

**VILLAGE OF RIVER FOREST
VILLAGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MINUTES
March 10, 2025**

A regular meeting of the Village of River Forest Board of Trustees was held on March 10, at 7:00 p.m. in the Community Room of Village Hall, 400 Park Avenue – River Forest, IL.

1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. Upon roll call, the following persons were:

Present: President Adduci, Trustees Gillis(7:05pm), Brennan, Bachner, Vazquez, O’Connell, and Village Clerk Keller

Absent: Trustee Johnson

Also Present: Village Attorney Lance Malina, Village Administrator Matt Walsh, Assistant Village Administrator Jessica Spencer, Police Chief James O’Shea, Fire Chief Tom Gaertner, Deputy Police Chief James Greenwood, Director of Public Works and Engineering Jack Bielak, Finance Director Rosemary McAdams, Police Commander Michael Swierczynski, Deputy Fire Chief David Bochenek, and Deputy Clerk Luke Masella.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

President Adduci led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. CITIZEN COMMENTS

None.

4. ELECTED OFFICIAL COMMENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Trustee O’Connell had no comments.

Trustee Brennan asked for an update on the leaf blower ordinance from the Sustainability Commission.

Village Administrator Walsh stated that the draft recommendation from the Sustainability Commission should come before the Board in the near future.

Village Clerk Keller had no comments.

Trustee Vazquez had no comments.

Trustee Bachner began her comments with a land acknowledgment. She then reported attending the opening of Black Fodder Coffee.

Trustee Gillis arrived at 7:05pm.

President Adduci announced the retirement of Police Chief James O’Shea and thanked him for his service to the Village.

5. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. Village Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes – February 24th, 2025
- b. Administration Department Report
- c. Monthly Department Reports
- d. February 2025 Financial Report
- e. Accounts Payable – February 2025 – \$1,632,681.83
- f. Approval of Motor Fuel Tax Resolution – 2025 Maintenance of Streets and Highways
- g. Award of Contract – 2025 Street Improvement Project (SIP) – Schroeder Asphalt Services – \$495,218.63
- h. Award of Contract – Fire Department Renovation – Futurity19 – \$34,276.00

Trustee Bachner requested Consent Agenda Item A be removed for separate consideration.

MOTION by Trustee Vazquez to approve Consent Agenda Items B through H. Seconded by Trustee Gillis.

Roll call:

Ayes: Trustees Vazquez, Brennan, Gillis, Bachner and O’Connell

Nays: None

Absent: Trustee Johnson

Motion Passes.

6. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS FOR SEPARATE CONSIDERATION

- a. Village Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes – February 24th, 2025

MOTION by Trustee Vazquez to approve Consent Agenda Item 5.a Village Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes – February 24th, 2025. Seconded by Trustee Gillis.

Roll call:

Ayes: Trustees Vazquez, Brennan, and Bachner

Abstain: Trustee Bachner and O'Connell

Nays: None

Motion Passes.

7. RECCOMENDATIONS OF BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AND COMMITTEES

- a. Economic Development Commission

- i. TIF Small Business Grant Program Introduction – No Action

Assistant Village Administrator Jessica Spencer gave a presentation on the proposed TIF Small Business Grant Program and fielded questions from the Board.

Trustee Vazquez inquired about why some expenses are not eligible for funding while others are.

Assistant Administrator Spencer reminded everyone that the TIF funds are designated for the TIF, not the Village. She explained that the separation of expenses was intended to ensure the applicant has some financial commitments and responsibilities.

Trustee Vazquez requested further clarification on how the costs were determined and which ones were deemed eligible.

Mr. Walsh mentioned that the eligible costs were related to visibility but emphasized that everything is still open for discussion.

Village Clerk Keller suggested using the term "façade" when referring to potential eligible improvements.

Trustee O'Connell asked for clarification on how funds could be used for properties that are not ADA compliant.

Assistant Administrator Spencer explained that the funds could be used to help businesses meet ADA standards.

Trustee Bachner inquired if the funds could be used to help businesses exceed ADA standards.

Assistant Administrator Spencer responded that, depending on the situation, that might be possible.

Trustee O'Connell expressed concern about allowing funds to be used for improvements beyond the required ADA standards.

Trustee O'Connell asked if the Village's code enforcement officer does not address ADA concerns.

Assistant Administrator Spencer clarified that this is incorrect, as ADA inspections are typically complaint-driven or initiated when the Village becomes aware of non-compliance.

Trustee Vazquez asked if the Village ensures ADA compliance when a new property is being built.

Assistant Administrator Spencer confirmed that, when applicable, such as with new construction, the Village requires ADA compliance.

Trustee Bachner asked if there would be an application deadline.

Assistant Administrator Spencer explained that staff and the commission will monitor the flow of applications during the first year and then determine if a deadline is necessary.

Trustee Bachner asked how much money is currently in each TIF district and what year they are in.

Finance Director McAdams responded that each TIF has over a million dollars in their funds. The Madison Street TIF started in 2016, while the North Avenue TIF began in 2018.

Trustee Bachner then inquired about how many businesses are in each district.

Administrator Walsh stated that the total is approximately 40-50 businesses.

Trustee Bachner also asked how tenant applicants will be reviewed.

Assistant Administrator Spencer explained that the plan allows both business and property owners to apply and clarified that a property owner can apply on behalf of their tenants, or a single tenant or group of tenants can apply independently. She also noted that the Commission and staff are open to making any necessary adjustments after the first year.

Village Clerk Keller expressed concerns about tenants being allowed to alter the exterior of a property.

Assistant Administrator Spencer clarified that any tenant application must be approved by the property owner.

Trustee Vazquez asked if it would be fair for property owners with more tenants to receive more funds.

Assistant Administrator Spencer explained that the Commission tried to address this by assigning applications to pin numbers but acknowledged that it remains a possibility.

Trustee O'Connell asked how signage will be handled.

Administrator Walsh stated that each sign is reviewed on an individual basis by the Building Department. He also suggested that it might be worth discussing the creation of a uniform signage application for properties with multiple tenants.

Trustee Bachner suggested that the Village consider developing a vision for what the TIF districts should look like, essentially a plan to guide the desired outcome for each corridor.

The Board and staff briefly engaged in a discussion concerning the importance of a specific vision for the TIF districts, specifically in the interest of a cohesive façade for each district.

President Adduci reminded everyone of the Village's comprehensive plan and noted that it would be an excellent foundation for any future planning efforts.

Trustee Vazquez reminded everyone that the current discussion is only about considering loans of up to \$5,000.00.

Administrator Walsh explained that this topic was introduced by the EDC to help fill vacant spaces within the TIF Districts.

Trustee Bachner asked how the penalty system would work.

Assistant Administrator Spencer indicated that the EDC believes the Village should avoid imposing additional debt on a business in the event of its failure, to prevent further burdening the struggling business.

Administrator Walsh mentioned that the EDC discussed both options: splitting costs with potential businesses and offering the funds without any cost-sharing from the business.

Trustee Brennan asked if this is an appropriate use of Taxpayer TIF funds.

Village Attorney Malina stated yes.

Administrator Walsh noted that the Village's redevelopment plans for the TIF districts mention using funds in this manner.

Trustee Brennan asked why these two TIF districts were chosen.

Administrator Walsh stated the Village only has these two districts.

She then inquired if there had been any discussion about the program fund balances for this program in future years. She also asked if someone could apply year after year for the same property.

Assistant Administrator Spencer replied that the fund balances would be reviewed after the first year to evaluate any necessary changes. She then clarified that there would be one application per year, with some exceptions.

Trustee Bachner noted being in support of allowing yearly applications.

Trustee Brennan asked for clarification on how the funds would be distributed.

Assistant Administrator Spencer explained that the funds would be provided to the applicant after the work is completed.

Administrator Walsh added that there had been discussions about offering the funds upfront and noted that staff is open to further discussion on this approach.

Trustee Gillis asked why signs are not ineligible.

Assistant Administrator Spencer stated that the goal was to make the program as broad and inclusive as possible. She also mentioned that there is a plan to advertise the program and notify business and property owners in town.

Trustee O'Connell stated that he sees the program as a façade rebate initiative and expressed his support for assisting multi-tenant property owners in improving all their units.

Trustee Bachner suggested hosting open houses so business owners could meet with staff to discuss the program.

Trustee Brennan expressed concern about permitting signs under the program.

Trustee Gillis expressed support for the staff's role in the program.

Assistant Administrator Spencer assured the Board that she would keep them updated on the program's progress.

Trustee Brennan asked whether the Chamber of Commerce has been involved in this and if the program offering free memberships for businesses is still ongoing.

Assistant Administrator Spencer confirmed that the Chamber of Commerce has been involved in the program from the beginning and that the free membership program is still ongoing.

President Adduci suggested Visit Oak Park be told about the program.

8. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

9. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Presentation Regarding Traffic & Safety Initiatives and Upcoming Projects – No Action

Public Works Director Jack Bielak gave a presentation on the Village's traffic and safety initiatives, as well as upcoming projects.

Trustee O'Connell asked for clarification on how the Village collects traffic data.

Director Bielak explained that typically, a resident submits a complaint about a potential issue, and then staff place a traffic monitor in the area to gather data.

Trustee Vazquez asks who calculates the points used in the traffic matrix.

Director Bielak stated that staff and the entire Traffic and Safety Commission complete the calculations individually and then discuss their findings.

Trustee Bachner requested clarification on who and what are involved in the traffic improvements along Thatcher Avenue and the bike trail.

Director Bielak explained that the Village was already looking into traffic calming measures for Thatcher Avenue. When the opportunity to improve the bike trail came up, it became possible to make improvements to Thatcher Avenue simultaneously.

President Adduci inquired whether the County has contributed to the cost of the trail.

Director Bielak confirmed that both the County and various state and federal grants have funded portions of the trail and street improvements.

President Adduci asked if there will be any improvements beyond the bike infrastructure.

Director Bielak explained that the bike path could lead to changes in the lane configuration along Thatcher Avenue, which should help address traffic issues.

Trustee Bachner asked how other municipalities along the path are managing their portions.

Director Bielak explained that each municipality is handling it differently, as each town has its own layout and restrictions.

Trustee Vazquez asked for clarification on who is responsible for maintaining any improvements to Lake Street.

Director Bielak explained that, aside from routine maintenance, the Village is responsible for maintaining any improvements made.

Trustee Bachner asked how long the recent improvements took to be installed.

Director Bielak mentioned that the improvements at Harlem and Greenfield/Lemoyne took over a year to complete.

Trustee Bachner asked how much money IDOT gives the Village for street maintenance.

Director Bielak stated \$17,000.00.

Trustee Bachner suggested that staff and the Village Board consider acquiring the rights to Lake Street, allowing the Village to make improvements as needed without waiting for IDOT approval.

Director Bielak mentioned that he has had preliminary discussions with IDOT and highlighted some initial questions the Board should consider before deciding.

President Adduci expressed support for the Village pursuing the acquisition of Lake Street.

Trustee Vazquez indicated that he would like more information on the topic before further discussions take place.

Trustee Bachner asked staff to research how Oak Park acquired their portion of Lake Street.

Administrator Walsh provided background on some of the improvements already made to Lake Street, as well as potential future improvements. He noted that staff would investigate further.

Trustee Bachner highlighted the improvements Oak Park has made to Madison Street.

Director Bielak stated that staff are currently researching potential visual changes to the road to help slow traffic.

Director Bielak provided background information on potential future improvements the Village is considering for North Avenue.

10.EXECUTIVE SESSION

None.

11.ADJOURNMENT

MOTION to adjourn by Trustee O'Connell. Seconded by Trustee Vazquez

Roll call:

Ayes: Trustees Vazquez, Brennan, Gillis, Bachner, O'Connell, and President Adduci

Nays: None

Absent: Trustee Johnson

Motion Passes.

The Village Board of Trustees Meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.



Jonathan Keller, Village Clerk

Date: 03-24-25