



Village of Bull Valley: Year 2022 in Review

Dear Residents,

Below you will find an update and summary of events that occurred in the year 2022. As always, please feel free to email or call with any questions or concerns.

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Home Rule

The referendum asking you whether or not the Village should become Home Rule community failed with 310 “no” votes and 104 “yes” votes.

The ability to access alternative funding and not increase property taxes was a primary consideration for the Village in seeking Home Rule status. As a non-home rule Village, our options for alternative funding are limited. The Village plans to pursue both annexations and retail development but neither is likely to result in more than small amounts of revenue.

Annexations

Tax revenue from annexations alone is not sufficient to raise revenues significantly, but is an important addition to the stabilization of our tax base. Each new annexation brings the Village closer to other properties, many of which could also be annexed, and widens our sphere of protection from inappropriate development.

In addition, each annexation increases the Village population, thus increasing the amount of state shared funds and grants most of which are based on population. Many who enjoy the amenities and protection of the Village are not annexed, are not paying their fair share of property tax and are not counted in the population base, causing the Village to lose money to which it would otherwise be entitled. Residents can help by encouraging non-annexed neighbors to annex.

Roads 2022

The total cost of the Mason Hill Road construction is still being finalized, but was estimated at \$1,144,000. The Village paid 20% of the grant plus engineering costs or approximately \$300,000.

Cold Springs Road was resurfaced from Thompson Road to the entrance to The Boone Creek Conservation Area.

We were awarded a Surface Transportation Grant for Queen Ann Road, but the funding will not be available until 2026. Prior to the roadwork we need to replace the culvert on Queen Ann Road just south of the S-curve. American Rescue Plan money has been allocated to that project, which is estimated at just under \$90,000.

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 upkeep and maintenance necessary.

Roads 2023

The amount of road work in the coming year will be limited, with a primary focus on subdivision roads, all of them in great need. Once again we will be doing segments of road instead of continuous stretches. This allows us to stretch the available funding to cover the worst segments first. We also will need to find a way to finance at least one new snow plow truck.

Valley Hill Road

A funding request for Valley Hill Road has once again failed to make the cut with our new District 14 Congressman William Foster. Valley Hill Road is a three-mile road with an estimated repair cost of between \$1.6 and \$1.8 million in today's dollars. This equals about 6 years of Bull Valley's average road resurfacing budget. The road is not eligible for federal STP grants. Your Village Board is open to suggestions.

Fleming Road

Fleming Road is in McHenry County's jurisdiction. The Village does not maintain it or have input into scheduled resurfacing. Assistant Director of Transportation Department Scott Hennings and Darryl Kunz contacted the Village and met with Road Trustee Ed Ellinghausen and me to discuss repaving Fleming Road.

Neither Scott nor Darryl were employed by the County Transportation Department (MCDOT) when Fleming was last repaved twelve years ago. They asked for the history from our perspective. If you recall, after 18 months of meetings and discussions with the Fleming Road Alliance, the County Board directed MCDOT to keep Fleming Road "in the same footprint".

Scott and Darryl had some suggestions about improving the base. They will be working on a proposal for the road that incorporates this new, better base. I will forward their proposal to this list

for feedback as soon as I get it. With MCDOT reaching out to understand our position, I am hopeful that we will not have the same issues we had last time.

Traffic Calming and Road Safety

The Village was awarded a grant of \$9,755 from the Metropolitan Mayors' Caucus of Chicago requesting some speed and traffic control devices. Village matched that amount to purchase traffic calming equipment intended to raise awareness and enhance compliance with speed limits. You will probably see the Scout Speed Trailer with LED readout at some point as it is moved to different roadside locations.

Two Speed Radar Feedback signs have been installed permanently on Mason Hill Road, These signs do not light continuously, but only on approach of a vehicle. They shut off after the vehicle has passed. Both the Scout Trailer and these LED readout signs are encouraging motorists to slow down We are hoping that over time this will train regular users of that road to reduce their overall speed automatically.

The Village also purchased new signage designed to inform truck traffic of our weight limits and provide adequate notice to the trucker before turning onto a weight restricted road, rather than after the driver is already on the road. The more trucks we can keep off our roads, the longer the roads will last.

Hazard Mitigation Planning

This year the Village is participating in the County update of its 2017 Hazard Mitigation Plan. Participating in the plan increases our awareness of hazards, risks and vulnerabilities; identifies actions for risk reduction; and focuses our dollars on the greatest risks while communicating our hazard mitigation priorities to state and federal officials. Financially, approved mitigation plans are a prerequisite for certain kinds of non-emergency disaster assistance.

Village-wide Storm Water Remediation Plan

The 2021 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 commissioned a Village-wide storm water plan from our engineering firm and has begun storm water work under that plan. The Queen Ann culvert is one of those projects that will be scheduled in 2023.

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 received 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.

Finances

The Village's financial picture is unchanged from last year, focusing on road improvements while maintaining a balanced budget each year. 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.

The Village's total budget yearly is between \$850,000 and \$900,000. The Roads Department budget for repaving is generally about one-third of that money. When you add mowing, snowplowing, pot-hole patching and general maintenance the Road Department budget is over half. This year we have to commit to purchasing at least one new snow plow truck. Our current trucks are year 2001, 2002 and 2006.

Home Occupations

The Village Zoning Code chapter on Home Occupations has been revised 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 have a business run out of your home, please call and request a copy of the new Home Occupations ordinance.

The Thompson Road Farm

The Thompson Road Farm is currently working with a contractor to install a small parking lot off Thompson Road. Once that is completed, the first trail will be established and opened, hopefully by June. 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

The Stickney House Foundation: Living With The Land

Living With The Land (LWL) is the product of research by graduate students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the fall of 2021 and spring of 2022. It creates a holistic vision for the Stickney House/Village Hall property that goes beyond restoration of the house. It includes a historic district, a community center and a community identity for the Village. People will not only be able to tour the renovated historic Stickney House Mansion, but will be able to rent the newly repurposed Stickney Barn for weddings and other events, enjoy summer festivals on the grounds, enjoy the walking and biking trails and experience the embodiment of the interconnection of our glacial, cultural and historic landscapes in the Village.

With support of the Village Board, a Resident's Steering Committee has been working with the LWL plans to refine and direct the concepts of the project. The Stickney House Foundation, with a new expanded mission, will work to develop a detailed timeline and budget for funding purposes and will be responsible for funding and directing implementation of the plan.

Living With The Land is intended to be funded through private donations and grants without any property tax money. It is also designed to be self-sustaining upon completion with user fees and donator support.

The Open House held at the Woodstock Country Club of Bull Valley (WCC) was a great success. Several good suggestions and questions came up during the lunch discussions that will guide the direction of LWL in the next planning stages. We are pleased and honored that the School of the Art Institute will continue to offer guidance and support in this effort.

If you missed the open house, the display is available for viewing at the Village Hall during regular hours.

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. The Village is participating in a program of the National Wildlife Federation called the Mayors Monarch Pledge. Last year the Village began three projects to fulfill the pledge. Two are Monarch habitat projects that will be completed this spring and summer. For the third project, the Village passed a Dark Sky Ordinance to reduce light pollution using guidelines of the International Dark Sky Association, Inc.

This year the Village commitment is to recruit, inform and assist residents about the opportunity to develop a Monarch waystation on their property. Thirteen residents responded to the email asking for projects last fall. The group will meet on May 6, 2023 at 10:30 a.m. at Village Hall to share ideas. A guest speaker will bring a list of appropriate native plants for different soil, water and sun conditions. 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.

Outdoor Lighting Ordinance: Dark Sky at Night

When you moved to Bull Valley you were probably attracted by its open space, woods, streams, wildlife, and rural character. One essential element of this rural character is the ability to enjoy the night sky. A dark sky at night is essential to the natural diurnal and nocturnal rhythms of all creatures, including us.

We are no longer a society whose hours are determined by daylight. We are a 24-hour society that requires artificial light at night for functional purposes as well as safety and security. The Village Outdoor Lighting Ordinance provides for that necessary light while minimizing the negative effects of light pollution to preserve our rural character, aesthetic value and the unique quality of life. It gives us the ability to view the night sky as part of the peaceful enjoyment of our property.

The Village's Outdoor Lighting Ordinance was guided by the International Dark Sky Association, Inc., <https://www.darksky.org/> a United States-based non-profit organization incorporated in 1988. The mission of the IDA is "to preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies through quality outdoor lighting." Thousands of cities nationwide have become Dark Sky Communities. <https://www.darksky.org/our-work/lighting/public-policy/lighting-ordinances/>

Village Office Hours:

In an effort to reduce expenses and increase productivity, the Village Board voted in November 2022 to change the hours that Village Hall is open to the public.

Monday 9-5

Tue closed

Wednesday 8 –5, 5-7 by appointment

Thursday 9-5

Friday by appointment

Police are on duty on varied schedules seven days a week and are always on call. 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.

Residents who cannot visit the office during these hours are encouraged to call to arrange an alternate time that is convenient

Staff Notes:

Your Police Department is still ably headed by Chief Tracy Dickens, with part-time Sargent Al Antoni and part-time Officers Ken Hoffman, Frank Beatty 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.

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 second Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m. You are invited to attend and share your comments and questions on any issue. Please phone the office ahead to confirm that the meeting is being held as scheduled. 815-459-4833.