

Village News



YOUR FRANKLIN PARK NEWSLETTER



Mayor's
Desk

MARCH, 2013

FROM MAYOR BARRETT F. PEDERSEN

The Village of FRANKLIN PARK

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VILLAGE HALL HOURS
Mon. Tues. Thurs. Fri.
8-4:30 pm
Wed. 8-6 pm
Sat. 9-12 pm

Village Hall will be closed
on Friday, March 29
and Saturday, March 30

Let's Move Meeting
March 26 at 7 PM
at Village Hall

Village Has Frozen Its Property Tax Levy for the Last Three Years

Not that long ago our Village was financially unstable, plagued by debt and mired in deficit spending.

In fiscal year 2009, the Village had a negative general fund balance of \$5.4 million. Based on this, Standard & Poor's Ratings Service defined the Village's financial situation as not investment grade. That was simply unacceptable.

The Board and I took swift action to begin to right our ship. We instituted budget discipline and established a conservative approach to spending. We reduced our head count by 10 percent. We professionalized our budgeting process. We initiated an in-depth review of all expenditures to increase additional savings.

We were committed to you our taxpayer and

knew we owed it to you to run a leaner, more streamlined operation. We were careful not to jeopardize public safety or reduce other critical services. As a result, we have been able to produce general fund surpluses in FY 2011 and 2012 that have resulted in strong cash reserve levels.

We were innovative in our approach and we restructured and streamlined our government. We operate much more effectively and professionally in our endeavor to be good stewards of our taxpayer's money.

Our Trustees, our elected officials and our Village employees are working diligently toward accomplishing our shared goal of reversing the poor financial position we inherited.

Village Bond Rating Raised

As I reported to you last December, Standard & Poor's Ratings Services has raised the Village of Franklin Park's underlying rating from 'BBB' to 'A-'. This upgrade of two categories is an excellent indication that our financial condition is strong and continues to strengthen.

This increase in our bond rating translates into real savings for our Village. This new bond rating allowed us to insure and issue bonds for our new police station at a substantial cost savings of between \$2-3 million over the life of the bonds.

Last year, the Village of Franklin Park was

awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association. We were recognized for our success in professionalizing our operations and creating a transparent process that accurately reflects our true financial position.

The fact that we have put our financial house in order, during a difficult economic recession, is significant. We have provided financial stability for our Village while continuing to meet the needs of our residents and our businesses.

Mayor's Desk Continued on Page 2. ▶



Mayor's Desk (Continued from Page 1.)

One of the Lowest Tax Rates in the Region

Our municipal tax rate of 1.929% remains one of the lowest among peer municipalities.

MUNICIPALITY	2011 TAX RATE
Village of Maywood	7.749
Village of Bellwood	6.462
Village of Stone Park	4.719
Village of Hillside	3.610
Village of Rosemont	2.159
Village of Elmwood Park	2.050
Village of Schiller Park	1.982
Village of Franklin Park	1.929
Village of Melrose Park	1.809
Village of River Grove	1.353

For residents who have shared their concerns about property taxes, I completely understand. I dislike taxes as much as the next person. It is very frustrating for property owners to see an increase on their tax bills when in many cases their property values have actually declined.

However, the modest property tax increase in 2009, coupled with savings related to Village staffing, have allowed our Village to get back on a strong financial footing. If we had not taken these steps, we would be facing major cuts in Village services and a significant impact on our quality of life. That is the reality.

Franklin Park has held the dollar level of the Village tax levy flat for three years. Nevertheless, many residents have seen increases on their tax bills. This is due in part to the fact that Cook County is increasingly shifting tax liability allocations from commercial and industrial property to residential taxpayers. **The County's classification changes have negatively impacted residents by passing more of the tax burden onto residential properties.** The Cook County Assessor reduced the assessment-to-market ratio for each of the three major classifications of property as follows:

CLASSIFICATIONS OF PROPERTY TAX REDUCTIONS	
COOK COUNTY	• Commercial properties from 38% to 25% a 13% reduction
	• Industrial properties from 36% to 25% an 11% reduction
	• Residential properties from 16% to 10% ONLY A 6% REDUCTION

Cook County has also been decreasing the maximum exemption for homeowners and it declined by \$4,000 again this year, or 25%. **This reduction in the Homestead Exemption by Cook County is a prime reason for why residential taxes continue to escalate.**

DECREASE IN MAX EXEMPTION FOR HOMEOWNERS

COOK COUNTY

- \$26,000 for 2008 tax year (property taxes paid the following year in 2009)
- \$12,000 for 2012 tax year (property taxes paid the following year in 2013)

Seniors, aged 65 or older, can apply each year to take advantage of the Senior Citizen Homestead Exemption. It provides real estate tax relief by reducing the equalized assessed value of a qualifying residence by up to \$4,000. Also, the Senior Citizen Assessment Freeze Homestead Exemption allows applicants with total household incomes of \$50,000 or less to obtain a freeze of the assessed value of their property. More information on these and other exemptions can be found on the Cook County Assessor's website at www.cookcountyassessor.com.

Now that we are back on track financially, there are several priority areas that I believe continue to deserve our attention:

Putting Public Safety First

First, we need to focus on public safety. It is government's primary duty to protect our neighborhoods and provide for the security of our families in their homes. Thanks to the efforts of our Police Department, we have seen markedly less gang activity in our community. Due to collaborative efforts with other local police departments, dangerous criminals have been removed from our streets. We continue to see a visible reduction in graffiti throughout our town and our schools are safe and have reported very few incidents.

We will continue to focus on providing a visible police presence in our neighborhoods. We will supplement this effort by using cutting-edge technology that allows our officers to stop crime and vandalism before it happens.

It is critical that we ensure that those who risk their lives daily have every resource possible to guarantee their safety and to assist them as they keep our families and neighborhoods protected. Our new Franklin Park Police Station will open this summer. It will serve as a regional center, facilitating collaboration with police departments in neighboring communities to jointly implement new crime prevention programs.

The new Police Station will be the location for Village Board Meetings, courtroom appearances, and police business. The site will feature a public recreation area with a walking path around the constructed wetland basins. Our Police Chief, Michael Witz is conducting tours of the old and new police stations on Saturday mornings for Franklin Park residents. I encourage you to contact him at 847-671-8203 to register.



Franklin Park is All Business

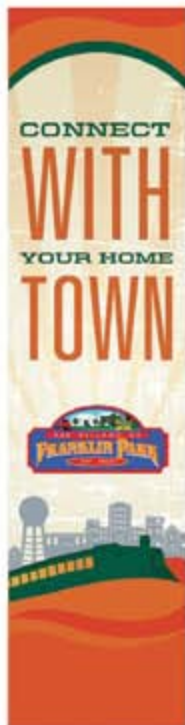
Second, we need to continue to take action steps that will provide for additional job creation and enhanced economic development in our community.

We know that good communication is the first step in keeping jobs in a community, and we created our local Business Visitation Program with this in mind. As a result, we have helped business owners and operators who compete with overseas commerce to identify grants, programs and tax credits and deductions that both uncover obstacles to their growth or facilitate their expansion and re-investment in Franklin Park. We have been committed to making sure that high quality, sustainable jobs stay in our Village, and our efforts have paid dividends. Not surprisingly, we have assisted many local firms to expand their operations in our Village.

Despite the recession, we are seeing increased activity and investment in Franklin Park. In the last year alone, over 50 new businesses have made Franklin Park their business address. All in all, more than 150 businesses have opened up shop in our town in the last few years and they represent a strong mix of industrial and commercial offerings.

We have been focusing on our downtown corridor to attract new private investment and promote transit oriented development. Business activity has increased and we have seen a variety of new retail shops, restaurants and entertainment offerings locate in the district. We are working closely with the local merchants to better promote these businesses. We have also welcomed new national retail chains which have invested in vacant property and brought jobs to our community.

The revitalization of our industrial and commercial corridors is critical to our community. It will provide increased revenue to the Village from business and therefore lessen the tax burden on our homeowners.



NEW BANNERS

New banners will be put up to promote business in Franklin Park and highlight our freindly hometown atmosphere.

What You Know – Not Who You Know

Third, I am very pleased to say that we have ended nepotism in Village hiring. When family members of elected officials, appointed officials or rank and file employees are placed on the public payroll, it gives the wrong impression that they were hired for who they know rather than what they know. Since I was elected Mayor four years ago, we have not hired anyone at the Village who is related to anyone else at the Village.

Upgrading Our Customer Service

Fourth, we need to continue to upgrade our Department of Inspectional Services. Immediately upon taking office, I made improved customer service our mission. I believe that you, the taxpayer, are our customer. And I also believe that you deserve courtesy, clarity and promptness in all your dealings with the Village. As a result, every employee has undergone customer service training. I required all Village employees to treat residents and businesses with dignity and respect.

We have begun a comprehensive review of the practice of charging for permits that have little or nothing to do with health and safety concerns. We are committed to discontinuing any unnecessary fees which amount to an unjust tax that discourages homeowners from improving their properties and pushes businesses away from our Village.

Investing in Infrastructure

Fifth, we need to tackle the deferred maintenance projects that have continued to mount in our community. We have worked hard to pursue state and federal funding to make upgrades and repairs to our streets, curbs, sewers and facilities and to alleviate flooding and we have been very successful in bringing millions of dollars of grants to the Village. But it is not enough.

We must seek new funding to complete important projects including providing storm water improvements to sections of the Village who were promised flood relief by the prior administration. This promise was broken, but we are working diligently to facilitate flood relief. We are working on projects that would increase storm water capacity and separate storm sewers. We are investigating every avenue to identify funding for these upgrades which would bring much needed relief to parts of our community that are often hit hard during big storms.





Flood Insurance Relief

Sixth, as I mentioned, we are working aggressively to seek funding to support several larger capital projects that would provide additional storm water relief and to facilitate a combined sewer separation project. In addition, we have initiated a project to remove areas of the Village from the special hazard area shown on outdated FEMA floodplain maps. This action could result in over 400 homes and many businesses no longer being required to purchase costly flood insurance. This action could save residents over \$1,600 per year in insurance premiums, meaning that \$1.5 million would stay in Franklin Park instead of going to insurance companies.

Franklin Park: Clean, Attractive, Well-Maintained

Finally, our residents deserve to live in a community that is clean, attractive and well maintained. We must also protect and maintain certain moral and community standards. I have called for a moratorium on any further adult uses in Franklin Park to protect our Village from seeing strip clubs and unsavory businesses come to town.

We are working hard to keep our residents informed of the decisions your local leaders make in governing our Village. I would like to invite and encourage all residents and business owners to contact my office at any time to make a suggestion, a comment or ask a question. Together, I believe, we can make a difference.

Thank you for everything you do to make our community a great place to live, work and play.

Sincerely,


BARRETT F. PEDERSEN
MAYOR



Mayor Pedersen Named Municipal Leader of the Year by Illinois State Crime Commission

Mayor Barrett Pedersen will receive the Municipal Leader of the Year Award from the Illinois State Crime Commission at their annual dinner. This prestigious award is the highest form of recognition in Illinois for crime prevention efforts. Mayor Pedersen was selected as a recipient for his many important crime prevention achievements in Franklin Park including a strong commitment to regional cooperation. Last year, the Franklin Park Police Department worked with the FBI and the Chicago Police Department on a Joint Task Force on Gangs which led to the arrest of 19 suspects for supplying illegal drugs and firearms to the Chicago area. This collaboration resulted in dangerous criminals being removed from our streets. The Illinois Crime Commission also recognized Mayor Pedersen's perseverance in locating new funding sources to provide important technological advances in crime prevention including adding surveillance cameras and license plate recognition software. The Village has also utilized grants from the Illinois Department of Transportation to support a Click It or Ticket Campaign to help deter drinking and driving.

Watch the Comcast Interview

Residents are encouraged to watch Mayor Barrett Pedersen's recent interview on the Newsmakers Program on Comcast. Mayor Pedersen discussed how Cook County has been increasingly shifting the tax liability allocations from business properties onto residential properties and how this has pushed more of the burden onto our taxpayers. Go to the Village website at www.vofp.com and click on the link to watch.

