by experience.
Empowered in life.**

GET INVOLVED

Monray Larry and her husband have lived in Park Forest for eight years. She joined the Human Relations Commission five years ago after completing the Park Forest Leadership Academy, which inspired her to get involved. She became Chair in 2022, motivated by a desire to support a critical community need. Monray encourages others to serve, noting that teamwork and civic responsibility strengthen the Village. Through her service, she's built connections, learned about Park Forest, and found her life enriched by community involvement.



You can volunteer to be on any of the following boards or commissions:

- 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 Administration Department at Village Hall or go to villageofparkforest.com/volunteer



Mayor/Village President
Joseph A. Woods

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

Manager
Jon Kindseth

Clerk
Sheila McGann

Please Recycle



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.

FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY TIPS



Beware of fire hazards.

Cooking, heating, electrical outlets, cigarettes, and candles are common fire hazards.

Check fire alarms.

Test smoke alarms every month. Replace the batteries every year.

Know what to do.

Create a fire escape plan with exit points for every room in your home.

Conduct a fire drill.

Practice your fire escape plan. Know how to stop, drop, and roll.

Ask for help.

Know who to call in case of a fire. Stay calm and give them your address with landmarks.

Do you need a smoke detector installed?

Call the Park Forest Fire Department at 708-748-5605