

Village Voice

Village of Lake Linden Newsletter

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Here we are near the end of another long winter. The start of spring means that we are looking forward to some new challenges and projects for the upcoming seasons.

Americana Grant: The Village has been awarded a grant for \$24,000 from the Americana Foundation for the continued renovation of the exterior of the Village Hall. This makes a total of \$133,000 granted by the Americana over the past four years. We thank them for their generous support and look forward to a continuing relationship with them in the future.

Community Surveys: To sort out and identify these projects and address some of the issues that are foremost on the minds of residents, we sent out a community survey last month. We were completely taken aback at the response we got. Almost 270 surveys were returned, a response rate of over 55%! Compiling the data was a daunting task in itself, but now that the process is complete there are some things that are very evident.

Strengths- Many categories on the survey returned an overwhelmingly positive response. These included fire protection, emergency services, the Village park, snow removal, business variety, strong school system and friendly, small-town atmosphere.

Priorities- Residents were overwhelmingly most concerned about the following areas: Activities/facilities for youths, police protection, condition (or lack) of sidewalks, poor cell phone coverage, attracting and keeping businesses, junk cars in yards and having a recycling center here.

Concerns- Other things were mentioned by numerous residents including: water and sewer service too expensive, Torch Lake contamination, inadequate street lighting, cable/internet service, new fire station, more restaurants, more park activities, zoning, reopening Lindells, garbage service too expensive, and repair/expand park, marina and campground.

As I mentioned there was certainly a great deal of information to digest. The above items were only the most frequently mentioned. Many other constructive concerns and/or complaints (and some not very constructive) were received as well. We would like to thank those who participated and those who expressed an interest in serving the community on committees.

Motivation- The survey project was conducted with an eye toward developing a comprehensive strategic plan for the Village. This plan will be used as the basis for community and economic development, utilities and infrastructure review and improvement, and recreational activities and facilities improvement. Most importantly, it will be the foundation of our continuing search for grant opportunities to help fund the projects outlined in the plan. Do you realize that since 2002 the Village has benefitted from \$1,728,500 in grant funds from various sources. They are a large part of what we have accomplished here within a very short time.

Action- There are some things in the survey upon which the Village can act in short order, and we intend to address those things as quickly and as efficiently as we can. Specific subjects we are turning our immediate attention to are police protection, cell phone service, youth activities/facilities, ordinance enforcement (specifically junk cars, hazardous buildings/yards), and village sidewalks. (We currently have a sidewalk program under which the residents can pay for the concrete to redo the sidewalk in front of their home and the Village will form, pour and finish it. Call the office for costs.)

Misconceptions- There are obviously things over which we have little control or say. We would like very much to have Lindell's re-open and we hope this will happen in the near future. As a Village we can do very little to attract business other than market our strengths to prospective owners and we will certainly make an effort to do that. We are also doing everything we can to assure users that Torch Lake is environmentally sound. The EPA, DEQ and Health Dept. all watch the area very closely and conduct periodic testing. Weekly water tests in the swimming area are done by the health dept. and those test results are posted at the site. The detection of the contamination last year is a testament to the diligence of this testing process and the clean-up was handled quickly and efficiently.

Service charges/fees- I would like to clear up a misconception evident in the survey results. The rates for services the Village offers; garbage collection, garbage bags, water rates, dumpster fees, etc., are not designed to make a profit for the Village. These rates are determined so the costs for the services are paid for and no more. Sanitation rates(bags and annual fees) pay for the labor, truck, tipping fee at the transfer station, administration and maintenance of those services and equipment. Currently, sanitation rates are being reviewed to keep pace with current expenses. Unfortunately, the cost of fuel largely drives those expenses (truck costs go up, bags are a petroleum product) so it may become necessary to increase some of those rates in the near future.

Survey summaries: If you would like to get a copy of the survey summary of raw data you can pick one up at the Village Clerk's office during regular office hours.

Village Finances: The Village has gone through some rough budget cycles in the last couple of years primarily related to General Fund expenditures (police, park maintenance, staffing levels, etc.). As a result of carefully planned staff reductions and spending, the Village budget is now

balanced and operating smoothly. Funds are now available for carefully planned expenditures that are in line with your thoughts received through the recent Community Survey.

Dump truck Rentals: Because of changes and restrictions at the Houghton County transfer station, we will no longer be renting dump trucks out for residents. The two-yard dumpsters will still be available on a first come, first served basis.

Summer construction: A couple of major repaving projects will be going on at various times throughout the summer. M-26 will be undergoing a resurfacing through the Village. Also, 9th Street (Bootjack Rd) will be resurfaced up to Calumet Street. We will let you know when this takes place as soon as we get more specific information.

Let-run Water Accounts: Over the course of the summer some of those residences where the water is run to prevent freezing will be notified of a change in our policy. Next winter fewer homes will receive credit on their bills for these let-runs. It is not the Village's responsibility to prevent water from freezing if pipes are exposed on the premises or in the house itself. *If you have a mobile home with exposed pipes underneath or an unheated basement where water service enters the house you are responsible for making sure those areas are protected.*

New Water Bills: In conjunction with the updating of our water billing program, the bills themselves will have a new look. The details have not yet been worked out but be aware that the appearance of the bill will be changing, possibly by the May 1st billing.

Spring Clean-up: It is still a bit early for establishing dates for clean-up. We will post dates in the *Gazette* and ads on radio stations as soon as possible, or you can call the office at 296-9911.

Monthly meetings: A general theme also expressed in the surveys was that residents either had no say in decisions rendered by the Council or that they are blindsided or befuddled by some Council decisions. I can say that every decision made by the council is done so at *public* meetings, these decisions are rarely made "on the spot" but are deliberated well beforehand, and when there is public comment these comments are strongly considered. Our meetings are often held with two or three residents in attendance! Complaints about a decision after the fact are not productive and frankly are of little use. *Come to the meetings* (2nd Thursday each month, changes posted and broadcast well in advance) and *voice your concerns* (or support) to the Council when it will make an impact.

Email newsletters! If you would like the email sent to you via email please let me know at vll@lakelinden.net. We will try this with the next newsletter at the end of June.

James M. Aittama, President

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