



**State of the Village
of River Forest Address
Village President
Catherine Adduci
February 25, 2019**



VILLAGE PRESIDENT

Catherine M. Adduci

VILLAGE CLERK

Kathleen Brand-White

VILLAGE TRUSTEES

Thomas Cargie
Susan J. Conti
Carmela Corsini
Michael Gibbs
Patricia Henek
Respicio Vazquez

Good evening Village Trustees, Village Clerk, Village Administrator Eric Palm, Assistant Village Administrator Lisa Scheiner, Police Chief Jim O'Shea, Fire Chief Kurt Bohlmann, Finance Director Rosey McAdams and Public Works Director John Anderson. I'd like to take a few minutes to speak with you about the state of our Village.

I can't emphasize enough that while we have made progress, we still have a ways to go. I know you're probably tired of hearing me talk about the importance of keeping our community safe, about stabilizing property taxes and strengthening property values to make River Forest a great place to live. I can't stress enough that there is nothing more important for our vitality than these three core values. They will be our guiding principles again in 2019, and I want to spend some time discussing each one in greater detail.

The Village remains committed to the core belief that we live in a safe community. We accomplish that goal through increased transparency, communication and the strategic use of technology. Did you know we post monthly crime summaries on our website and Facebook page so you can become aware of incidents that take place? In addition, Chief Jim O'Shea will continue the successful quarterly crime prevention meetings to engage and educate with the community on public safety matters. The Chief and I have talked about increasing participation since they are held to educate the public on important crime prevention information and strategies. I would like the administration to see how we can use live streaming and other social media as well as rotate the venue to allow more expanded citizen participation.

We will bolster our use of technology to support the work of law enforcement by expanding our street camera system to other parts

of the community and updating the radios and in-squad computer units that our officers rely on to do their jobs.

As part of our commitment to safety, we anticipate implementing the results of the Safe Walking Routes to School study, a collaborative project with Elementary School District 90.

The initiative, which we began looking into last year, will include nearly 70 new stop signs throughout River Forest and add several crosswalks to help students and pedestrians safely cross our streets. As a result of this study, the Village will eliminate nearly all of the uncontrolled intersections making it safer for students, pedestrians and motorists to navigate our streets.

The second core value is strengthening our property values. A major component that will further this principle is an updated Comprehensive Plan. A lot of hard work went into this 18-month study, and I'm happy to report that this initiative will be the framework of our current and future land use – and it will be transformative. It will fold in a sweeping set of bike lanes and other facilities to encourage bicycling as a safe model of alternative transportation and another form of recreation. The study will look at how land in our Public, Recreational, and Institutional (PRI) sections can be used.

The Plan also will look at the type of development that needs to happen in our commercial corridors. This is imperative. With half of the property in our community not subject to property taxes because it is owned by nonprofits and government, River Forest must get the highest and best use out of our commercially-zoned property. This leads into our third core value, stabilizing property taxes. Economic development must remain a priority. As a built-out community, River Forest has to enhance and reinvest in our existing commercial corridors. Several key projects will move forward in 2019.

- Lake and Lathrop. We continue to work with Sedgwick Development and Keystone Ventures as they market and secure contracts for their new mixed-use development. This project will be an anchor as we envision Lake Street becoming our downtown.
- We look toward Lake and Park as the other anchor of our downtown. With focus and perseverance, a project will be before our Economic Development Commission chaired by Bob O'Connell by the end of 2019.
- At Chicago and Harlem, construction will start this summer on a senior living facility. The 125-unit assisted living and memory care community will generate nearly \$700,000 in property taxes, third largest behind Town Center I and West Suburban Medical Center Complex. It will provide a significant amount of additional assessed valuation for all of our taxing districts. This state-of-the-art facility will fill a long-standing need by

offering our senior population the ability to age-in-place in our Village. I will talk about this a bit later.

- We will continue to look for promising redevelopment and revitalization of the North Avenue and Madison Street TIF. As part of our TIF revitalization strategy, the Village approved incentive agreements with two local small businesses - Skincare Company and Spa and In and Out Fitness Center - to relocate from Lake to Madison.

A major collaboration among taxing bodies and key stakeholders is underway to create a new Civic Center at the west end of Madison Street. This could be an exciting redevelopment for Madison Street and for our community - and a good use of TIF funds.

I want to take a moment here to thank Trustee Susan Conti who will be stepping down after 14 years of dedicated public service to River Forest. Susan chaired the ad-hoc economic development committee when it was formed in 2013 and was instrumental in formally establishing the Economic Development Commission. Her expertise on this important issue came through in discussions on each project the Village has undertaken. We will miss her institutional memory and her passion.

Redevelopment is one strategy that strengthens property values and makes River Forest an attractive community for people to live, work and raise a family. Another is a sound bottom line. I'm proud to report that we have balanced our budget for nine straight years. Our administration always looks to cut expenses and live within our means. This is so vital and important to the community's well-being. Thanks go to Trustee Carmela Corsini, the chair of the Board's Finance Committee, who will be stepping down this May after 8 years of public service. Thank you for your commitment and your stewardship. For everyone's hard work in this, I thank you.

I also want to thank former finance director Joan Rock, who shepherded River Forest through some stressful times and helped guide us on to good financial footing. She is one reason why River Forest's finances are on solid ground. And we welcome our New Finance Director Rosey McAdams who will continue our tradition of strong financial performance.

As we focus on our economic vitality, River Forest also needs to concentrate on how we can improve our overall quality of life.

I'm talking about caring for our community's vulnerable, our seniors. We are now one of five Illinois communities designated as dementia-friendly. This will help raise awareness and educate our citizens about the issues surrounding dementia. It also will allow us to see how patients and caregivers can connect with important resources. This has taken

a lot of hard work by our partners, including the Village, River Forest Township, Concordia University Age Option and others.

I have been appointed as chairperson of the Mayor's Caucus' subcommittee on aging in place, and I know that our involvement will spell out some initiatives that communities can engage in as they continue to engage in and around this significant issue. In 2017, nearly 16 percent of our community's residents were over the age of 65; 7 percent of our residents were over the age of 75 - and those numbers will only rise as the baby boomers continue to age. Nothing is more important to me than helping our seniors remain active, nothing is more important than helping them integrate into as many aspects of life as possible. Nothing is more important than having the necessary resources so they can maintain a healthy quality of life. In the near future, I will be bringing before the Board of Trustees a pledge that I will ask you to pass that will focus around the importance of Aging in Place.

We need to continue to foster environmental stewardship. Our Sustainability Commission has done stellar work in making River Forest a greener, healthier community. The Commission under the leadership of Katie Brennan helped create a bike path strategy in our Comprehensive Plan and made River Forest the second community in Illinois to have curbside composting. We look to our Green Team to create new programs and projects that will improve our Village's health and meet the goals of the PlanitGreen and Greenest Region Compact initiatives.

River Forest also must reach out beyond our borders and join with leaders in our neighboring communities to exchange ideas and address common challenges.

Our elected officials need to come together again and talk about how we can build on the success of the community calendar. Check out the website at www.rfhappenings.com. I had the opportunity to present it as a good example of community engagement at a local government innovation conference in Washington. Thanks go to Trustee Cargie and Jon Pape for spearheading this initiative.

Civic engagement is vital to the health of a democratic society - it creates better policies and reinvigorates democratic practice. Leaders from our taxing districts need to take the time to listen and learn from their constituents on what matters to them. I therefore call for a series of "listening tours," where residents can engage in constructive dialogue with officials to learn what is on their minds and figure out how constructive resolutions can come about. An action plan and timeline should be forged to get that work done and I would ask our collaboration committee to lead this effort.

All of our work and effort cannot happen in a vacuum - communication is the thread that binds together everything we do. Communication is imperative to keep government transparent and accountable. We do not start any initiative or new program - from infrastructure to development - without taking firm steps to apprise you of what we plan to do - and keep you updated as the project moves forward. We could not update our Comprehensive Plan without citizen input. We cannot hold our successful quarterly police meetings without your intent listening and asking good questions. The Village and District 90 could not provide a solid safe walking to school plan without active citizen participation.

Without an engaged citizenry we cannot do what we do day in and day out. Staying involved means taking advantage of a myriad of ways that we keep you informed. Our new website www.vrf.us is user-friendly. We have set up an electronic means of communications with an e-newsletter and alerts informing citizens about crime, road closures, construction and other important messages. Our Facebook page is regularly updated on what is happening in our Village. I would like to see the administration move into other social media such as Instagram and Your Story.

We live in a modern community with a small-town feel. That means ready access to your elected officials. Our regular Trustees' and commission meetings provide ample opportunity to hear your concerns and answer your questions. If you can't attend, you can access audio from those meetings and call or email us with questions. Many of you take the time to call us at home or chat with us while we are shopping, at the library or any number of other places around town. If you know of a way to improve how we reach out to you, please give us a call. We'd love to know what you think.

Finally, I want to digress a bit and talk again about property taxes. My letter to residents last month focused on the question of property taxes. Again, I want to emphasize River Forest is the best bet in the Chicagoland area. Our taxes, compared to our surrounding communities including Chicago, are a tremendous value. Over all, think of everything you receive in return for your taxes: an award winning and wonderful public school district, a police and fire department that is second to none; beautiful, historic and architecturally significant homes; serene streets; a community that has made a concerted investment in storm-water management and other green initiatives; beautiful parks, a charming library, and top performers at Dominican Performing Arts venue. I could go on and on.

River Forest is a great investment, and the Village Board and Staff work hard to provide you with not only wonderful services, but also a quality of life that is meaningful and pleasurable. We strive to make River Forest a place we can all be proud of; and together we can make our community a role model for leadership, innovation, and progress.

Thank you for your time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy". The script is fluid and cursive, with the 'y' having a long, sweeping tail.

Cathy Adduci
Village President