

Village of Bull Valley: Year 2021 in Review



Dear Residents,

Below you will find an update and summary of events that occurred in the year 2021. It was a busy year, in spite of it being another year of Covid and its restrictions. This report is a little long, but there is a lot of information in it. I appreciate your patience. As always, please feel free to email or call with any questions or concerns.

Emily Berendt, Village President

bvillageinfo@gmail.com

815-459-4833 Office

815-337-3101 Direct

April 1, 2022

Roads 2021

In 2021 we replaced the aging culvert on South Cherry Valley Road and resurfaced North Cherry Valley Road. We also began preliminary preparations for the Mason Hill Road Surface Transportation Project, a grant-funded project, with construction anticipated in late spring or early summer of 2022. Weather, Covid and timing prevented the resurfacing of a portion of North Cold Springs Road that will be carried over to 2022.

Roads 2022

The plan for 2022 includes the deferred Cold Springs Road project from last year. The road will be resurfaced from Thompson Road to the entrance to The Boone Creek Conservation Area. That is likely the only road work that will be done this year other than Mason Hill Road. The total cost of the Mason Hill Road construction is \$1,144,000. The Village pays 20% of the grant plus engineering costs. That amount is over a third of our entire average annual revenue of about \$900,000.

We also began the application process for a Surface Transportation Grant to resurface Queen Ann Road. If we are awarded that grant, the earliest the work will be done is 2026, but now is the time to apply for that grant as American Rescue Plan money has been added to the available funds.

Unfortunately some of our most deteriorated roads are not eligible for the Federal Surface Transportation Program, including local subdivision roads and Valley Hill Road. Valley Hill Road is a three-mile road with an estimated repair cost of between \$1.6 and \$1.8 mm in today's dollars. This equals about 6 years of Bull Valley's average road resurfacing budget. We continue to watch for grant money and appeal to our elected representatives for help. We are continually challenged to finance major repairs on these roads.

As always when making decisions on road work, we are guided by our long-range improvement plan, and other factors such as amount of traffic, number of residents, and affordability of the necessary improvement. We have over 29 miles of road to maintain, and not enough households paying taxes to provide the level of road resurfacing available to neighboring Townships and Municipalities.

Infill Annexations

Our roads are supported by you, our Village residents, but used daily by residents and non-residents alike. There are over 50 properties in pockets of unincorporated land surrounded, or almost surrounded, by the Village that are not annexed in. The Village will continue to seek to annex them. Filling in these big pockets would help make the Village a more compact unit, increase efficiency for maintenance purposes and police protection, and assess a fair share of these costs to those properties.

I know I repeat this every year and if you are reading this, you are not one of the 50 non-resident properties. However, you may share a boundary with someone who is. These non-residents are neighbors and friends who value and enjoy the same things about the Village we all do: large lots, open space protection and a small community where we all know each other. We all share in the benefit of being in this community; we should all be sharing the costs.

If your neighbor is not in the Village, please ask them to consider annexing. It is in your best interests and the best interests of the Village.

Traffic Calming and Road Safety

Police Chief Tracy Dickens and I met with county transportation officials last fall to discuss the ongoing concern about drivers' failure to observe the stop signs at Fleming and Bull Valley Roads.

This is in no way intended to minimize the fact that it happens throughout the Village at other intersections, but the Fleming/Bull Valley intersection seems to get the most complaints and is under County control. We agreed to work together to find some solutions to the problem. The County officials have agreed to meet with their Chief Traffic Engineer to consider some alternatives at that intersection. If any changes are approved they will be done this spring.

For our part we have agreed to make sure the corners are cleared for visibility. We appreciate the clearing done by the homeowners at that intersection and other intersections in the Village. We also will be adding small top-mounted LED lights to the approach signs on Bull Valley Road.

Remember to always be careful approaching any intersection in the Village, from any direction, and stop completely.

The Village has submitted a grant application to the Metropolitan Mayors' Caucus of Chicago requesting some speed and traffic control devices. The grant is funded by ComEd for an award of up to \$10,000. The Village has to match that amount with another \$10,000 if the grant is awarded.

Village-wide Storm Water Remediation Plan

The Village stormwater infrastructure consists entirely of surface components - ditches and culverts. We do not have a constructed system of storm sewers, drains or drain pipelines.

The recent Survey on the use of our allocation of American Rescue Plan funding, made it clear that storm water control and flooding issue were your priority. In response, the Village has commissioned a Village-wide stormwater plan from our engineering firm. We will prioritize and begin work as soon as the plan is completed. We have identified several areas of the Village where remediation of the degraded ditches and culverts would provide long-term benefit and protection that is preferable to mounting emergency responses after the damage has occurred.

The first goal is to remediate where critical issues exist and then attempt to stay ahead proactively before new issues arise. The increase in the number and severity of extreme weather events, particularly heavy rain storms, has made it critical to increase resilience to these events and avoid flooded streets and neighborhoods, road damage, road closures and water damage to private and public property.

The amount of funding we will receive is inadequate for the number of projects submitted for the plan, and other areas of need have come to light since then. We will seek grants to add to the available funds.

Pipeline Safety

There are three major transmission pipelines that run through and are on several properties in the Village. One is an oil pipeline owned and operated by Enbridge Energy and the other two are gas pipelines owned and operated by Kinder Morgan. An estimated total of 45 properties in the Village have pipeline easements.

There are no known reported significant pipeline incidents within the Village according to governmental reports. There are anecdotal reports and one documented maintenance issue with the crude oil line within the Village. However, I'm sure you have read of disastrous pipeline accidents in some areas of the country. To ensure that the Village is providing the information you need to avoid a potential pipeline incident, we will ask all building permit applicants to indicate on the application whether or not there is a pipeline on the property. Staff will then provide the applicant with a copy of the Village pipeline ordinance that specifies the procedures to follow before construction.

In addition we will make some changes to the density and setback requirements in our current pipeline ordinance that will be applicable primarily to new commercial construction. Existing residences and accessory buildings that were constructed in compliance with the current setbacks will remain exempt from the new setbacks.

Finances

The Village's financial picture is unchanged from last year, focusing on road improvements while maintaining a balanced budget each year. I am happy to share more budget information with any of you who want to see it.

General operating expenses are up across the board. As a small non-home rule Village, our non-property tax revenue sources are limited. Again this year, we will take only the statutory cost of living increase in our levy. To increase revenue we will continue to pursue annexations, STP road grants, and other smaller grants that we use to cover unbudgeted expenses.

Business Development

Many of you are familiar with the Aavang family products from buying them at the Woodstock Farmers Market. You will soon be able to access their products year round at Michelle Aavang's Bull Valley Farm

Country Store at 8817 Illinois Route 120. The store will open for business later this year, offering locally-raised meats, ice cream, cheese, yogurt, bread and other baked goods, whole fruit and vegetables, seasonal plants and flowers, popcorn, honey, jam/jelly, beef jerky, seasonings, and sauces. The large dairy barn on the premises will be renovated and updated into a suitable milking parlor, where visitors can watch a milking, the bottling process, or simply observe farm animals.

Our other two businesses in the Village are the Woodstock County Club and the Boone Creek Golf Course.

Administrative Assistant and Development Coordinator Emma Kane has been meeting with the McHenry County Economic Development Corporation to find ways to attract more limited retail development that is compatible with the survey you completed last year. Identifying our strengths as a Village and reaching out to businesses that reflect and support those strengths can help us develop a retail tax base that benefits the Village without compromising our collective values.

Home Occupations

The Bull Valley Planning and Zoning Commission is reviewing the Village Zoning Code chapter on Home Occupations to make it more attractive for a homeowner to run a small non-intrusive business from the home. The goal is to modernize the concept to incorporate current home business trends that have been accelerated by the advent of Covid-19 and its variants. If you currently have a home business we would appreciate your input as the new definition is developed. The Commission meets every first Monday evening of the month at 7 p.m. and is currently virtual. If you wish to attend, please call Emma at 815-459-4728 to get the agenda and Zoom link.

Internet Service

One of the biggest obstacles to expanding home occupations or attracting compatible retail businesses to the Village is the lack of reliable, affordable internet.

Poor internet access also has a negative impact on Village property values, the ability to access telemedicine and emergency services and the ability to connect school children with their teachers and classwork. Household entertainment and security systems rely on good internet to function properly. How many of us can go an entire day without checking our smart phones for emails from friends and family?

The recent Village internet survey results indicated there is a core group of residents for whom broadband internet is a critical need and who are willing to pay a higher up front installation and monthly fee. Others think broadband is important but they are happy with what they have now and not willing to pay more. One person commented that broadband internet is no longer a luxury but a necessity that should be treated like a utility and installed free, available to everyone. A couple respondents noted that we live in an area of great beauty and privacy and the lack of good internet is an unfortunate side effect.

These mixed responses did not result in definite direction for the Village. Several grants for fiber broadband internet will be available soon, due to recent passage of the federal infrastructure bill. Without a strong majority opinion, it doesn't make sense to pursue them at this time. Federal grants require a Village match of between 20% and 50% of the total cost, something the Village cannot afford on its current budget. So even with a grant, there would still be costs that would need to be paid by you, the end user.

The Village will keep monitoring federal funding sources for grants that are available and affordable. We will keep looking for alternative solutions to improve your internet access as the various providers improve their technology and it becomes available. Some residents have reported that their service providers have upgraded their in-home equipment such as hot spots that provide a stronger signal.

The Thompson Road Farm Project

In the summer of 2020, for sale signs went up at the Thompson Road Farm, (you may know it as the Jung Farm), resulting in conversations between the Village of Bull Valley, The Land Conservancy of McHenry County (TLC), the Bull Valley Riding Club (BVRC) and several local residents, with concerns about the future of the farm. The group formed the Thompson Road Farm Project (TRF) and started developing plans to acquire the property with a combination of grants, sales and personal donations.

Eighteen months later, on March 8, 2022, The Land Conservancy closed on the purchase of the property. TLC will hold the property during the initial restoration and establishment of park amenities and will continue to hold conservation easements when the property is formally transferred debt-free to the Village of Bull Valley.

This farm is unique in that it isn't 324 flat acres of row crops. This farm is a glacial topography, featuring scenic, rolling terrain and natural views from almost every area of the property. The resulting variety of landscapes creates perfect small areas of habitat for native plants and animals, particularly birds. It's a varied eco-system of wetlands, woodlands and prairie that will all be restored under TLC's leadership. The restoration will protect a total of 274 acres of natural areas, safeguarding water quality in Boone Creek, one of the region's highest quality streams and an important source of water that replenishes our aquifers.

The nearly five miles of equestrian trails on the farm are the original "heritage trails" of the Bull Valley Riding Club. These trails will be preserved and incorporated in the future park as mixed-use trails for public recreation. That will not only allow for horseback riding to continue, but will also add hiking, walking, snowshoeing, trail running and more! A public viewing area will be created along Thompson Road for wildlife viewing, including the seasonally resident Sandhill Cranes.

A number of upcoming restoration workdays will be scheduled soon. This is an opportunity to come out and experience the farm first hand, while you contribute valuable volunteer hours. We will seek public input on future uses through surveys, on social media and on TLC's website as well as through a public meeting later this summer.

We are grateful to several residents who had enough faith in the project to donate start-up funding and give us the confidence to achieve our goal. It never was a question of "can we do this?" but always "how can we do this?" We still have to raise funds both to pay for the shortfall that we covered with a bank loan, and to start the restoration and public access of this ecological treasure. You can support this project right now by making a donation. Naming rights are available, and donations in honor or memory of another are welcome. Pledges of future support are also very much needed and appreciated.

Members of the Thompson Road Farm Project are Lisa Haderlein, TLC's Executive Director; Emily Berendt, President, Village of Bull Valley; Patrick Skvoretz, President Bull Valley Riding Club; Nicola and John Birch, Deo Gloria Farm and Bull Valley Riding Club members; Elaine Ramesh Ph.D, JD, Chair, Equestrian Coalition of McHenry County; Village Trustee and TLC Board member Mark Newton; TLC Board Vice President Ders Anderson.

Bull Valley Garden Club Memorial Patio

The beautiful gardens at the Stickney House have been planted and maintained by the Bull Valley Garden Club for the past three years. This year the club will continue this work, and will expand with a memorial brick patio on the south side of the building. The patio will be designed and placed with a lovely landscaped backdrop and will be large enough to serve as an outdoor venue for various social functions.

The Garden Club is grateful for a generous private donation that has made it possible to begin construction this spring. They expect the patio to be ready for summer and fall functions, kicked off with a dedication ceremony.

Bricks of several sizes will be available for engraving, to memorialize people and events for posterity. You can purchase your brick or bricks throughout the year from the Garden Club for placement once a year each spring. Details will be sent out as available. To buy a brick, call Marge Theisen at 815-575-2833.

The Monarch Mayors Pledge

The monarch butterfly, is an iconic species whose eastern populations have declined by 90% and western populations by 99% in recent years. Through the National Wildlife Federation's Mayor's Monarch Pledge, U.S. cities, municipalities and other communities are committing to create habitat for the monarch butterfly and other pollinators. The Village is participating in this program.

The Mayor's pledge document asks us to commit to undertaking three projects in furtherance of the pledge annually and identifies several ways to accomplish this. One way is to recruit, inform and assist residents about the opportunity to develop a monarch waystation on their property. Two locations have been identified so far.

The first location is at the eastern gateway to the Village along Bull Valley Road, just west of the McAndrews Glen subdivision, which itself created 25 acres of monarch and pollinator habitat over 15 years ago. It's a private residential property with approximately 150 feet of road frontage, adjacent to the 45-acre Boloria Meadows Nature Preserve. The owner will remove invasive trees and brush up to road edge, including some large non-native trees. The cleared area, approximately one-quarter to one-half acre, will then be planted with a monarch-friendly native prairie seed mix donated by a local restoration contractor.

Within two to three years this restored area will be awash with monarch host and nectar plants such as milkweed, coneflowers, blazing stars, asters, and goldenrods. The owner also has committed to continued control of invasive plant species and regular controlled burns once the prairie planting is established. They have also agreed to put up signage identifying the stretch of roadside as monarch habitat, with signs provided by the Village.

This first project is viewed as a demonstration that will be highly visible. Over time we hope that many of you will be inspired to undertake similar habitat restoration projects, creating a network of interconnected habitats that monarchs and other pollinators can travel between.

The second location for a monarch habitat is the area north of the dog park at the Still Farm, where the previous prairie restoration has been sadly neglected and overtaken by invasive species. Two enthusiastic residents have volunteered to work to revitalize the prairie in that area, and incorporate monarch habitat into the plan. The first step there, as on Bull Valley Road, will be to clear the roadside tree line for safety and visibility.

You should see activity at both sites as the weather begins to improve. Once the tree line on Queen Anne Road is cleared, you will be able to see into the restored area. Volunteers are welcome to help with the burn and seeding activities. We will send an email with dates and times of workdays when scheduled.

The third pledge we are making is to pass a Dark-Sky ordinance to reduce light pollution using guidelines of the International Dark Sky Association, Inc. The mission of the IDA is "to preserve and protect the night time environment and our heritage of dark skies through quality outdoor lighting."

If you are interested in creating a monarch habitat on your property and want more information or if you are willing to volunteer to help with the current projects, please call the Village and leave your name and number. We will put you in touch with the team leader for the project.

Restoration of the Stickney House: Guidance from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Last fall, Village resident Dr. Hennie Reynders, Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) raised the possibility of having the Department of Historic Preservation and the Department of Architecture at the School contribute to the next steps in the restoration process of the Stickney House Mansion.

This spring semester the Stickney House Mansion is the subject of research and study in two graduate classes under the guidance of Architect and Restoration Specialist Professor Anne Sullivan. On Monday, March 28th, the house was visited, examined, explored and filled with the enthusiastic voices of eight graduate students from Professor Sullivan's classes.

The group expressed an interest in viewing the Stickney House site in a holistic manner, as part of the neighborhood of the period including an interest in the natural features of the glacial landscape in the Village.

The result will be a history and analysis of the Stickney House and an action plan to complete the restoration, creating a valuable public resource with space available for small events and community functions, managed tours, and other uses. The SAIC will continue to provide support and direction as agent during the restoration process.

We are pleased and honored to have the School of the Art Institute take an interest in the Stickney House, and grateful for their offer of assistance. We want to acknowledge and thank the Stickney House Foundation for all the work over the last 25 years that has created a solid foundation for the SAIC to build on.

Staff Updates:

Your Police Department is still ably headed by Chief Tracy Dickens, with part-time Officers Ken Hoffman, Al Antoni, Frank Beatty, Pam Mason and Rolf Baker. Mike Koch is still Road Supervisor, with part-time Road Workers Marc Koch, Connor Byrne, and Mike Seiple.

In the office you will find Village Clerk Hannah Lindner and Records Clerk and Development Coordinator Emma Kane.

It's a small staff but a committed one. Office hours are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Police are on duty on varied schedules seven days a week. The Road crew team works generally from 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. but are on call all hours during weather events.

Your Village Board consists of seven unpaid volunteers who are hands-on in their areas of responsibility. Emily Berendt, President; Trustee Ed Ellinghausen, Roads; Trustee Nancy Sobol, Planning and Zoning; Trustee Peg O'Brien, Finance; Trustee Mark Kersten, Public Safety; Trustee Mark Newton, Parks; Trustee Steve Thomas, Communications and Community Development.

Village Meetings

The Village Board of Trustees meets the fourth Monday of each month at 10:00 a.m. The Planning and Zoning Commission meets the first Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. You are invited to attend and share your comments and questions on any issue. All meetings are virtual. Please phone the office ahead for access numbers and to confirm that the meeting is being held as scheduled. 815-459-4833.

And Finally – Kittens!

A big THANK YOU to those who donated \$50 toward the catch-spay-release program for a litter of feral kittens living in the Village barn. The kittens were here for a couple of short weeks and then disappeared, fate unknown. We did, however, catch the mother cat. She was spayed, ear chipped and vaccinated, and released at the Village barn. She has since been spotted in the neighborhood, and appears to be doing well. We are thankful that she will not be producing any more kitten families in our barn.