Will County to receive more than $54 million in funding from IDOT Competitive Freight Grant Program

Will County communities will receive more than $54 million from the Illinois Department of Transportation’s Competitive Freight Program.

The program, funded by the federal government, was designed to help communities across the state implement goals identified in the Illinois State Freight Plan. In total, Illinois allocated a total of more than $240 million in federal funds for these projects.

“The funds awarded to Will County will be used for two key projects that are important in managing our position as North America’s largest inland port,” said Will County Executive Larry Walsh.

“I want to personally thank Ann Schneider who has been leading the Will County Freight Study efforts which identified the critical needs of our county’s transportation infrastructure.”

Walsh also noted the joint efforts between the Executive’s office, Will County CED, Plainfield and New Lenox and the private sector, Will County Governmental League and IDOT played a significant role in winning this competitive grant. These partnerships have been critical to focusing both the public and private stakeholders on collaborative efforts.

The total cost of the reconstruction project at the Interstate 80 and U.S. Route 30 interchange is $43 million. The grant will contribute more than $34 million to this IDOT District 1 - led project which has been noted for its history of large bottlenecks and safety concerns.

Will County strongly supported this project as part of a comprehensive effort to address safety and traffic along issues along I-80. The interchange handles a lot of truck traffic from the local intermodal facilities and growing commuter populations in the communities in the Lincoln-Way area.

In addition, more than $20 million was awarded to Plainfield for the 143rd Street extension.

This project, which totals nearly $30 million, will be part of the re-routing of traffic from IL Route 126 and is being led by the village.

“Both of these projects are in highly populated areas of our county,” Walsh said. “When finished, these improvements will improve traffic flow along these roadways. We are very thankful to IDOT for recognizing the importance of these projects to the region.”

Will County completed an IDOT-funded Community Friendly Freight Mobility Plan in September 2017 which was a comprehensive look at freight movements throughout the Will County region. The plan addresses freight movements, quality of life issues, workforce challenges, and passenger mobility. The plan is the basis for a series of action orientated steps to continue to improve roads throughout the Will County Region.

More information on the Freight Plan can be found at www.willcountyfreight.com.
Sunny Hill residents get new ride
Friends of Sunny Hill raises funds for replacement bus

JOLIET -- Sunny Hill Nursing Home residents, staff and members of the Friends of Sunny Hill gathered in the lobby, anxiously awaiting the arrival of residents’ new ride.

After nearly a year of fund-raising, the 2018 Ford arrived April 4 to replace the aging bus that, like the one before it, had been purchased by The Friends of Sunny Hill, Inc.

“The Friends of Sunny Hill provides many of the ‘extras’ that the county budget doesn’t allow for,” said County Executive Larry Walsh, whose office oversees the county-owned nursing home. “The residents are fortunate to have this dedicated group of volunteers.”

The new bus replaces a 2004 model that carried four wheelchairs and eight people in regular seats, said Roger Bentley, bus driver. The new one holds two additional wheelchairs.

“Which we need,” said Administrator Becky Haldorson, “because most of our residents are in wheelchairs.”

Bentley says depending upon the weather the bus is in operation three to four days a week, taking residents out to lunch, shopping, concerts and other local trips, keeping them in touch with the area they helped build throughout their lifetimes.

“This one has a better heating system so that will help in the winter,” Haldorson said, explaining that it has more vents in the back.

Karen Sorbero, former Sunny Hill Administrator who founded The Friends of Sunny Hill to raise funds for the first new bus, spearheaded the fund drive.

She said the bus was purchased from Midwest Transit in Kankakee/Bourbonnais for $73,147 with the trade-in. Of that, $42,500 was raised during the Ride to Freedom campaign. The rest came from the

The 2018 Ford bus (above) replaces a 2004 model. Jamie Wesley (below), president of the Sunny Hill Resident Council, and Bonnie Wilkerson, vice president, toast the bus.

Friends’ budget.

As the staff passed out bus-shaped stress balls, chip clips and back scratchers provided by Midwest Transit, other staff members distributed plastic cups with sparkling grape juice for a toast to safe travels.

Residents who wished to be on the first ride – around the Sunny Hill and Health Department campus – were asked to sign up for a lottery.

All of the residents who attended the reception put their names in for the April 6 ride.

The bus was on display at the County Office Building May 17 during the regularly scheduled County Board when the title and keys to the new bus were turned over to the county.
Appointments, please!

County implements appointment system for collections

In an effort to shorten lines and wait times, the Resource Recovery and Energy Division of the Will County Land Use Department has implemented an appointment system for its collection events.

Will County Executive Larry Walsh said, “We want to make recycling as easy as possible for our residents. In the past, people sometimes waited in line for up to two hours or more at some events. This new system should alleviate that wait.”

Appointments are offered on a first-come, first-served basis in 15-minute time slots with the last appointments of the day at 2:45 p.m. Participants will receive an electronic event reminder a day or two in advance.

Marta Keane, the county’s Recycling Specialist, said, “We spoke to representatives of other counties that have experienced large event turnouts and switched to appointment systems. Each one reported improvements in wait times, satisfaction from participants that could schedule their day more easily and improved planning for staffing by the county and its event vendor.

“The time it will take to unload each vehicle will depend upon the amount of recyclables that’s in it,” she continued. “That means we can’t guarantee to get every person in and out in 15 minutes, but we’re certain that it will take less time than an unpredictable long line.”

To set up an appointment, go to www.willcountygreen.com and follow the prompts. Those without internet access may call (815) 727-8834 between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays.

Additional information about what items will be collected at the events, as well as more information about the Land Use Department, can also be found at www.willcountygreen.com.

The schedule for the Saturday, Sept. 8, Recyclepalooza in New Lenox is available now.

Find a place to stay cool when it’s hot

There have already been some really hot days this summer and there are certainly more to come.

On those scalding days, take precautions to stay cool and hydrated.

But if your home isn’t cool, and there is no friend or relative to stay with, there are cooling centers throughout the county.

Some communities have cooling centers, but for those who don’t, check out willcountyema.org/warming cooling.

Dedication

Will County officials held a ribbon cutting for the Public Safety Complex, 16811 Laraway Road in Joliet on June 26. Pictured (from left) are Minority Leader Herb Brooks, Jr., County Executive Larry Walsh, Sheriff Mike Kelley, Speaker Jim Moustis and Capital Improvements Committee Chairman Ray Tuminello.
Students from eight schools celebrated the planet and their roles in protecting it at the annual Earth Flag Awards at Rialto Square Theater.

It is the 20th year that the Land Use Department has done presentations at Will County schools.

The awards are sponsored by the Will County Land Use Department’s Resource Recovery and Energy Division. This year 48 schools earned the designation.

Students were welcomed by Nick Palmer, chief of staff for Will County Executive Larry Walsh, who congratulated the students for their efforts, calling them “the leaders of tomorrow.”

Joan O’Keefe, the county’s Environmental Educator, and colleague Tim Anderson presented the awards on May 9. To qualify, a school must complete four of 13 qualified Earth Tasks, two of which must be recycling at least two materials, and inviting O’Keefe to speak with one grade level or club.

Prior to the event, O’Keefe said, “Whether it be an assembly or visiting schools room by room, I encourage students to keep recycling-- and more importantly start reducing waste. Students are encouraged to stop wasting at home and at school and to look at how they contribute to filling up our landfills.

“If schools want more graphic real-life experiences, lunch time waste audits can be performed with a student group. Students help sort lunch waste and observe what kind of wastes are prevalent at their schools. If possible, after the audit is complete all students come back to the lunch room to see just what is going into those garbage receptacles.

“Suggestions are gathered from the student body on how they can make a difference. Some schools opt to do school yard composting and classroom vermicomposting - with worms. Students observe worm anatomy and witness the decomposition of organic wastes.”
Annual book reuse/recycle event has global impact

A Joliet man’s humanitarian work and Will County’s book reuse and recycling event have come together to have a global impact.

Paul Waggoner went on his first humanitarian trip to Ghana in 1989. He returned in 1991, when he lived in the West African nation for 10 months. He’ll return this summer.

But he’ll be preceded by about 5,000 books he picked up at the Will County Land Use Department’s Resource Recovery and Energy Division book recycling and reuse event held earlier this month.

Waggoner, who belongs to Friends of St. Peter’s School, said many of the books will go to St. Peter’s College, a vocational high school in Larteh, Ghana. The remainder will be distributed to other schools in Ghana.

Waggoner said a friend dropped by with books from the day one of the three-day event held at the Pilcher Park Nature Center. The next day he and a colleague went and got books. They made arrangements with Tim Anderson, who organizes the event for the RRE Division, to come at the end of the event to go through the remaining books.

“We took as many of the academic books as we could take,” Waggoner said. “We were very happy to avert these from going into the waste stream when there’s so much need.”

That sentiment dovetails into the event’s goals, said Will County Executive Larry Walsh.

“There are two primary goals of this event and Mr. Waggoner hit them both. We want to keep these books out of our landfill, and we want to promote literacy.”

Will County Executive Larry Walsh

An estimated 60,000 books in a myriad of categories went through this year’s book reuse and recycling event at the Pilcher Park Nature Center this year. The annual event is co-sponsored by the Will County Land Use Department’s Resource Recovery and Energy Division and the Joliet Park District.

“There are two primary goals of this event and Mr. Waggoner hit them both. We want to keep these books out of our landfill, and we want to promote literacy.”

Will County Executive Larry Walsh

Of those, about 8,000 were left to shred at the end of the three-day event, meaning an estimated 52,000 unwanted books were kept out of the waste steam.

“Next year’s event is already scheduled with our partner, the Joliet Park District,” said Anderson. “Mark your calendars for May 31, and June 1 and 2, 2019.”
Transportation continues to be a big issue in Will County. Whether it’s $54 million from the Illinois Department of Transportation’s Competitive Freight Program or a new bus to take Sunny Hill Nursing Home residents on trips in the community, transportation is key.

The reconstruction project at the Interstate 80 and U.S. Route 30 interchange will address the long history of large bottlenecks and safety concerns. In addition, grant money was awarded for Plainfield’s 143rd Street extension.

Sunny Hill residents are riding in a 2018 bus, which replaced one that was 14 years old. Both the buses, as well as the one before that, were purchased by The Friends of Sunny Hill, Inc. We’re grateful to members’ devotion to the residents.

Staff continues make the health of residents and our planet a priority. The Land Use Department’s Resource Recovery and Energy (RRE) Division has been busy. Students from eight schools celebrated earning Earth Flag Awards with Environmental Educator Joan O’Keefe; 48 schools earned the awards. The enthusiasm these students have for taking care of Earth is inspiring.

Another annual project from RRE helped not only local readers, but also is having impact in Ghana, where students there will get books that were no longer wanted here. If you missed it this year, RRE and Joliet Park District have already scheduled the 2019 event for May 31, and June 1 and 2.

The Health Department has joined in the micro pantry movement. Also sometimes known as a blessing box, the structure invites people who need something to take it and leave items when they can. Non-perishable food items are welcome, as well as toiletries. The box is at the facility at 501 Ella Ave., off the Neal Street parking lot. Both givers and takers are anonymous.

I wish you all a happy fall as you go about both working and playing.