

Last week the City of Chicago passed its second major revision to its code of ethics since Mayor Lightfoot took office. Among other things, the newest revision broadens campaign finance restriction on city contractors, strengthens conflict of interest provisions, requires specific disclosure of conflict of interest and strengthens fines for ethics violations. As the former Chair of the Cook County Board of Ethics and the former Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Better Government Association I commend this effort and wish to shine a light on a similar effort which recently took place in the Village of River Forest,

In the Fall of 2021 Village President Cathy Adduci contacted me and asked me to lead an effort to update the Village of River Forest's Code of Ethics. "Let's draft a new code that's best in class," she told me. "I want River Forest to be known for its good governance and I want rules that make it clear that village officials and employees can't profit from their positions." I was thrilled to be asked to help with this important effort.

The Civic Federation has counted more than 8,900 separate governmental units in Illinois, more than any other in the country. Many of these units of government, such as small villages and towns have been rife with corruption and self-dealing by governmental officials. A recent report authored by Dick Simpson "Corruption Continues Through the COVID-19 Pandemic," shows that the Northern District of Illinois, which contains Chicago and its suburbs, is still the most corrupt metropolitan area in the country, while Illinois, on a per capita basis, remains the third most corrupt state in the nation. Casual readers of our local papers will be aware of the recent examples: Commonwealth Edison admitted it bribed speaker Michal Madigan over a nine-year period; Jeff Tobolski, a former member of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and former mayor of McCook, pleaded guilty to extortion conspiracy and failing to pay taxes; and Crestwood's Mayor Louis Presta was indicted for bribery arising out of fraud in a red-light camera program.

It was refreshing to know that leadership in my own village wanted clear rules prohibiting such behavior. Along with my fellow River Forest Board of Ethics members Anastasie Senat and Greg Ignoffo and with input by the Village of River Forest and the village board we drafted a new code of ethics which strengthened the conflict-of-interest rules, disclosure requirements, gift bans and more. This new code was passed without fanfare earlier this year.

After so many stories of corruption and greed it's so refreshing to know that the Village of River Forest officials are focusing on what's good for the citizens and are working diligently to make it harder for corruption and waste to thrive.

Peggy Daley
Chair, Village of River Forest Ethics Commission