

## **2012 State of the Village Address**

In last year's State of the Village address, I spoke about how our Village, though certainly affected by the national economic recession, has risen above the financial hardship, uncertainty and instability that has plagued so many communities. During this time of turmoil, La Grange Park received national recognition for its stable housing market and high quality of life. This recognition was well deserved, and it did not come by accident.

What makes a great community "great?" Things like strong schools, solid infrastructure, affordable housing, and a diverse commercial base all come to mind. These items, coupled with community amenities such as ample parks, libraries and recreational facilities create a solid foundation for a community, but what really makes a community great is its residents. Residents who care about their community, who care about each other, and who take the time to contribute what they can, and in their own way, to making La Grange Park better. Our residents have always played an integral role in building our community and it is this tradition of civic engagement that has helped La Grange Park rise to the national spotlight.

Tonight, I'd like to reflect back on the past year and what we, collectively as a Village, have accomplished. I'd like to share with you our plans and initiatives for the future and how we intend to continue to build on this great community.

I'm joined this evening with fellow members of the Village Board, along with many volunteers who serve on Village committees and commissions. We are fortunate to have their leadership and guidance and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to serve with them.

Fiscal responsibility continues to be the number one priority for the Village. Over the past few years, the Village made some difficult decisions in an effort to ensure financial stability for the future. As a result, the Village has a leaner staff than it did just a few years ago and our remaining staff have been charged with continuing to provide the same level of service to the community – essentially accomplishing more with less. While the Village has experienced some staffing changes over the past year, which you'll hear about in greater detail a little later, the current budget proposes no increases to existing staffing levels.

The Village has been diligent in monitoring its expenditures and ended the 2012 fiscal year with a small surplus, despite projecting a deficit budget. While this is good news, a surplus was

realized in part because funding for capital projects was significantly reduced, a strategy that cannot be sustained over the long term.

Last year's revenues were up slightly over the previous year, with a 2% increase in overall revenues. Sales tax revenues were up nominally and income tax revenues increased nearly 12%. While this is a good sign, other revenue sources, such as utility tax and telecommunications tax revenues decreased. As a result, the Village has remained conservative in estimating future revenues and has carefully planned and allocated funding for future capital improvements.

The current year's budget for all funds totals nearly \$14 million; a 16.8% increase over last year's budget. This increase is due primarily to the addition of several capital projects, which I will share with you in greater detail later this evening. Revenues over the current fiscal year are projected to remain relatively flat – a conservative estimate on the part of the Village to ensure that we do not overestimate the funds we will have available for operating expenditures and capital improvements.

After enduring multiple years of economic recession, it has become increasingly challenging for the Village to maintain a solid budget, while still providing the same level of service to the community. As a result, the Village is conducting a Local Revenue Study to evaluate its fee and revenue structure and to ensure that the Village is recouping all of our costs associated with the various services we provide. The results of the study will inform future adjustments to our fee structure and ensure that the Village positions itself well to meet ongoing and future obligations.

The Village recognizes that our charge to remain fiscally sound extends beyond our own budget, and this year through a referendum on the March ballot, the Village provided residents the opportunity to allow the Village to aggregate our residential and small business electrical supply. Residents voted in favor of the referendum, the Village solicited bids for a lower-cost energy supplier and selected First Energy. Over 97% of all eligible residential and small businesses opted to participate in the municipal aggregation program. Participants will see savings on their October electricity bills and the average household can expect to save over \$330 annually as a result of the program.

In an effort to save taxpayer dollars, the Village continues to pursue opportunities to obtain grant monies whenever possible. Our Village lobbyist, Chris Ganschaw of Cagwood Consulting,

has been instrumental in identifying and assisting the Village secure grant funds; and for that we are very appreciative. Last year, the Village received over \$537,000 in grant funds and we expect to receive even more this fiscal year. Once awarded, the Village works to leverage these funds in a way that minimizes current and future costs to the Village. Last winter, the Village completed a comprehensive upgrade of all the lighting fixtures in the Village Hall and Police Department to more energy efficient lighting. The total cost of the project was nearly \$21,000, all funded by a grant through the State. This summer, all of the interior lighting fixtures in the Public Works Facility were upgraded and all of the exterior fixtures were replaced. This \$22,000 project was over 95% funded by State grants and resulted in much needed improvements to the facility. These upgrades not only increase safety and efficiency, but they substantially reduce bulb replacement costs and emissions.

The Public Works facility is in need of structural and mechanical improvements and progress on the Renovation Project continues. In May, the Village welcomed new Public Works Director Brendan McLaughlin who, along with the Public Works Garage Committee, led by Trustee Mesick, has worked tirelessly to evaluate all possible options for the nearly 60 year old facility; ensuring that the Village was making the right decision for the community moving forward. While the Village had hoped that it could construct new, after a comprehensive evaluation of the costs, the Village determined that it would not be financially feasible to construct new under the identified project budget. As a result, the Village has recently released a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a \$1 million renovation of the existing building. Renovations include removing all hazardous materials from the building, cleaning up the former gun range in the basement of the building, replacing all windows, upgrading existing mechanical systems and stabilizing and enhancing the existing façade. Approximately 60% of the project will be funded by grants the Village has received from the State of Illinois and the project is expected to be completed by February 2014.

The Public Works Department received a grant to make improvements to two of the Village's water pumps. While the Village budgeted monies to make these improvements, the grant obtained from the State covered the majority of the cost and the improvements were completed at a cost of only \$1,800 to the Village.

This past year, the Village completed Phase 2 of the reconstruction of Beach Avenue and also completed resurfacing projects on Blanchan and Morgan. The current budget does not include any street paving projects. Instead, the Village has several other large capital projects planned. These include a major reconstruction of a portion of the water main located along south La Grange Road. The existing 6" water main that runs under the sidewalk from Brewster to Oak

will be replaced by a 10" water main. The project will be completed in two segments. Once complete, residents will benefit from improved water flows available for fire protection and the reduced risk of water main breaks due to aging infrastructure. This \$890,000 project is over 50% funded by a grant received from the Army Corps of Engineers. Construction is slated to begin spring 2013.

Each year the Village budgets to plant parkway trees throughout the community and this year is no exception. The current budget contains \$15,000 for tree-planting. In an effort to stretch taxpayer dollars, the Public Works Department secured a \$15,000 matching grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, bringing the total tree planting budget to \$30,000. All trees will be planted in-house by department employees, saving money and maximizing the benefits of the funds to the community.

Many residents will recall the heavy rain event and resulting flooding that occurred in La Grange Park and surrounding communities during the summer of 2010. The event brought to light some of the challenges associated with the Village's combined sewer system. As a result, the Engineering and Capital Projects Committee, led by Trustee Seeder, reconvened and worked with Village staff and the Village Engineer to complete a comprehensive review of the Village's storm water drainage system and options available to mitigate the impacts of flooding on the Village. This effort culminated into a comprehensive Flood Mitigation Report, which includes both Village-wide recommendations and actions individual residents can take to mitigate flood impacts. Two of the Committee's recommendations have already been implemented – *the Flood Incident Action Plan and the Resident's Guide to Flooding*. Other elements of the report will guide future efforts on the part of the Village to minimize flooding impacts on the community from rain events.

The Police Department, led by Police Chief Dan McCollum, has been successful in securing funding to improve service and increase safety, all while minimizing the cost to residents. In the last two years, the Police Department received over \$90,000 in Justice Assistance Grants to support the Adopt-A-Cop Program, school safety patrols, and park and bicycle patrols. This funding also supported the purchase of two new police vehicles, radar equipment, speed monitoring signs and safety clothing for crossing guards. This year the Police Department also installed in-car video in the majority of our squad cars, funded entirely by grant dollars.

This fall, the Department welcomed a new probationary police officer, Timothy Griffin, to the community, a position that was budgeted, but remained unfilled until recently. The new officer

came to the Village having already completed more than 400 hours of police training; saving the Village over \$10,000 in training costs.

To help ensure that the Village is receiving the revenues that it's owed, the Village is participating in a new program run by the State Comptroller Office, called the Local Debt Recovery Program. This program will assist the Village in recovering outstanding parking tickets and fines that are owed. Currently, the Village has the potential to recover \$250,000 in outstanding fees and fines. The Police Department has also made it easier to pay parking citations and fines by adding an online and pay-by-phone option, which can be accessed through the Village's website.

The Village continues to look outside our organization for potential cost savings. Today's economic state has forced governments to think creatively about how we provide services to our communities and to work collaboratively to reduce costs and improve efficiencies. As a result, the Village is currently working with the Villages of La Grange and Western Springs to undertake a shared service study for dispatch services. The study will consider personnel, financial, logistical, administrative, governance and technological needs as well as incorporate a cost-benefit analysis. This information will be used to identify opportunities for the provision of shared dispatch services to improve public safety services and efficiencies in operation. The study is underway with anticipated completion in early 2013.

The Fire Department, led by Director of Fire and Building and Emergency Management, Chief Dean Maggos, continues to work to enhance its service to the community and this year welcomed six new part-time paid on-call firefighters, which helped replenish current staffing levels. The Department continues to operate using a combination of many dedicated part-time personnel and contracted full-time paramedic/firefighters. Being able to continue providing service in this manner is a prolonged and remarkable benefit, in that it continues to save residents hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, and all paid-on-call firefighters are residents, our neighbors and friends.

During the past year, the Fire Department continued to better prepare for emergencies through aggressive training. This past spring our new firefighters attended a fire academy that is run jointly with other nearby communities, including Riverside and Western Springs. Senior personnel from our department helped run the academy by teaching some of the classes to help share and offset the costs of training our personnel. Our Fire Department also hosted a Leadership course this past spring, run by the Illinois Fire Service Institute, which is part of the University of Illinois. Throughout the year, firefighters conducted many realistic hands-on

training sessions. Most recently, they have been using a home in the 300 block of Stone which is scheduled for demolition. Our firefighters relish these opportunities, and sincerely appreciate residents who deal with some of the inconveniences created by such trainings.

The Department undertook an ISO Survey for the first time since 1997 to update the Village's ISO rating. A community's ISO rating is a reflection on the quality of the fire protection services provided. A favorable rating can result in reduced insurance premiums for homeowners. The Survey involves an extensive review of Fire Department procedures and processes as well as testing of the Village's water flows available for fire-fighting purposes. Although the preliminary findings were promising, the Village will not receive the final results of the survey until early 2013.

The Fire Department purchased new rescue tools to assist in rescuing persons trapped in vehicles or obscured by heavy obstacles. A \$20,335 grant from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program funded the purchase of new a hydraulic rescue power unit and cutter and new air lifting bags.

The Administration Department, led by Finance Director, Pierre Garesche and new Assistant Village Manager, Emily Rodman, has undergone some changes as the Village welcomed new Administrative Clerk, Deanne Curelo, and Administrative Intern, Traci Steger. The Department recently reconfigured and transferred some existing employee duties to better align employee expertise with responsibilities, thereby improving service to residents. The Administration Department has recently revamped the format of the Village's E-brief's – the electronic newsletter that is emailed weekly to residents. The Village recently celebrated its 1200<sup>th</sup> E-briefs subscriber and is excited that so many of our residents want to stay informed about Village news and events. The Administration Department is also in the process of reconfiguring the Village website to make it more user-friendly and informative to residents as part of the Village's continued efforts to improve transparency and communication with the community.

After 36 years, long-time Village Treasurer Richard "Dick" Zeiler retired and the Village welcomed new Village Treasurer, Chad Chevalier in August.

The Village also celebrated some non-financial successes this year. In 2011, the United States Postal Service announced they were considering closing several underperforming postal branch locations in Illinois, including the La Grange Park branch located on 31<sup>st</sup> Street. The Village recognized that maintaining our branch was important to our residents. In an effort to prevent the local branch from closing, the Village held a community meeting with Postal Service

officials, produced a film highlighting the value of our local branch, and recorded video testimonials of local residents on the issue. The Village also reached out to State and Federal officials and stressed the significance of the branch to the community. Our efforts paid off, and in May of this year, the Postal Service announced that they had renewed their lease at the 31<sup>st</sup> location for 5 years. This is just another example of how you, as a resident, can make a difference in our community.

The Cool Village Commission, led by chairperson Christa Grimm, was created in 2009 to make recommendations to the Village Board on how the Village can reduce its carbon footprint, while promoting water conservation and the improvement of air, climate and water quality. The Commission worked tirelessly over the past two years to complete a community-wide and government greenhouse gas emissions inventory reports, along with a Sustainability Plan. In March of this year, the Village Board approved the inventory reports and adopted the Sustainability Plan. These documents will help inform future Village practices and policies. The Cool Village Commission also sponsors several annual events in the community, including the recently held E-waste recycling event and the first ever community sale of rain barrels and compost bins. The Commission also worked with our local Ace Hardware store, who has volunteered to collect used CFL bulbs and dispose of them at no cost to residents. We are very proud of all of the work this Commission has done for the betterment of our community; and on behalf of the Village, I wish to extend my appreciation for all their efforts.

In order to ensure that our community continues to prosper and grow, the Commercial Revitalization Committee, led by Trustee Topps, has been hard at work in creating a new Action Plan for La Grange Park. This Plan, which is being drafted in conjunction with input from the Village's business community and the La Grange Park Chamber of Commerce, outlines strategies and objectives for the Village's current and future economic development efforts.

The Commercial Revitalization Committee, working closely with Village staff, has accomplished a number of initiatives this year. One of these initiatives included welcoming a new Commercial Revitalization Intern, Katie Hosso, who has been assisting Village staff develop marketing and outreach materials to promote vacant space within the community to potential businesses. Last month, Village staff attended the International Council of Shopping Centers Chicago Deal-Making Tradeshow in Chicago. There they spent time marketing the Village's vacant commercial and industrial spaces to national firms and businesses looking to expand in the Chicagoland market. The Village also created a Businesses Resource Guide to provide key information on Village regulations and useful resources to businesses in one comprehensive

document. All of these efforts were accomplished through the leadership and expertise of Assistant Village Manager, Emily Rodman.

Over the coming months, the Village will be expanding its website to add information on available properties in the community and to provide a portal for businesses to find information important to them, such as information on Village regulations and links to resources for business development. We will also be reaching out to local businesses to get to know them better and to find out how we can assist them in becoming even more successful in the community.

The Village is supporting our 31<sup>st</sup> Street businesses in a very visible way – by adding much needed parking to the 31<sup>st</sup> Street corridor. The Village recently constructed our first ever public parking lot, located on Beach Avenue, behind Angel’s Spirits. The Village acquired the property in 2009 and with the assistance of Senator Cronin, secured \$100,000 in grant funding to finance the cost of constructing the 12 stall parking lot. The Village is hosting a ribbon-cutting for the parking lot tomorrow at 11:00 a.m. If you’re in the neighborhood, please stop by to celebrate with us.

The La Grange Park business community is growing stronger, thanks in large part to the efforts of the La Grange Park Business Association, which has recently become the La Grange Park Chamber of Commerce. This change – from a business association to a chamber of commerce – is just further evidence and testimony to the strength of this organization. The La Grange Park Chamber, led by President Sheri Sauer and its Board of Directors, continues to grow its membership and to expand its presence in the community. The Village is proud to support its efforts by assigning a staff liaison and assisting in the coordination of its endeavors. The Chamber hosts a variety of business-friendly and family-friendly events including Bike Fest and the annual Holiday in the Park event. Mark your calendars for this year’s Holiday in the Park – to be held on December 15<sup>th</sup>. This past year, the Chamber enhanced the Tree Lighting Ceremony by hosting a community chili cook-off event – an event so successful and well attended that it will be held again this year on Friday, December 7<sup>th</sup>. The Chamber also added a Haunted Trolley Trick-or-Treat event, where parents and children could ride trolleys around the community and trick-or-treat amongst local businesses at the Village Market and along 31<sup>st</sup> Street. The event provided an opportunity for families to come out and experience the business community in a new way. Last year, the Chamber unveiled their Shop Local banner program in the community along 31<sup>st</sup> Street and La Grange Road. Member businesses are able to sponsor a colorful light pole banner that reminds residents to shop locally in their community. Shopping locally benefits the community in so many ways – it supports local businesses, it creates more

jobs locally and the sales tax supports local public services such as police and fire service. In the coming year, the Village will be expanding its efforts to encourage residents to shop locally by developing a local business guide and by promoting various businesses within the community.

The Village has over 100 businesses, including banks, retail stores, restaurants, professional and medical offices and warehousing facilities. As in past years, the Village experienced some changes in its business landscape. This year the Village welcomed several new businesses along 31<sup>st</sup> Street, including:

- The Children's House Montessori School (which opens next week)
- Premier Design and Cabinetry
- Arbor Animal Hospital
- Hertz Local Edition
- Accounting Services Association
- Dina's Great Cuts
- and most recently, Subway.
- Back in Balance relocated to its own space in the Village Market and,
- Oasis Women's Fitness and Spa has successfully experienced a change in ownership.

La Grange Park is privileged that these new businesses choose to call our community home and we wish them great success. In fact, I would like to take this opportunity to thank ALL of the businesses in our community. Not only do our local businesses provide much needed services to the community, but they also give back to their community through their generous donation of time, goods and services to various community initiatives and events. I would like to express the Village's appreciation for your willingness to do business here and your support of the community over the years. We're glad you're here.

Nationally, we are seeing signs that the housing market is beginning to recover. While La Grange Park was recognized in 2010 by Forbes Magazine as having one of the most stable housing markets in the country, we have not been immune to the challenges of the market. Still, our community is doing better than most. La Grange Park's foreclosure rate of only 1 in 730 homes compares favorably with the State overall, which has a rate of 1 in every 356 homes and even more favorably than Cook County, where the foreclosure rate is 1 in every 298 homes, over twice that of La Grange Park's. In fact, more homes have sold in La Grange Park in

the previous 10 ten months than sold in all of 2011 and the median sale price of homes has increased by 5% since 2011. Additionally, the average time a home stays on the market has declined by over 20%. Most recently, the Main Street Organization of Realtors noted that homes sales in La Grange Park were up 140% in September, the greatest increase seen in the Chicagoland area. This is evidence that residents are selling their homes more quickly and at higher prices, both of which are a reflection on how desirable our community is to new families.

That desirability is due in large part to the many amenities available to our residents. These amenities include recreational opportunities provided by the Community Park District of La Grange Park. The Park District led by Executive Director Roy Cripe, President Lou Ritten and the Park District Board; is excited to be in the process of finalizing their first master plan in the history of the Park District. After a year-long effort, the Master Plan will be released this coming December. The four year plan includes all of the Park District's facilities and outdoor areas. A date for the final public hearing on the Master Plan will be announced soon and the Park District invites residents to attend the hearing and provide their input.

In order to enhance communication to residents of Park District programs and events, the District recently replaced the old Community Events sign located along La Grange Road, with a new and improved electronic message board. The new sign is installed and will be operating soon, so please be sure you check it out for up-to-date information on Park District happenings.

Despite the limited land available in the community, the Park District continues to look for opportunities to expand and improve its facilities and parks. The District recently applied for a grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. This matching grant could provide up to \$150,000 in funding to purchase property adjacent to Beach-Oak Park and allow for the expansion of the park. The IDNR recently announced the Park District's application has made the first cut, but the final decision is still pending.

The Village and the Community Park District have maintained a solid working relationship over the years. As a result of our collaborative efforts, service to our residents is enhanced and tax payer dollars are maximized. The Park District and the Police Department have partnered to provide increased police presence at local parks and Park District events; including the Concert Under the Stars series and Blues & Jazz Festival. Additionally, the outdoor ice rinks that the Park District builds each winter are maintained by off-duty Village Fire Department personnel. The Village Public Works Department and the Park District's Building and Grounds Department also occasionally share equipment and manpower. This intergovernmental cooperation reduces both operational and capital costs, benefitting the residents of La Grange Park.

La Grange Park residents also benefit from another great amenity, the La Grange Park Public Library. Our Village is fortunate to have a public library that provides a broad array of programming and an extensive collection of books, music and films. Led by Executive Director Dixie Conkis, President Cathy Foster, and the Library Board, this past year has been an exciting one for the library. The Library completed an upgrade of their main entrance to make it ADA compliant and more easily accessible to all residents in the community. The new accessible entrance ramp from Oak Street was constructed with grant funds and a bio swale and new plantings were added to reduce storm water run-off and improve aesthetics. Additionally, over the past year, the Library has experienced an over 20% increase in participation in their programs, due in large part to changes in the children's department and the addition of a new Children's Librarian.

The Village of La Grange Park continues to move forward with the implementation of much needed capital projects, new collaborations, and fresh ideas for the future of the community – all while remaining fiscally responsible. Our community continues to benefit from the sound leadership provided by the Village Board, the expertise of our Village staff, the passion of our local business community and the dedication and commitment of our residents. For that, I extend my sincere appreciation to all of you. La Grange Park is a community of neighbors – a community with purpose, passion and character and I, like you, am proud to call La Grange Park home.

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