

2013 State of the Village Address

Each year during the State of the Village Address, I take the opportunity to reflect upon the year's progress, take stock of achievements and outline the challenges that we face as a community going forward. In last year's address, I spoke about how La Grange Park had risen above the challenges of the economic recession and how, despite the odds, our community fared much better than most. This year, I'm excited to share with you that 2013 has been a year of progress for the Village. Tonight, I'll reflect back on how the community has transformed over the past year. I'll share with you the large-scale initiatives the Village has undertaken and I'll discuss the many ways in which we, collectively, have invested in the future of our 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.

As in past years, fiscal responsibility continues to be the number one priority for the Village Board. Over the past several years, we have made some difficult decisions in an effort to ensure our financial stability for the future. As a result, we have been able to maintain the same level of service to our residents despite our reduced staffing levels. While there have been some staffing changes over the past year, the current budget proposes no increases to existing staffing levels.

The Village has been diligent in monitoring Village expenditures and we ended the 2013 fiscal year in a stronger financial position than was originally forecasted. Last year's revenues were up over the previous year, with a 5.6% increase in General Fund revenues. Nearly all revenue sources were up from the previous year. While this is a good sign, 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 over \$14.6 million; a 4.4% increase over last year's budget. This increase is due primarily to the addition of large capital projects (such as the La Grange Road Water Main Replacement Project) which I will share with you in greater detail later this evening. General Fund revenues over the current fiscal year are projected to increase 2.9%.

In order to remain fiscally responsible, the Village must ensure that we are recouping our costs associated with the various services we provide. Last year, the Village undertook a Local Revenue Study to evaluate its fee and revenue structure. A significant number of the Village fees and fines have not been increased for nearly ten years and have failed to keep pace with the rising cost of doing business. As a result, throughout the past year, the Village has been working to update the fee structure. To date, the Village Board has approved updated liquor license fees, vehicle sticker fees, police fines, ambulance fees and zoning fees. In the coming months, the Village will be updating its building permit fees and fee structure. Having an updated fee and revenue structure ensures that the Village positions itself well to meet ongoing and future obligations.

The Village Board recognizes that the charge to remain fiscally sound extends beyond our own budget. Last fall, the Village proceeded to aggregate our residential and small business electrical supply. Over 97% of all eligible residential and small businesses opted to participate in the municipal aggregation program. Between October of last year and May of this year, participating residents and businesses collectively saved over \$682,000.

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 in securing grant funds.

We are very appreciative to Mr. Ganschaw for his efforts and thankful to all of our legislators for their support. Once awarded, the Village works to leverage these funds in a way that minimizes current and future costs to the Village.

Last year at this time, the Village had just released a Request for Proposals for a \$1 million renovation to the Public Works Facility. This is a project that had been in the pipeline for years. I'm excited to report that the extensive renovation work has been completed – six months earlier than anticipated! The renovations included removing all hazardous materials from the building, cleaning up the former gun range in the basement, replacing all windows, upgrading existing mechanical systems, installing fire sprinklers and air conditioning, replacing the roof and stabilizing and enhancing the existing façade. A new locker room was also constructed and the existing offices, bathrooms and kitchen were renovated. Thanks to the leadership of Public Works Director Brendan McLaughlin and the Public Works Garage Committee, led by Trustee Mesick, our employees now have a safer and more efficient building. This \$1 million project was approximately 60% grant funded through the State of Illinois Jobs Now! capital bill. This renovation project is truly an investment in the future of our community and we invite you all

to join us for the upcoming Ribbon-Cutting ceremony on October 14th to celebrate its completion.

This past year, the Village undertook a comprehensive evaluation of foreseeable capital projects over the next 10 years. The Village Board, along with Village staff, worked to prioritize over 80 different projects in an effort to identify those areas of top priority. As many of you would concur, the number one priority identified was the paving of streets. As a result, the Village is evaluating its existing Local Pavement Program to determine how we can expand the program to pave more roads sooner. Paving roads is a costly endeavor and the Village must work to identify and take advantage of any funding opportunities that are available.

This year the Village is repaving three blocks of roadway, including the 1100 and 1200 blocks of Beach Avenue. This work continued the Village's multi-year planned improvements to the Beach Avenue area. When the Village Board became aware of additional monies being available, they elected to accelerate our paving program and pave the 1100 block of Newberry as well. The paving improvements are well underway and these blocks of roadways are expected to be open again to the public by the end of the month.

Over the spring and summer, the Village also completed the first phase of the La Grange Road Water Main replacement project. This expansive project resulted in the construction of a new 10" water main underneath the sidewalk along La Grange Road between Brewster and Woodlawn. The second phase of the project is already underway and will extend the line from Woodlawn to Oak. As a result, residents in the area will benefit from improved water flows available for fire protection and the reduced risk of water main breaks due to aging infrastructure. This \$900,000 project is over 50% funded by a grant received from the Army Corps of Engineers. We anticipate Phase 2 of the project will be completed by the end of November.

The Village regularly monitors and repairs its sewer infrastructure on an annual basis. This is done to ensure the system functions properly and to maintain the longevity of the infrastructure. This summer the Village also completed sewer line pipe repairs at over 30 locations throughout the community and cleaned and televised an additional 16,500 linear feet of sewer pipe. Nearly 4,000 linear feet of sewer lines were re-enforced to prevent pipe failure.

As in previous years, the Village experienced a heavy rain event this past spring that resulted in some flooding in La Grange Park and surrounding communities. Salt Creek, which runs through the western portion of the Village, crested to its highest level ever recorded. In response,

Village personnel assisted residents' located along Salt Creek by dropping off and piling sandbags to divert the rising water. Staff also kept the community informed with real time updates on rainfall levels and road closures via the website and special E-Brief notices.

Certain areas of the Village were impacted by water backflowing up through the storm sewers from Salt Creek. After evaluating various options, the Village determined that certain areas of the community can benefit from the installation of a flap gate over the storm sewer outfalls into Salt Creek. In the future, this will prevent water from the Creek from flowing backwards through the system. The first of these flap gates will be installed by the end of November. There are a number of actions residents can take to mitigate the chance of flooding in their own homes. The installation of check valves or the installation of overhead plumbing have been proven to be effective measures. For information on these and other measures, residents should review the Village's Resident's Guide to Flooding or call Village Hall.

The Village is constantly looking for opportunities to improve storm water management in the Village. Recently, we received word that we've been awarded a \$416,500 Illinois Green Infrastructure Grant. The Village applied for this grant from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) last December to support a new Downspout Disconnection Assistance Program. This program would assist residents in disconnecting their downspouts from the Village's combined sewer system and redirecting them to overland flow. As a result of the disconnection, water flows into Salt Creek will be reduced and water quality will be improved. This is exciting news as the new Program could have a significant impact on how storm water is managed in our community. Once in place and during storm events, the Village anticipates that the capacity of the combined storm sewer system will increase as much as 12%.

Prior to the beginning of the school year, the Public Works Department visited all the area schools and applied new thermoplastic to the surrounding crosswalks and stop bars. Thermoplastic is used in place of paint because it has a longer life span and is more readily visible to drivers. The freshly marked crosswalks and stop bars should enhance safety for students utilizing those crossings on their daily walks to school.

The Public Works Department also experienced some staffing changes this year. Maintenance worker Gary Moore was promoted to the Village's Water Operator position. Gary was selected from a pool of competitive applicants and is well qualified for the promotion. He has been a maintenance operator with the Village since 2004 and previously served as the Water Operator for the Village of Melvin.

Many of you are familiar with the Emerald Ash Borer, which swept through the Chicagoland area in recent years and devastated the urban forests of many communities. La Grange Park has not been immune to the EAB and we have a number of trees which are susceptible to infection. As a result, the Village has increased our tree trimming and tree removal budget for this current fiscal year. This will allow us to remove trees which are susceptible to the EAB as a preventative measure. This will also allow us to plant new resistant parkway trees to maintain the beautiful tree-lined streets characteristic of La Grange Park. Our current budget contains \$15,000 for tree-planting. In an effort to stretch taxpayer dollars, the Public Works Department secured a \$10,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, bringing the total tree planting budget to \$25,000.

The Police Department, led by Police Chief Dan McCollum, was recently notified that they been the recipient of a \$4,200 scholarship to cover the tuition of sending Sergeant Felix Hernandez to attend the prestigious 10-week School of Police Staff and Command presented by the Northwestern University Center for Public Safety. This school is considered one of the top three in the country and La Grange Park was one of only two recipients in the United States to receive the scholarship. This award is truly a reflection of the quality and reputation of our Police Department.

In April of this year, the Police Department partnered with Superintendent Mark Kwasnewski and School District 95 to hold a session attended by some 60 area law enforcement and educational administrators. A nationally-recognized school safety specialist, Mr. Ken Trump of Cleveland, Ohio provided a presentation on how to make our schools safer and how to increase cooperation between local government, law enforcement and the educational community. Mr. Trump has appeared previously at U.S. Congressional hearings on school violence and safety-related issues. Our friends at Plymouth Place were kind enough to make their facility available for this presentation. A special thank you to Police Chief Dan McCollum for his efforts in organizing this event. As a result, our Police Department now visits each of our schools on a daily basis.

To better serve our residents, the Police Department in cooperation with the United States Department of Justice, recently installed a Prescription Drug Disposal Box in the lobby of the Village Hall. Residents can safely dispose of unwanted prescription drugs by depositing them in the collection box. There is no charge for disposing of unwanted prescriptions and the service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Police Department will monitor the box and ensure that the unwanted drugs are disposed of in accordance with the law.

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 was implemented in May of this year and will assist the Village in recovering outstanding parking tickets and fines that are owed. To date, the Village has recovered approximately \$5,000 in outstanding fees and fines. We anticipate recovering a significantly larger amount next year.

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. It has also demonstrated the need 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 considers personnel, financial, logistical, administrative, governance and technological needs as well as incorporates a cost-benefit analysis. This information will be used to identify opportunities for the provision of shared dispatch services to improve public safety and efficiencies in operation. The study is underway with anticipated completion in the next couple of months.

The Fire Department, led by Fire Chief Dean Maggos, continues to work to enhance its service to our community. This past year, 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. The Survey involves an extensive review of Fire Department procedures, training and equipment, as well as testing of the Village's water flows available for fire-fighting purposes. The Village is happy to report that our ISO rating was improved from a previous score of 5 to a score of 3. This places the Village in the top 9% of communities in Illinois that have an ISO rating of 3 or better and in the top 6% of communities nationwide. This favorable rating can result in reduced insurance premiums for homeowners and businesses.

This year, the Village will see its 50th home built with Fire Sprinklers, which is currently under construction. La Grange Park was one of the initial communities in Illinois to require that new single-family homes include fire sprinklers. The inclusion of sprinklers in your home cannot only save your life, but statistics show that they reduce the amount of property damage from fire by more than 70%. To see firsthand how effective residential fire sprinklers can be, stop by the Fire Department Open House on October 13th. At this annual event, our Fire Department personnel provide a variety of educational and family-oriented activities, including

demonstrations on cooking fires and fire sprinklers, and practicing fire escape planning. Kids will even have the opportunity to ride in a La Grange Park Fire Truck.

The Village's Fire Department continues to operate using a combination of many dedicated part-time personnel along with contracted full-time paramedic/firefighters. Being able to continue providing service in this efficient manner is a prolonged and remarkable benefit. It continues to save residents hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, and all paid-on-call firefighters are residents, our neighbors and friends.

In September, the Administration Department, led by Finance Director, Pierre Garesche and Assistant Village Manager, Emily Rodman, welcomed new Administrative Intern, Edward Teelucksingh. The Administration Department has recently changed the format of the Village's E-brief's to a mobile friendly format. The E-Briefs is the Village's electronic newsletter that is emailed weekly to residents. Now residents can stay apprised of Village and community happenings using their smartphones. The Village currently has nearly 1,500 E-briefs subscribers, a 25% increase over last year. The Village is excited that so many of our residents want to stay informed about Village news and events. For those residents that don't use email, the Village provides written communication through the Rose Clippings – a publication that is mailed quarterly to 5,400 households in our Village.

The Cool Village Commission, led by chairperson Krista 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. In addition to the emissions inventory reports and the Sustainability Plan, which were Commission initiatives, the Cool Village Commission also sponsors the annual E-waste recycling event, which is coming up on October 19th. This event provides residents the opportunity to recycle old or unwanted electronics and small household appliances at no cost, keeping thousands of pounds of waste out of Illinois landfills. 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.

The Village Board also recognizes the importance of teaching our young residents about civic responsibility and civic engagement. In 2002, the Village created a Youth Commission, which is made up of 10 youth in 7th through 12th grade. The Youth Commission meets monthly throughout the school year to review Village Board agendas, and discuss and evaluate important Village issues. The Commission then shares their feedback with the Village Board at

each Village Board Work Session. The Youth Commission also sponsors annual community events, such as the Community Volunteer Weekend.

Every April, the Youth Commission and other community volunteers help senior residents with yard work and other challenging outdoor tasks. The Village Board greatly values the contributions of our youth and we would like to say thanks to our Youth Commissioners for their interest and dedication to the future of our community.

In order to ensure that our community continues to prosper and grow, the Commercial Revitalization Committee, led by Trustee Kucera, has been hard at work implementing the new Commercial Revitalization Plan. The Plan was adopted by the Village Board in January. This Plan, which was 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.

A number of the action items identified in the plan have already been implemented. Earlier this summer, the Village unveiled its first ever Business Resource Guide. This Guide was developed to serve both prospective and existing businesses and to make doing business in our Village easier. The Guide contains vital information on Village services and regulations. Copies of the new Business Resource Guide can be downloaded from the Village website or picked up at Village Hall.

The Village continues its efforts to market the community to new businesses as well. This past year, the Village added a listing of all the vacant properties in the community, to the Village website, which is often the first place new businesses go to find information. Yesterday, Village staff attended the International Council of Shopping Centers Chicago Deal-Making Tradeshow where they spent time marketing the Village's vacant commercial and industrial spaces to national firms and businesses. Over the coming months, the Commercial Revitalization Committee will be planning a business meet and greet, where local businesses will be invited to attend a Committee meeting, meet the Committee members and share their input on Village efforts.

The La Grange Park business community is growing stronger, thanks in large part to the efforts of the La Grange Park Chamber of Commerce. 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 Chamber's membership grew by nearly 25% over the past year. 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 14th. The Chamber's second annual Haunted Trolley Trick-or-Treat event is coming up on October 25th. Parents and children will be able ride trolleys around the community and trick-or-treat amongst local businesses at the Village Market and along 31st Street. This event was a huge success last year and it provides an opportunity for families to come out and experience the business community in a new way.

This year, the Chamber will be updating their Shop Local banner program in the community along 31st 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.

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, including: The West Suburban Museum Star Emporia; CR Improvements, LLC; Subway; and TNB Services – all of which are on 31st Street. Also coming to 31st Street is Premier Tile by Premier Design and Cabinetry, which will open this month; and Amusement Bark Dog Day Care, which will open in December.

The Montessori Children's Place joined the community on Maple Avenue, along with Joe's Mechanic Shop on La Grange Road and Recycle Solutions on 26th Street

The Village Market also saw some changes, with the expansion of Panera and with the soon to open health food store and market, Fruitful Yield. The owners of the shopping center also demolished the old Pancake House structure in an effort to increase the marketability of the site for redevelopment.

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 faring better than most. La Grange Park's foreclosure rate of only 1 in 949 homes compares favorably with the State overall, which has a rate of 1 in every 725 homes and even more favorably than Cook County, where the foreclosure rate is 1 in every 147 homes, over six times that of La Grange Park's. The Village's foreclosure rate has declined by over 25% since 2012. In fact, homes sales in our community have increased by 17% over last year and the median sale price of homes has increased by 21% since 2012. This is evidence that more residents are choosing to live in La Grange Park and those residents that are leaving are selling their homes at higher prices, both which are a reflection on how desirable our community is to new families.

Further evidence of the strength of La Grange Park's housing market comes in the form of our newest subdivision, Heatherdale. Constructed by McNaughton Development, Heatherdale Subdivision is located off Finsbury Lane. Currently five of the eight homes planned for this subdivision are under construction. Home prices are anticipated to be upward of \$650,000 with the first homes being completed sometime this month.

Residents are also choosing to reinvest in their home at record levels. This year, the Village has issued 662 building permits, a 20% increase over the previous year. The majority of these permits have been related to improvements to single-family homes. The Village has also seen the complete teardown and reconstruction of 4 homes since last October. This is evidence that not only are people choosing to come to La Grange Park, but those that are already here are modifying their homes in order to stay in the community. I'd like to take a moment at this time to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our Building Department during this extremely busy year. Reviewing and issuing such an extensive number of permits in such a short period of time is extremely challenging and I would like to thank Chief Maggos, Allison Chorley and Rob Wierzba, along with our front counter staff for their ongoing commitment to our residents.

This year, the Building Department will not only update the building fees and fee structure as part of the Local Revenue Study, but they are also planning a comprehensive update of the Village's Building Code. The Village currently uses 1998 and 1999 versions of model building

codes, and with the Building Code rewrite, we are hoping to adopt 2012 editions of building codes.

La Grange Park is a community that offers its residents a wide range of amenities. These amenities include recreational opportunities provided by the Community Park District of La Grange Park. The Park District is led by Executive Director Roy Cripe, President Lou Ritten and the Park District Board of Commissioners. 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 acquired a property located at 534 Beach Avenue to expand existing Beach-Oak Park by about 1/3. The nearly \$300,000 addition was made possible with a matching grant from the federally funded Land and Water Conservation. The addition will provide more space for open grass play over the next year as the Park District pursues an additional grant to enable the complete renovation of the expanded park in 2015.

The Park District is also planning for a new Veterans Memorial, which is located at the northeast corner of Memorial Park. The new memorial wall will be a more visible tribute to all veterans; past present and future and will serve as a gathering place to honor veterans during Memorial Day ceremonies. The \$85,000 project is being entirely funded by donations. Donors have an opportunity to order an engraved paver brick in honor of a family or friend veteran. This is truly a community driven project and the Community Park District Board of Commissioners and the Veterans Memorial Committee, chaired by Ray Wielgos, thank the many individuals that have already contributed to this worthy project.

Perhaps the largest project slated for 2014 is the renovation of Memorial Park, provided that the Park District receives a \$400,000 OSLAD grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. This funding would allow the Park District to add a new picnic shelter, indoor restrooms, a splash pad and sand and water playground, renovate the existing playground, and add outdoor fitness equipment, bocce ball, and permanent bags goals. The Village recognizes that the facilities and services the Park District provides are highly valued by our residents. The Village Board has expressed its support for the Memorial Park renovation by agreeing to provide the Park District \$3,300 toward project implementation. The Village will also provide discounted water rates for the Park District's use of water related to the proposed splash pad.

This is further evidence of the solid working relationship the Village and Community Park District have maintained 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 Jazz & Blues 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. Led by Executive Director Dixie Conkis, President Cathy Foster, and the Library Board, the Library continues to expand its offerings to residents. This past year, the Library redesigned its website to make it easier for residents to learn about the variety of services and resources that are available. In addition to the extensive collection of books, music and films, the Library also offers homework help for children grades K-12, basic computer classes, technology tutoring and an extensive collection of free downloadable e-books. For more information on this valuable community resource, visit their website at LPLibrary.org.

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 our 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.
