

**River Forest Township
Supervisor's Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2021 (April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021)**

2021 Annual Town Meeting

SUMMARY

Fiscal Year 2021 was a year unlike any other. The COVID-19 pandemic struck on March 13, 2020, and the Township's new fiscal year started two weeks later. Most in-person programs, services, events, and activities were cancelled in FY2021. Some never happened; many were transformed into the virtual format. We learned to live in a world of Zoom and remote access while we worked from home.

Our main priorities were to ensure:

- that the populations we serve continued to have their needs met as much as possible in the new pandemic world, and
- that our agencies had what they required from us to “pivot” and continue their delivery of services, as much as possible.

The work of Township Senior Services and Township Youth Services has been exemplary during the months of the pandemic. Both “pivoted” multiple times throughout FY2021. Thousands of meals were delivered to seniors by volunteers; case managers served hundreds of senior clients virtually. Youth interventionists also served their clients virtually and were physically present wherever possible. Youth and senior programs continued virtually, and participation grew as people learned to Zoom. The Youth Interventionist Program was successfully renewed among 9 taxing bodies in Oak Park and River Forest, and we are grateful for their continued support.

The mental health agencies which we fund, including those which serve those with disabilities and those with substance issues, continued to operate programs in-person where required (such as residential programs) and virtually wherever possible (such as therapy and day programs). Once again, their efforts are to be commended.

At the same time, where and when possible, we continued to be mindful of the Township's overall goals:

- **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**.

In addition, the Township Assessor's office remained available and accessible to residents despite being unable to meet most residents in-person. The Assessor's office provided service and assistance to hundreds of residents, including many of our seniors, by phone, email and zoom.

Under new leadership, the Cook County Assessor's office instituted numerous policy and procedural changes. River Forest was open and re-open for appeals multiple times, which also added to the Township Assessor's workload. Fortunately, a new Deputy Assessor, Kathy Elliott, was hired April 1, 2020 and greatly supported the efforts of the Township Assessor, Pamela Kende.

The need to work remotely necessitated an overhaul of the Township's software and computers, so this was accomplished during the summer with our IT company, Access One. Working remotely also highlighted the need for new phone system for the Township. After review of several companies and their bids, we selected Access One to install a new VOIP system early in FY2022.

Significant time was also spent on re-building the Township team, as Clerk Abby Schmelling and Trustees Mark Kelty and Holly Economos announced they were not running for re-election in April 2021.

- Because of the learning curve and the specific skills required for Clerk, we interviewed Clerk candidates and selected Vanessa Druckman, who also agreed to run for Clerk in April 2021. Abby resigned in January and Vanessa was sworn in as the new Clerk. Vanessa ran unopposed in April and will continue as Clerk.
- Deana Herrman was a member of our volunteer Mental Health Committee. Deana indicated a desire to become a Trustee and to run in April 2021. Trustee Mark Kelty resigned in December and following precedent to elevate our experienced volunteers, Deana was appointed and sworn in as Trustee in January. She ran unopposed in April and will continue as Trustee.
- Keith Strom ran unopposed in April and he will be sworn in as Trustee in May.

In addition, Senior Outreach Coordinator Cathaleen Roach, who had been with the Township for 5 years, retired effective June 1. We thank Cathaleen for her passion for working with older adults and for her many excellent contributions. Numerous strong

candidates were interviewed, and Betsy Kelly was chosen to replace Cathaleen. Betsy has picked up right where Cathaleen left off.

Finally, long-time Mental Health Administrator Avis Rudner went on medical leave in October. I helped fill her role, working with Avis remotely. This gave me a new sense of appreciation for all Avis has done. In February, Avis announced her desire to retire; a search for her replacement began in March.

One bright spot in FY2021, amidst the pandemic: River Forest Township was awarded *Innovative Senior Program of the Year* from Illinois Township Association of Senior Services Committees (ITASCSC). This recognized our “Gifts of Genealogy and Meaningful Memoirs” program, spearheaded by Senior Outreach Coordinator Cathaleen Roach and supported by Clerk Abby Schmelling. Equally as exciting, OP RF Township Senior Services Director Pam Mahn won *Director of the Year* from ITASCSC.

Efforts in FY2022 will focus on:

- training and orienting **the new Township team**;
- re-visit/return to **programming in an easing pandemic world**;
- development of a **new Township website**;
- further implementation of **“the HUB”**;
- enhanced support of the **Dementia Friendly River Forest and Age-Friendly River Forest** initiatives;
- enhanced **senior outreach efforts**, including those with the Sheridan;
- development of **new communication alternatives**;
- development of an **Emergency Assistance program**;
- renewal of **capital improvement planning for the RFCCA Building**;
- enhanced **infrastructure at the Township offices**, including the new phone system.
- **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 and assessor services.**

FY2021: YEAR IN REVIEW

FY2021 was characterized by a positive environment of collaboration, cooperation and communication. Everyone worked together during the pandemic to ensure positive outcomes.. Activities included:

Financial and Reporting – completed the following financial reports per deadline, submitted final reports to required places and posted/publicized as required:

- FY2021 Budget
- FY2021 Audit (hired new auditor)
- FY2021 Annual Treasurer’s Report
- FY2021 Annual Financial Report (AFR)
- 2020 Levy
- FY2021 Annual Report of Revenues and Expenditures

River Forest Township Board-Related Activities

- Approved one new Mental Health Committee members and four new Youth Services Committee members.
- Issued Resolutions of Appreciation for retiring RF Public Library Director Sue Quinn; retiring RF Township Trustee Mark Kelty; departing Village of RF Administrator Eric Palm. Also for Village of RF staff Jon Pape and Village of RF Trustee Erika Bachner for their work on the Complete Count Committee and 2020 Census.
- Per statue, set salaries for Supervisor, Assessor and Clerk for new 4-year terms.
- Reviewed and converted applicable executive session minutes to regular session minutes.

Regular Meeting Commitments (reduced due to Covid) – Staff or I 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), Suicide Prevention Task Force, Dementia-Friendly River Forest, Complete Count Committee for 2020 Census, D200 Mental Wellness Collaboration.
- **Quarterly:** OP & RF Community Foundation Community *works* Advisory Board and Guidance Team
- **Twice per year:** RFCCA Capital Improvement Committee was on hold pending outcome of Feasibility Study.

RF Civic Center Authority (RFCCA)

- Extensively involved in **feasibility study** process regarding expansion/renovation/rebuilding of RFCCA Building.

General Communications/Awareness

- Continued RF Township **Instagram**.
- 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. **Received excellent coverage** of Meaningful Wellness groups at Concordia University, Sibshops program, hiring of Betsy Kelly as new Senior Outreach Coordinator, and state-level senior awards given to Township.
- Continued to **promote Township events and services** in monthly RF Village eNews, quarterly Township Seniors Services News & Views newsletter and RFCC newsletter.
- Continued to **maintain current Township website**.
- **2020 Memorial Day Parade** and **Rotary Food Truck Rally 2020** were cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Maintained **communication with local media**.

Other Taxing Bodies

- Worked closely with Village of RF to help support **Volunteer Care Corps** during COVID-19 pandemic. Managed background checks and outreach. Promoted Volunteer Care Corps to those on Township Senior Services case management list. Communicated regularly with Helen Kwan, coordinator.
- Contributing member of **2020 Census Complete Count Committee**.
- Continued strong relationship with **RF Public Library in regard to senior programming**.
- Participated in **bi-weekly conference calls** hosted by OP Township with all social services agencies.
- Supported Village of RF efforts toward **masks and social distancing** with "All in Illinois" campaign and purchased banners for RF-based campaign.
- Attended **Joint Review Board meetings** for North Avenue and Madison Street TIF's, hosted by Village of RF.
- Met with **Emily Compton-Czak**, new RF Public Library Director.

Community Outreach

- Attended the following **community events** (in-person events were generally cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic; others were held virtually):
 - ✓ Rotary lunch meetings (Township became a member)
 - ✓ Infant Welfare golf fundraiser
 - ✓ D200 Mental Wellness Collab Parent University
 - ✓ Housing Forward “magic” fundraiser
 - ✓ NAMI “celebration of hope” fundraiser
 - ✓ Women Leaders in Philanthropy “meet the grantees”

Mental Health Services (with Mental Health Administrator)

- Attended monthly **RF Mental Committee (MHC) meetings**; provided status report.
- Interviewed and appointed **1 new member** on the MHC.
- Led new funding effort to **support FRED** and development of their new website.
- Brought on **new agency** for FY2022 funding: Progress Center for Independent Living.
- During leave by Mental Health Administrator (MHA) starting in October, **led MHC and performed most functions of MHA.**
- Converted agency fee-for-service grants to **flat grants** and paid all grants in full.
- With OP CMHB and Healthy Communities Foundation, continued rollout of **The HUB** (www.healthconnectionhub.org); participated in weekly status calls and virtual trainings.
- Participated in interview and hiring process of **new HUB project manager**, Lynda Murphy.
- Contributed to **Covid-19 Social Services Guide** and bi-weekly Social Services zoom calls.
- Participated in the **“They Deserve More” campaign** to increase hourly pay for I/DD caregivers.
- In partnership with Concordia University departments of counseling and gerontology, OP CMHB, and Township Senior Services, sponsored and did outreach for **Meaningful Living Groups for older adults** in the fall; previous spring groups were cancelled.
- Serviced on **D200 Mental Wellness Collaboration**. Co-sponsored and worked on two virtual events for OPRF HS and middle school parents: “Connecting through Laughter” and Parent University.

- Served on **Suicide Prevention Task Force** and with community partners; input to NAMI-led revision of **Support 4U texting program**, to better address needs of students in remote learning mode. Assisted NAMI with grant application to Women Leaders in Philanthropy.
- Continued to do outreach for **Sibshops** program, in partnership with Thrive Counseling Center.
- Continued implementation of the **Health Needs Assessment Plan** with OP CMHB, Oak Park Health Dept and community partners.
- Partnered with OP CMHB, NAMI, Thrive and Riveredge to produce joint ad campaign for **Mental Health Awareness Month**.
- Continued partnership with **LOSS from Catholic Charities** to co-sponsor non-denominational support group for those who have lost loved ones to suicide; groups continued virtually and will return to RF Township post-pandemic.
- Continued participation with Oak Park CMHB **Behavioral Health Consortium**; attended virtual meetings.
- Participated in **Developmental Disabilities Consortium**; attended virtual meetings. Supported Disabilities Awareness Month **ad campaign**.
- Attended virtual **mental health funders group** meeting.
- Had lunch with **Opportunity Knocks Warriors**.

Senior Services (with Senior Outreach Coordinator)

- **Interviewed candidates** for Senior Outreach Coordinator position to replace Cathaleen Roach, who retired June 1; **hired Betsy Kelly**.
- Participated in and supported **Dementia-Friendly River Forest committee** and initiative. Assisted with development of new **Dementia-Friendly RF website**.
- 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.
- Attended **open house for The Sheridan's** grand opening.
- Presented to Village of RF **Age-Friendly Committee** with Pam Mahn regarding Township Senior Services, past surveys and data and future needs.
- Agreed to support one-year pilot for **senior Home Repair Program**, with both villages and OP Township, through Northwest Housing Partnership.
- Funded Betsy Kelly to help issue **weekly Community Connections email** to seniors, in joint effort with Arbor West Neighbors.
- Participating in conversations with **neighboring communities** regarding senior safety.

- Started **Circle of Friends** initiative (Betsy Kelly).
- **2020 Celebrating Seniors Week** was cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Supported C. Roach participation in Arbor West Neighbors memoir-writing workshop
- Promotion of new **Dole Center for seniors** was put on hold during COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Indoor pickleball** for seniors at Tennis and Fitness Centre in Oak Park put on hold due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Outreach on behalf of **OP RF Sounds Good!** senior choir was put on hold due to pandemic.
- Continued partnership with **Arbor West Neighbors**.
- **SHIP** appointments at RF Township offices put on hold during COVID-19 pandemic; appointments continued virtually.

Youth Services

- Attended **monthly Youth Services Committee meetings** as Township liaison; provided status report.
- Interviewed and appointed **4 new members** on Youth Services Committee.
- Supported efforts to successfully **renew Youth Interventionist Program** among RF taxing bodies.
- Regularly reviewed **status of youth programs** throughout pandemic with Megan Traficano.
- Continued to **promote youth scholarships** to school social workers, etc.

General Assistance

- **Supported GA Administrator's efforts** to work with GA client, GA applicants and other residents in financial need. Assisted in finding housing for GA client in Oak Park.
- **Moved GA Administration** to OP Township when GA Administrator went on leave; will assess FY2022 strategy.

Oak Park Township

- Maintained **ongoing positive relationship** and met regularly with Oak Park Township Manager and staff.
- **OP RF Township Volunteer Breakfast** and **OP July 4 parade** were cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic..

Substance Prevention

- Financially supported new **Prevention Services** department.
- Contributed to and distributed new “**Talk Cards**” aimed at starting family conversation about substance use.
- Participated in PYD **Red Ribbon Week**.
- 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.
- Continued to serve on **PYD School Committee** and PYD general steering committee; collaborated with OPRF HS student prevention programs.

Holiday Food and Gift Basket

- Continued **in-kind support of Holiday Food and Gift Basket**, as it fulfills the Township mission of serving youth, seniors and those receiving General Assistance, including office and conference space, computer, copier, storage.
- Continued referrals and **grant support to HFGB** for RF residents.

Training- completed the following virtual trainings:

- Multi-day ***Sibshops facilitator*** training
- Multi-day ***Dementia Leadership*** training
- ***TOI Annual Conference***
- ***TOCC Education Session*** on communications

TOCC/TOI

- Member **TOCC Board**; co-chair of **TOCC legislative committee**; **Vice-President of Supervisors Division**.
- Attended virtual **TOCC Board and TOCC Supervisors Division meetings**.
- Completed ***audit of TOCC financials*** as member of audit committee.
- **TOI’s Township Topics Day in Springfield** was cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic.