

**River Forest Township  
Supervisor's Annual Report  
Fiscal Year 2024 (April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024)**

**2024 Annual Town Meeting**

**FY2024 HIGHLIGHTS**

Fiscal Year 2024 was a busy and productive year at River Forest Township. We moved many important projects forward to completion, including the launch of our new website the mailing of two major communications pieces, the new Policy Handbook, and the Decennial Committee's Efficiency Report.

I have announced my retirement at River Forest Township Supervisor after 11 years, to be approved by the Board on May 21, 2024. Clerk John Becvar, who has done an exemplary job for the Township since June 1, 2023, will be appointed Supervisor at that time.

The Township's overall goals in FY2024 were to:

- **actively grow awareness** of the Township and its human services-related programs through outreach and enhanced communication;
- **develop new programs and services and enhance existing ones;**
- **strengthen ongoing relationships** with organizations and other government entities;
- seek and develop **new partnerships**.

**Assessor**

The Township Assessor's office continued its availability and accessibility to residents. The Assessor's office assisted hundreds of residents, including many of our seniors, by phone, email, and in-person meetings. FY2024 was especially challenging for the Township Assessor's office, as the Triennial Reassessment took place for River Forest. Changes continued to occur in the Cook County Assessor's office which resulted in additional work for our Assessor's office. The Township Assessor's office was nimble and flexible in response.

We appreciate the efforts of Assessor Pam Kende and Deputy Assessor Kathy Elliott in handling a large volume of resident inquiries. The Township Assessor's office continued to have excellent success with their electronic newsletter, sent out through Constant Contact. They also held two Assessor Outreach sessions, with strong attendance.

### **Communications**

The new Township website was launched in November 2023, led by Kathy Elliott as the Website Project Manager (upon the resignation of Vanessa Druckman) and Hutchinson & Associates as the design firm. Clerk John Becvar also assisted with the development. The entire Township team had input to their respective sections. The new website, built on the Squarespace platform, is clean, fresh, and easy to navigate and update. Many thanks to Kathy, John, and Vanessa for their leadership on this project.

We completed two major mailings to all River Forest residents. The 16-page Mental Health and I/DD Services Resource Guide was mailed in December 2023 and a 4-page color senior program information flier was mailed in January 2024. Both contained a QR code directing residents to the new website and how to sign up for Township senior and Assessor newsletters.

### **Administration**

Several key administrative documents were completed in FY2024, many in compliance with statute. These include the Policy Handbook, the Personal Paid Leave Policy, and policies related to ethics, whistleblowing, and personal conduct. Appreciation goes to Clerk Becvar for his help with these documents.

The Decennial Committee convened and completed the Efficiency Report, which the Board of Trustees approved in March 2024. We were pleased to have the assistance of NIU graduate student Kennedi Glover and her professor, Trustee Deana Herrman. Thanks also to Clerk Becvar, the Board of Trustees and our 3 resident members, Barb Hickey, John Phelan and Melinda Peterson.

Significant office space and record re-organization took place. Banking policies and procedures were enhanced.

We renewed the following IGA's with Oak Park Township for the two next fiscal years, FY2025 and FY2026 (through March 31, 2026): Youth & Family Services, Senior Services, General Assistance, and Home Repair Program.

### **General Assistance/Emergency Assistance**

April Dugal from Oak Park Township continued as our General Assistance (GA) administrator. Partnering with OPT for GA administration has proven to be far more

efficient than hiring someone to uniquely handle the small number of GA cases in River Forest. The monthly flat River Forest GA grant remained at \$650. We, as well as April and her team, continued to field numerous questions from residents related to financial need.

With April Dugal/OPT, we launched the new Emergency Assistance (EA) Program. The EA Program uses GA funds to support one-time grants to qualified residents to help alleviate a crisis like eviction or utility shut-off. EA is an alternative way to help residents in need who may not qualify for GA. The maximum EA grant was raised from \$1200 to \$1600. EA allows us to expand the use of our GA funds and to help additional residents.

Many thanks to April and her team for their partnership and support in FY2024.

### **Senior Services**

OP and RF Township Senior Services, along with the Villages of River Forest and Oak Park, continued the Home Repair Program for seniors and those with disabilities (in partnership with the North West Housing Partnership). The CAPABLE program was added on, which offers visits and recommendations by nurses and physical therapists. The program received the Program Excellence Award from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

Township Senior Services started the PEARLS program, which provides a mental wellness component to their services. They also greatly enhanced their daytime programming at the Senior Center building, including activities like art, Zumba and tai-chi, as the dine-in lunch program resumed post-covid.

Two River Forest Township senior programs, both held at the River Forest Community Center, continued to grow and flourish. We continued to partner with the RF Park District to hold pickleball in the RFCC gym, run by River Forest resident Kelly Frank, which is very popular. We also held a weekly mahjong program, with River Forest resident Liz Ziehl as the instructor. The group continues to grow in numbers and connectedness. All of our excellent and well-attended joint programming continued with the River Forest Public Library.

We worked with Professor Julie Bach and her students at Dominican University's Graduate School of Social Work to host a Reminiscing class for seniors during the summer. We hope to have further collaboration with both Dominican and Concordia.

Celebrating Seniors Week, which started in 2012, was held in May. The week returned to 100% in-person events. River Forest Township hosted or co-hosted several events and spearheaded the “60 over 60” awards for River Forest residents.

Thank you to Senior Outreach Coordinator Betsy Kelly, as well as Township Senior Services Director Pam Mahn and her team, for their efforts to successfully serve our older adults.

### **Mental Health and I/DD Services**

Many thanks to Mental Health Administrator Sarah Schwarting for her assistance in completing the new Mental Health and I/DD Services Resource Guide, which is an update to the previous 2015 Guide. This Guide offers more online resources and includes many agencies and programs in addition to the ones we fund directly.

We worked closely with Debbie Lubeck at District 90 to support her efforts to launch a parent support group for parents of students with IEP’s. We presented at two parent meetings and provided a list of important resources at the second meeting.

Parent University successfully continues under the sponsorship of the D200 Mental Wellness Collaborative, which includes River Forest Township, Oak Park Community Mental Health Board, Township Youth Services, OPRF High School, D90, D97, and others. Two Parent Universities were held in April and November, with keynote speakers, resource tables, and workshops for parents.

Advocacy remained crucial in FY2024, particularly in the area of Developmental Disabilities. We continued to support the efforts of They Deserve More and other legislative advocacy groups.

The Health Connection HUB, an online resource database for agencies and providers, was discontinued. This was an excellent partnership for several years, but other resources like 211 gradually took the place of the HUB. In addition, few agencies were using the HUB for online referrals, as we had intended.

Appreciation to Sarah Schwarting for her dedication and work in support of our mental health and I/DD services, as well to the Oak Park Community Mental Health Board for their wonderful partnership.

### **Youth & Family Services**

Youth & Family Services enhanced its presence in River Forest, offering the Girls on the Rise program at all three River Forest schools, specially designed for girls of color. The number of Youth Engagement Program clients increased in RF; engagement specialists were present at the RF Public Library, RF Park District and D90. Youth adjudication returned to River Forest post-covid, and YFS' new Community Justice department established its working relationship with River Forest adjudication personnel. Community Justice programs were broadened to include a more wholistic approach to youth offenders. RF participation in the Community Justice program is increasing.

Thank you to Megan Traficano and her team for their dedication to serving our youth creatively and tirelessly.

### **FY2024: YEAR IN REVIEW**

FY2024 was characterized by a positive environment of collaboration, cooperation, and communication. In addition, many ongoing projects were brought to completion.

#### **Financial and Reporting**

We completed, submitted, and posted/publicized the following financial reports per deadline, as required:

- FY2024 Budget
- FY2024 Audit
- FY2024 Annual Treasurer's Report
- FY2024 Annual Financial Report (AFR)
- 2023 Levy
- FY2024 Annual Report of Revenues and Expenditures

The **Personal Paid Leave Policy** was drafted and approved by the Board, per the new statute effective July 1, 2023. Employees (non-elected officials) will receive 36 hours of PPL per year.

**Banking practices** were enhanced. Bank accounts were consolidated for administrative efficiency, higher interest rates, and greater protection/security. Prep work was done to eliminate check payments and begin ACH payments in FY2025. Low-limit credit cards were provided to employees to eliminate: 1) the need for employees to be out-of-pocket for Township expenses, and 2) the need for check reimbursements to employees.

A high number of complex **FOIA requests** in FY2024 required a significant time commitment to answer in a correct and timely manner. Thanks to John Becvar for working with me to achieve this.

### **Board-Related Activities/Administration/Office**

- The **new Policy Handbook** was completed and approved by the Board of Trustees, representing a major milestone for Township administration.
- Per the **Decennial Committee** statute, the Decennial Committee, comprised of the Board of Trustees and 3 residents, met 3 times. The Committee completed the **Efficiency Report**, which the Board approved in March 2024, and which will be submitted to Cook County in April.
- **New committee members were approved** for the Mental Health Committee and the Senior Services Committee.
- **Board approved proclamations** honoring Prevention Services Manager Kelly O'Connor, RF Police Sergeant Ben Ransom and Oak Park Township Manager Gavin Morgan.
- **Township office space** was re-organized since more space opened after HFGB moved out. Clerk Becvar obtained proper authorization for record disposal.
- The office continued to have a **steady stream of residents** seeking assistance with financial need, notary, voter registration, etc.
- **New conference room chairs** were purchased; thanks to Sarah for her assistance with this project.

### **Regular Meeting Commitments**

Township attended and provided status reports at the following:

- **Monthly:** RF Township Board of Trustees, RF Administrators Forum, RF Mental Health Committee, OP & RF Township Youth Services Committee, OP & RF Township Senior Services Committee, Positive Youth Development (PYD), D200 Mental Wellness Collaborative, RF Collaboration Sub-committee, HUB Advisory Team
- **Periodically:** OP & RF Community Foundation *Communityworks* Advisory Board

### **General Communications/Awareness**

- Launched **new Township website**.
- Designed and mailed **new Mental Health and I/DD Services Resource Guide** to all RF residents.
- Designed and sent **mailing to all RF residents promoting senior services** and programs.
- Continued RF Township **Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook**.
- Maintained **RFhappenings.com community calendar**.

- **Worked with Assessor** to create outreach packets for seniors who visit the Assessor's office.
- Maintained **display racks** at RFCCA Building and Village Hall for all Township materials.
- Maintained dedicated **Township bulletin boards** at RFCCA Building.
- Continued work with **Inside Edge communications** firm to issue press releases, maintain Facebook and twitter social media, and other projects. Ensured strong promotion of Township-sponsored events.
- Continued to **promote Township events and services** in monthly RF Village eNews, quarterly Township Seniors Services News & Views newsletter, two senior newsletters, and RFCC newsletter.
- **Participated in 2023 Memorial Day Parade and Rotary Food Truck Rally.**
- Maintained **communication with local media.**

### Other Taxing Bodies

- Developed new **packets for the homeless**, as well as **ICE Packets for seniors**, in partnership with the RF Fire Department.
- Continued strong relationship with **RF Public Library regarding senior programming.**
- Attended **Joint Review Board meetings** for North Avenue and Madison Street TIF's, hosted by Village of RF.
- Worked with **RF Park District** to develop new senior programming.

### Community Outreach

- Township attended the following **community events**:
  - ✓ Rotary lunch meetings and other events
  - ✓ Juneteenth ceremony at RF Public Library
  - ✓ NAMI annual fundraiser
  - ✓ CSS Circles of Support fundraiser
  - ✓ CMHB 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event
  - ✓ Way Back Inn/PYD Liv4Lali event
  - ✓ Pride parade in River Forest
  - ✓ Oak Park CRC Ribbon Cutting
  - ✓ Assessor Outreaches 5/23/23 and 10/2/23
  - ✓ D90 Parent Support Group meetings
  - ✓ Thrive benefit
  - ✓ Sarah's Inn gala
  - ✓ Parent University 4/19/23 and 11/15/23
  - ✓ Back-to-School family event at OPT
  - ✓ River Forest Fire Department Open House

- ✓ 2 fundraisers for Representative Camille Lilly
- ✓ Seguin gala
- ✓ Way Back Inn gala
- ✓ Sarah's Inn Breakfast
- ✓ I/DD Legislative Breakfast

### **Mental Health Services (with Mental Health Administrator)**

- Managed Mental Health Committee (Mental Health Administrator)
- Served on **D200 Mental Wellness Collaborative**. Co-sponsored and worked on Parent University events, held April and November 2023.
- Continued to support **Sibshops** program, in partnership with Thrive Counseling Center.
- Met with **D90 social workers** to present Township programs.
- Attended and spoke at two **D90 parent meetings** for parents of students with IEP's.
- Welcomed in-person **LOSS meetings** at River Forest Township.
- Continued participation with **Behavioral Health Consortium** and **Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Consortium**.
- Participated in **Mental Health Awareness Month ad campaign** with community partners.

### **Senior Services (with Senior Outreach Coordinator)**

- Continued to co-sponsor virtual **Gather, Discover, Engage** with RF Public Library, including Coffee Monday and Social Stitching.
- With RFPL, continued to co-sponsor virtual **Celebrating Seniors All Year Long** monthly series of programs and lectures.
- Supported **Home Repair Program IGA** between RFT, OPT, Villages of RF and OP and North West Housing Partnership.
- Funded Betsy Kelly to help issue **weekly Community Connections email** to seniors, in joint effort with Arbor West Neighbors.
- Supported development of **Home Sharing Program** pilot (Betsy Kelly).
- **Supported 2023 Celebrating Seniors Week** and return to in-person programming.
- **Started Mahjong program** for seniors at RF Community Center.
- Worked with **River Forest Park District** to develop recreational programming, including indoor pickleball and Celebrating Seniors Week events.
- **Senior Impact Fees** were received from The Sheridan for 2022 (\$5,000) and 2023 (\$5,000). These fees were used to help Township Senior Services



purchase a minivan for meal delivery and ride services, and to print/mail our senior flier to all River Forest residents.

### Youth & Family Services

- Regularly reviewed **status of youth programs** with Megan Traficano.
- Continued to **promote youth scholarships** to D90 social workers, etc.
- Worked with Youth and Family Services to support **Girls on the Rise** group in D90.
- Worked with **ISearch** to support program enhancements and changes.
- Met with River Forest Police **Officer Megan Drake**, replacing Officer Ben Ransom as Community Outreach Officer

### General Assistance

- Continued successful **relationship with Oak Park Township GA** to administer RFT's GA.
- Launched **Emergency Assistance Program** with OPT. **Raised maximum EA grant to \$1600.**

### Oak Park Township

- Maintained **ongoing positive relationship** and met regularly with Oak Park Township Manager and staff.
- Participated in interview process for **new Oak Park Township Manager.**
- **Renewed 4 IGA's** for FY2025 and FY2026 (through March 31, 2026): Youth & Family Services, Senior Services, General Assistance, and Home Repair Program.
- OPT participated in **RF Memorial Day Parade and Rotary Food Truck Rally.**

### Substance Prevention

- Financially supported Township **Prevention Services** department and Prevention Services IGA.
- Continued relationship with **Positive Youth Development (PYD)**, as their goal of addressing underage substance use directly aligns with the Township's youth and mental health mission.
- With D200 and OP CMHB, supported program at OPRF HS for **Way Back Inn** to do screening for students with substance offenses.

### Holiday Food and Gift Basket

- Continued **grant to Holiday Food and Gift Basket**. HFGB obtained larger and more convenient office space at Community of Congregations and moved from River Forest Township.
- Worked with **new Director**, Kelly Pollock. Continued referrals of RF residents.

### **Training**

Completed the following virtual trainings:

- IMRF new system employer access training
- TOCC Educational Session

### **TOCC/TOI**

- Member **TOCC Board**; co-chair of **TOCC legislative committee**.  
**Vice-President of TOCC Supervisors Division**.
- Continued revival of **TOCC Supervisors Division**; **attended in-person meetings**.
- Co-chaired the “new and improved” **TOCC Spring Conference**; obtained Senator Don Harmon as speaker.
- Attended virtual **TOCC Board meetings**.
- Attended **TOI Annual Conference** in Springfield (November 2023).
- Continued advocacy for Townships and Township services.

### **FY2025 GOALS**

John Becvar will become the new River Forest Township Supervisor on May 21, 2024, and will direct FY2025’s goals. However, Township officials and staff have identified several areas as potential priorities for FY2025 (in no specific order):

**Overall, we will continue to focus heavily on demonstrating and communicating *the unique and strong value* provided to residents by the Township in the areas of youth, mental health, senior, financial, and assessor services.**

- Develop stronger partnerships related to senior or other programming with Dominican, Concordia, and Triton Universities.
- Create and publish a general Township newsletter using Constant Contact.
- Assess additional ways to appropriately use General Assistance funds to further help residents with financial need.
- Help ensure renewal by 4 River Forest taxing bodies of the Youth Engagement Program for FY2025 and FY2026 (through June 30, 2026).

- Further market and promote key senior programs to our residents, such as the Home Repair Program, CAPABLE and PEARLS.
- Implement a pilot in River Forest for the Home Sharing Program.
- Assess the potential and future of the Support 4U Program and if indicated, enhance program marketing.
- Complete the conversion from check payments to ACH payments.
- Work with new bookkeeper to enhance and update internal financial processes.
- Execute an updated agreement between River Forest Township and the River Forest Community Center for front-end services (reception, bookkeeping, IT).
- Upgrade office computers, software, and other relevant technology.
- Assess the potential for a Sibshops program within River Forest, possibly in partnership with District 90, and if indicated, introduce the program.
- Explore ways to further market and promote the Active Adult Program at the Dole Center to River Forest seniors.
- Approve the new Committee Policy, and continuously determine other areas where formal policies and/or procedures are indicated or required.
- Fill the open River Forest positions on the Youth & Family Services Committee.
- Assess the feasibility of formalizing and consolidating Township marketing and communication efforts into a part-time hourly position.
- Continue strong legislative advocacy efforts in support of Townships, mental health, disabilities, seniors, and any other relevant areas.
- Maintain and develop strong relationships with key legislators and legislative leaders.