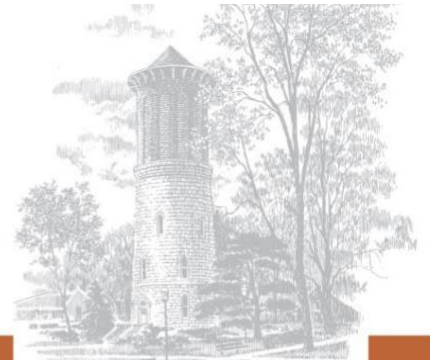


Village of Western Springs

TUESDAY TOPICS



January 5, 2021

President's Annual Address*

What a year we've endured! The COVID-19 pandemic has overwhelmed our hearts and minds, and upended our lives in significant ways. It has impacted Village operations and fiscal planning at every level. Municipal government exists first and foremost to serve and protect residents, and this remains the number one priority during this prolonged crisis. Despite significant challenges, all departments remained open and the Board continued with monthly meetings, so that services and community support would continue unabated. Telework and virtual meetings are now the norm as Village Hall remains closed while renovations to protect the public and staff are completed. Village Hall will reopen in early 2021.

With hope on the horizon that we may soon return to our normal way of life, please take a moment to find the good in this past year's extraordinary events. We may have to dig a little deeper to find it, but it's there. For my part, I am very grateful for the many residents who volunteer their time and considerable expertise to serve on advisory boards and commissions. Their input is a vital component of the Village Board's decision-making process. I am so fortunate to serve with the talented members of the Board: Trustees Nicole Chen, Al Fink, James John, Scott Lewis, Heidi Rudolph, Jim Tyrrell, and Clerk Jim Horvath. Especially this year, Manager Velkme, departmental directors, and the entire staff are to be commended for their devotion to duty, adaptability, and resilience. And, of course, a special thanks to our first responders who consistently put the health and safety of others before their own. I couldn't ask to work with a more professional, more dedicated group of people.

In addition to the pandemic and other complex issues facing the Board this year, our Village lost two of its finest public servants. In March, our respected colleague, Bill Siffermann, unexpectedly passed away. Bill made a career out of public service, specifically public health and safety, and in retirement he chose to volunteer his time and talents to give back to the community he loved. He was always a steady voice of reason on issues before the Board, and it was a pleasure to work with him and call him a friend. Along with a memorial plaque, a lilac tree has been planted in Bill's honor at Blue Star Memorial Park, just north of the Fire House.

In June, former Village President Saranne Milano passed away. In addition to her many other volunteer endeavors, Saranne was a Village Trustee, served as the Village's first female president, and was recognized as Western Springs' Senior Citizen of the year in 2018 by Congressman Lipinski. To know Saranne was to love her, and she is deeply missed.

The following is a brief recap of noteworthy events from the past year. More information about many of these topics can be found on the Village website.

Major Events Recap:

- The Tollway's Central Tri-State widening project is well underway. The shoofly is complete, and all trains are now traveling on the temporary tracks. The early morning pile-driving and other construction noise has been an immense aggravation, especially to those residents closest to the project. Thank you for your patience throughout. As part of this project, the Tollway will build a new pedestrian bridge connecting Spring Rock and Veeck Parks at 47th Street next year. Once completed, the old pedestrian bridge at Maple Street will be removed.
- Torrential downpours in recent years have been devastating to some areas within the Village, especially certain sections of both Springdale and Ridgewood. Infrastructure studies have been completed in both areas, and several substantial improvements are recommended. In the upcoming year, the Village Board will be addressing next steps, including the significant financial cost and strategic planning necessary to adequately manage severe storms.
- Several residents have asked the Board to investigate the lack of contiguous sidewalks in Forest Hills. In October, the Board authorized a feasibility study that will better identify the scope, cost, and aesthetic impact of such a large-scale project. The study is expected to be completed in the first quarter of next year.
- Over the course of 2020, the Village Board and staff have spent considerable time, effort, and money in researching state and federal laws governing 5G small cell technology, engaging in community outreach including hosting a Town Hall meeting, advocating on behalf of concerned residents, drafting amendatory language to the State Act, and engaging a lobbyist to promote that legislation in Springfield. The fact remains that the Village is limited in its authority to allow or deny the installation of 5G cell towers. Under the law, we cannot legally deny the installation of 5G cell towers based on health or property value concerns. With Representative Mazzochi and Senator Glowiak-Hilton, the legislation's sponsors in Springfield, we are doing all we legally can to regain some of the authority lost to state and federal usurpation. In the meantime, I recently signed an Executive Order which suspends the time period for review and approval of 5G permit applications for as long as the Village's and State of Illinois' COVID-19 pandemic disaster declarations are in place. If you are concerned about 5G, contact your state and federal representatives and your telecommunications provider – they need to hear concerns directly from their constituents/customers. Contact information and many other resources can be found on the 5G webpage of the Village's website.

General:

- Lakeshore Recycling Services became the Village's refuse and recycling provider, and the Village's 4500 households converted to a cart collection system. There is a slight rate increase in 2021, as per the contract agreement. More information can be found on the website.
- The Village introduced the new Smart911 emergency notification system which provides timely and actionable alerts via email, text, or voice messages. For more information and to register, click on the "Rave Alert/ Smart911" icon on the Village website.
- In order to provide safer streets and more efficient plowing, the Village Board amended its ordinance to no longer permit on-street parking after a snowfall of 2 inches – a change from the previous measure of 4 inches.
- The Illinois Society of Fire Service Instructors awarded Deputy Chief Patrick Gallagher with the much-deserved 2019 Instructor of the Year Award.
- The Village partnered with Thomas Ford Library to crown a Pet Mayor of Western Springs. Following the Facebook election, Porter the dog emerged victorious. Special thanks to resident Hazel Stocco for a great idea that brought levity during the early weeks of the pandemic.
- The United States 2020 Census took place between April and October. Western Springs rated first among Lyons Township towns, with a response rate of approximately 90%.
- Household Cleanup Day took place in June. Fifteen LRS trucks blanketed the Village, collecting 385 tons of household waste, an increase of 75% from last year.

- The Village unveiled a new online system for non-emergency service requests. The link can be found by clicking on the circular “Service Request” icon on the front page of the Village website.
- The Water Department’s annual Water Quality Report was mailed to residents. This report confirms that our water supply meets or exceeds all required IEPA standards. Our finished water is tested daily for a number of parameters, and undergoes regular bacteria and chlorine testing. More information, including the Water Quality Report, is on the Water Department’s page of the website.
- The new electric vehicle charging station at Grand and Burlington is in service. The charging station, adjacent bike shelter, and brick paver improvements, were all part of a project funded by the West Suburban Mass Transit District.
- The Village completed a comprehensive inventory of public trees to assess the condition and health of the urban forest, using funds from an Urban and Community Forestry grant.
- Prospect from Chestnut to Hillgrove and Clausen from 41st to Hillgrove were reconstructed in concrete, along with sub-grade infrastructure improvements. Due to its overall poor condition, the beloved “Keebler” tree at the corner of Prospect and Reid had to come down, and residents were offered memorial slices of the tree as a keepsake. As part of Combined Sewer Overflow Long Term Control Plan, a [bioswale](#) was established at the Prospect and Reid island to help stem the flow of stormwater during significant rains. In addition to these projects, several asphalt resurfacing projects were completed this year. See the Village website for more information.
- Despite additional challenges and delays brought on by the pandemic, construction of Well #5 is now complete with the addition of the electrical housing. The Village is awaiting installation of additional surge protection equipment before bringing the Well online. Come springtime, the Village will add landscaping on the site to soften the appearance of this critical piece of infrastructure.
- After a six-month hiatus due to COVID-19, the Styrofoam recycling program resumed in October. This successful program takes place on the first Saturday morning of each month at the Recreation Center parking lot, and is staffed by the First Congregational Church’s Green Team and Village staff.
- For the *25th consecutive year* the Village Finance Department received a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the year ending December 31, 2018. This prestigious award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) recognizes local governments that model transparency and full disclosure in their financial reporting.
- The Western Springs Police Department received its *sixth consecutive* reaccreditation award from the Commission on the Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). They also received the Advanced Accreditation with Excellence Award for their continuous commitment to public safety professionalism. This is an elite group: only 41 out of a possible 877 Illinois law enforcement agencies achieve this recognition.
- Residents voted on an advisory referendum question on the November 3 ballot regarding cannabis. The vote was approximately 60/40 to prohibit the recreational sale of cannabis in Western Springs. The Village Trustees subsequently passed an ordinance opting out of recreational dispensaries within Village boundaries.
- A recent Illinois Environmental Protection Agency investigation into PFAS (human-made chemicals) in drinking water confirmed that none of these chemicals were present in the Village’s finished water at concentrations greater than or equal to minimum reporting levels. These outstanding results are largely due to the location of the Village’s wells, and the reverse osmosis treatment method. Learn more on water testing and data page of the Village’s website.
- The Recreation Department, in partnership with SEASPAR, unveiled the new multi-sensory room at Grand Avenue Community Center. This space, named Ray’s Bay in honor of resident and long-time SEASPAR board member Ray Jasica, contains specially-designed interactive equipment that benefits individuals with special needs.
- Registration for Recreation Department programs is now available online using RecDesk. Learn more on the Recreation Department page of the Village website.

- Along with the organizational changes brought on by the pandemic, the Village saw several personnel changes this past year. In the Police Department, Sergeants John Piest and Tony Jemison retired after serving 24 years and 21 years, respectively. In the Fire & EMS Department, Lieutenant Fred Lesch and Captain Jim Jagoda retired after 40 years and nearly 23 years, respectively. Firefighters Paul Tegtmeier and Lou Hansen also retired with more than 30 years of service each. With a combined total of over 150 years protecting our health and safety, we thank our retirees for their many years of service and wish them well.
- Please join the Board in congratulating WSFD members Captain Steve Smith, Lieutenant Stephanie Grimm, Lieutenant Chris Langstaff, and WSPD member Sergeant Arthur Hull for their recent promotions. We also extend a warm welcome to Officers Bradley Jasutis and Aaron Riley, who joined the WSPD this year.
- In May, the Board welcomed Trustee Scott Lewis to serve the remainder of Bill Siffermann's term, through May 2021. Prior to his appointment, Trustee Lewis served on the infrastructure commission. He assumed this role under the most challenging circumstances, and we are grateful for his service.
- In October, the Village welcomed Jim Tock as Director of the newly established Department of Engineering Services. Director Tock brings a wealth of municipal experience managing complex engineering improvements, and we look forward to working with him.

To stay informed of projects, events, and issues in the Village, sign up for community alerts on the website at www.wsprings.com. Village Board meetings are currently held using Zoom. They are typically held on the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month at 7 pm. Please check the website for the complete schedule under "Government" tab of the website. The Board is readily accessible by email, and I encourage you to follow the Village on Facebook and Instagram.

This past year has been like no other. Much of what transpired this past year is beyond our control, but what we can control is how we react in the face of adversity, and how we treat each other. I am humbled by the kindness, generosity, understanding, and support our entire community has shown one another throughout the pandemic. Please continue to remember folks who live alone or are struggling. Your caring can make all the difference as we look forward to a year that we are confident will be better.

A look ahead to 2021 will be included in the March/April issue of *Tower Topics*.

On behalf of the Village Board of Trustees and staff, wishing you and yours a healthy and happy New Year!

Until next week,



Alice Gallagher,
Village President

*the President's Annual Address will also be published in the January/February issue of *Tower Topics*.

*Wear a Mask, Socially Distance, Wash Hands, Be Safe
Take Care of Yourself, Protect Others, Support our Community*