

The Nosy Neighbor

PRESIDENT CREATES NEW COMMITTEE

A Human Resources Committee was created to deal with succession plans for employee retirements, as several employees could be retiring within the next ten years. With the advice and consent of the village board, village president Jim Cooper appointed Steve Newman, Ryan Hancock, Mel Drucker, and Lori Sampson to the committee.

The committee's first agenda dealt with discussion on whether to pay members of committees for their attendance at meetings. Also discussed was the possibility of changing the village clerk's position from elected to appointed and a succession plan for the current clerk.

The clerk has been employed with the village for 45 years, the sewer superintendent for 31 years, the street superintendent for 25 years, and the water superintendent for 21 years. The positions of water and sewer superintendent require licensing and experience in the field.

The committee hopes to nail down better job descriptions and formulate a good way to determine fair and competitive wages for all positions. A salary and benefit survey of other municipalities compiled by the Bi-State Regional Commission is being used as a guide.

At the first meeting of the HR Committee, the clerk was tasked with formulating separate job descriptions for her duties as clerk and collector. She was also asked to note how often certain parts of the job must be done: weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and annual.

Committee members discussed the possibility of hiring an administrator and/or public works superintendent. Newman outlined performance metrics for a new position and asked committee members to review and respond at the next meeting. A date for the next meeting has not yet been set.



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Thank You!

**Wyman R. Coulter
Trust Benefit Committee**

Awards from the Coulter Trust have allowed the Village to install ornamental street lights, upgrade to a grass infield in Love Park, purchase Christmas decorations for Central Park, pay down a sewer loan, install tennis court light fixtures, and much more.

COULTER TRUST AWARDS FUNDS

Once again, the Coulter Trust Benefit Committee of the Wyman R. Coulter Trust awarded funding to the Village of Orion. The village received \$17,000 in total.

A camera surveillance system for Love Park will be purchased. Funds awarded for that project totaled about one-half the estimated cost.

Also awarded was \$10,000 for a plan and cost estimate for a proposed village hall.

Trustee Bob Mitton told the board last month that he would develop a letter for distribution to trustees and employees asking their input on what should be included in a new village hall.

Village trustee Bob Mitton will seek input from employees and board members for a proposed village hall.

**Telecommunications
Tax to Take Effect
July 1, 2021**

After considerable discussion and an estimation that the tax would cost the average customer \$2 per phone, the tax was approved.

Proponents of the tax were President Cooper and trustees Mitton, Newman, and Hancock.

Voting no were trustees Drucker and Nelson. Trustee Dunlap was absent.



TELECOMMUNICATIONS TAX

After voting to set a telecommunications tax at 4%, if an ordinance was adopted, the village board, two meetings later, adopted an ordinance to begin taxing Orion residents' phone bills. The ability for municipalities to tax phone bills has been in existence since the early 2000s.

President Cooper asked the board to consider the tax, partially due to declining utility tax revenue caused by warmer temperatures and energy efficiency. He felt the village could reap \$1,200 per month from the new tax.

Though the tax was approved in February, it will not become effective until July 1st. A certified copy of the ordinance was submitted to the Illinois Department of Revenue, and telecommunications companies serving Orion must be notified and supplied with all addresses within the corporate limits.

Village trustee Steve Newman said the communications tax would allow for more capital improvement projects and less pause between those projects. Others felt the implementation of a new tax during a pandemic was poor timing.

The ordinance passed by a 3-2 vote. One trustee was absent.

LARKINS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS (Cont'd from pg. 4)

of benefitting businesses taking out loans with BankORION. The program was highly successful and is still in existence today.

Larkins spent a great deal of time working with the village board, engineers, and the Illinois EPA to see that installation of sanitary relief main was completed along with upgrading the sewer plant, a two-part project totaling around \$4 million.

At the time, Larkins asked for no increase in the property tax levy since a sewer rate increase would be necessary to repay the loan for improvements. The village board heeded his advice. Larkins also hoped revenue generated by the TIF district would someday help pay the loan.

Sixty-six sets of bid docs were requested by contractors vying for the project. Only four contractors turned in bids. The low bidder was General Constructors, Inc. at a price of \$2,745,000, and they were awarded the job. The total cost of the project was estimated at \$3,063,000, including engineering and other fees.

The Village was able to obtain a loan from the IEPA's Revolving Loan Fund at an interest rate of 2.675%.

Larkins, never one to rest, announced Orion was chosen to participate in the Illinois Housing Development Authority's program to assist qualified residents with home improvements. This was the second time during Larkins' term that the village was chosen to participate in the program.

Orion celebrated the designation of the band shell to the National Register of Historic Places as well as the west water tower. Larkins and the village board committed funding to restore the band shell to its original glory just in time for the structure's 90th birthday celebration. It was estimated 1,200 celebrants attended the 2003 event.

Larkins' jam-packed term ended in 2005. He and his wife Bonnie live in Orion and winter in Florida. They have four grown children— Bill Jr. (Ace), Gretchen, Bobbie, and Daniel.

He retired from MidAmerican Energy and throughout his life has enjoyed hunting, fishing, gardening, preserving fruits and vegetables, cooking, and just about anything else he put his mind to.

Larkins worked well with others and was quoted as saying "I never laid claim to accomplishing everything by myself", after his term as village president ended.

Larkins was Orion's great promoter and protector.

Illinois Woman of Achievement Award

Larkins enjoyed giving credit where credit was due and nominated Diane Welborn for an Illinois Woman of Achievement Award for her part in developing the Main Street Orion program.

According to Larkins, Welborn went above and beyond the call of duty to gather the necessary resources to make the program a success. Welborn was the first to hold the position of Main Street Orion Director. Larkins presented Welborn with the Illinois Woman of Achievement Award issued by the office of Lt. Governor Corrine Wood.

Larkins also nominated Mary Ann Long, a long-time employee of BankORION, for her dedication to her job and the assistance she provided to her clients throughout her employment. Long's great-grandfather arrived in Orion in 1856 and her family had always been a part of the community.

Larkins also noted Long's affiliation with Mary Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church. He said Long felt strongly about volunteering her time.

Long attended the presentation ceremony and reception for the award in Springfield.

LARKINS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN FINAL TERM IN OFFICE

Picking up where we left off in last September's *Nosy Neighbor* newsletter, village president Bill Larkins was pushing for the establishment of a Tax Increment Financing District, at which he would succeed.

After taking the helm of village president upon the resignation of former president Jan Ryden, Larkins was elected to the position in April 2001.

Larkins was then able to convince other taxing bodies to not oppose the TIF district's establishment. After holding required hearings, adopting required ordinances, and coming to terms with the owners of a parcel of land blocking the extension of 12th Avenue westward, a developer committed to a plan to subdivide property into 30 housing lots, which would become the Prairie Knoll Subdivision.

A strong supporter of the Main Street Orion program, Larkins encouraged the village board to enter into a venture developed by MSO. The Cooperative Interest Buy-Down Program was funded by MSO, the Village, and BankORION with the intention

(Larkins' Accomplishments cont'd pg. 3)

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