

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

Section 6

Robert A. Cole

*Juno Beach Town Manager
Candidate Report*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
COVER LETTER AND RESUME	1
CANDIDATE INTRODUCTION	9
BACKGROUND CHECKS	17
CB&A REFERENCE NOTES	23
INTERNET SEARCH	37

Cover Letter and Resume

Section 6

Robert A. Cole
96000 Overseas Highway
Key Largo, FL 33037

January 15, 2025

Mayor Peggy Wheeler and Town Council Members
C/O Colin Baenziger & Associates

Dear Mayor Wheeler and Town Council Members,

I am writing to express my keen interest in the Juno Beach Town Manager opportunity. Having visited your community this past week with my spouse, Olga, I am impressed with the natural beauty and outdoor amenities. The Town feels like a place we would love to call home.

As a seasoned city management executive with approximately 30 years of municipal experience, complemented by several years of private sector quality assurance and financial services management roles, I offer demonstrated senior leadership and an extensive background in long-range and strategic planning, budgeting, and collaborating with others to promote positive outcomes. Executing on Town Council direction against a backdrop of public service ethics and community values, my team's efforts to excel will be supported by municipal best practices and quality assurance tools and techniques, such as the Plan-Do-Check-Act process, goal alignment, and use of appropriate metrics to track progress.

Having found through years of successfully working with and through others that demonstrating integrity and building trust are prerequisites for accomplishing great things, I lead with empathy and am firmly committed to diversity of opinion and respect, both of which I view as foundational elements for organizational success. On a day-to-day basis, I may be observed smiling and engaging residents, acknowledging the presence and efforts of employees at all levels of the organization, or lending a hand when one is not expected.

With an infectious enthusiasm for public service, continuous improvement, and a more sustainable and resilient future, I strive to empower and motivate others to pursue service excellence, demonstrate exemplary public and environmental stewardship, and faithfully honor our shared ethical obligations to one another, the community we serve, and the broader world in which we live.

In closing, I look forward to speaking with you more about this extraordinary opportunity and partnering with your team to serve the Juno Beach community. My resume is attached for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Robert A. Cole

ROBERT AUSTIN COLE

racole001@gmail.com / 630.207.1323 (c)

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

Local government professional with substantial leadership experience, including strength in these areas:

<i>Budgeting for Outcomes</i>	<i>Media Relations and Communications</i>
<i>Complex Project Management</i>	<i>Organizational Effectiveness</i>
<i>Emergency Management</i>	<i>Public Education and Engagement</i>
<i>Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs</i>	<i>Strategic Planning</i>

Committed to innovation, continuous improvement, partnership, and governmental excellence, Cole capably approaches his responsibilities with integrity and enthusiasm. Outcome-oriented, he pursues goals with a high degree of political acumen, being apolitical in his relationships and actions. Focused on maintaining community quality of life, stimulating meaningful and rewarding staff participation in organizational success, and cultivating positive perceptions of local government, Cole is a consummate city management professional.

EXPERIENCE AND RESULTS

Village of Islamorada, FL: 86800 Overseas Highway, Islamorada, FL 33036.

Population of 7,107; 157.5 FTEs; \$88.3M Total Budget/\$39.7M General Fund

Village Manager – March 2024 to January 2025

Reporting to the Mayor and Village Council, the Village Manager serves as Chief Executive Officer and has ten senior leadership direct reports. The following results are indicative of Cole’s performance:

- **Strategic and Long-Rang Planning** – Our team assessed gaps in strategic and long-range planning needs and initiated technical and public engagement efforts to establish community-supported priorities. Examples include initiating a Comprehensive Plan Update, Founders Park Master Plan, Stormwater Master Plan, and completion of the climate adaptation and resilience Vulnerability Assessment Report;
- **US-1 Transportation Challenges** – As a legislatively designated Area of Critical State Concern, transportation and land development in the Florida Keys are inextricably linked to one another in the regulatory and public policy landscapes. Factors including substantial tourism, globally significant environmental resources, roadway capacity constraints, and sharply divided perspectives on land development and potential traffic congestion solutions partially characterize the public policy landscape within which community supported solutions must be developed and advanced. Provided analysis and supported formulation of local

Section 6

transportation policy recommendations, balancing competing interests to deliver actionable guidance and alignment with long-term strategic goals; and

- **Organizational Effectiveness and Continuous Improvement** – Public faith and trust in government rests on a foundation of transparent, ethical, and accountable governance. Maintaining legal and procedural compliance, embracing and promoting municipal best practices, and honoring organizational and community values are essential commitments that staff were encouraged to embrace and reflect in executing their many public service roles and responsibilities. Initiatives included such efforts as implementing technology to enhance public records access, modifying the annual budget process and presentation to align with Government Finance Officers Association best practice standards, undertaking a personnel policy review and update, and organizing new employee teams focused on safety, innovation, and engagement.

Village of Scarsdale, NY:1001 Post Road, Scarsdale, NY 10583.

Population of 18,253; 233 FTEs; \$92.32M Total Budget/\$69.4M General Fund

Village Manager – August 2021 to September 2023

Reporting to the Mayor and Village Council, the Village Manager serves as Chief Executive Officer and has ten senior leadership direct reports. The following results are indicative of Cole’s performance:

- **Fiscal Stewardship** – The Village of Scarsdale maintains a Moody’s Aaa bond rating, reflecting sound financials and professional management. Innovation, continuous improvement, and a deep sense of public accountability drive efforts to maintain and collaboratively enhance financial performance. To illustrate, the result of a joint effort between staff and elected officials comprising our Finance Committee identified opportunity to significantly increase interest income through implementation of a cash management program coordinated by a third-party administrator, NYLAF. Because of this initiative, interest income for 2022-23 exceeded \$2.5M, compared against pre-2020 levels of less than \$250,000 per year;
- **Governance** – To support continuous improvement and organizational excellence, Cole collaborated with the elected body and staff to establish a strategic planning process supported by clear goals, objectives, and metrics to track progress. Supported by a Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, we established, monitored, and adjusted priorities and operational tactics as data and circumstances indicated necessary; and
- **Technology Innovation** – Established technology innovation team to identify capitalize on opportunities for operational and service delivery gains, including having initiated parallel strategies to upgrade and coordinate technology infrastructure enhancements. Illustrative team accomplishments include enhanced public transparency and operational efficiency in

Section 6

connection with records digitization and launch of our ClearGov [Digital Budget Book](#) and [Financial Transparency Center](#), strengthening of internal financial controls and regulatory compliance through migration of disparate record keeping systems into our enterprise product, and enhancing our cybersecurity posture through infrastructure upgrades and training.

Village of Scarsdale, NY: 1001 Post Road, Scarsdale, NY 10583.

Population of 18,253; 233 FTEs; \$92.32M Total Budget/\$69.4M General Fund

Deputy Village Manager – May 2015 to August 2021

Reporting to the Village Manager, the Deputy Village Manager supports supervision for nine departments. Together with the Manager, the Deputy has responsibility for contract and project management, shaping organizational culture, inspiring and realizing service delivery excellence, and implementing elected official policies in support of the community's vision for the future. The following results are indicative of Cole's performance:

- **Communications and Engagement** – As the Public Information Officer, Cole was responsible for media relations and developing and implementing communication strategies for routine matters, public emergencies, and high-visibility projects or topics of community interest, including such examples as the COVID-19 public health crisis, State-mandated police reform and reinvention, emergency activations, and others. One of the teams Cole led completed a major website redesign, including launch and promotion of an e-News system, leading to over 39,000 subscriptions;
- **Sustainability and Resilience** – Collaborating with community volunteers, Cole was instrumental in establishing the first curbside municipal food scrap composting program in Westchester County, NY. He also engages in direct community service, having rolled up his sleeves to help resident volunteers to construct the Village's Hyatt Park Butterfly Garden, convert Village property into the Secor Meadow natural area, and undertake a multi-year wetland restoration at Harwood Park; and
- **Technology Implementation** – As team lead for a cybersecurity assessment, significantly enhanced the Village's cybersecurity posture through identification of vulnerabilities and implementation of appropriate mitigation strategies. Also led successful website redesign.

Village of Oak Park, IL: 123 Madison Street, Oak Park, IL 60302.

Population 52,524; 377 FTEs; \$124.2M Total Budget/\$51.5M General Fund

Assistant Village Manager – Jan 2010 to May 2015

Reporting to the Village Manager, the Assistant Village Manager is responsible for planning and overseeing sensitive, complex projects and has oversight of up to two direct reports, as designated by the Village Manager. The following results are indicative of Cole's performance:

Section 6

- **Passenger Rail (CTA) and Freight Railroad (Union Pacific) Liaison** – Served as liaison to intercity passenger rail agencies and freight rail corporations, as well as county and state surface transportation agencies. Responsibilities included both routine operational matters and project leadership roles involving regional policy and strategic initiatives. Displayed exceptional political acumen and keen strategic awareness in building relationships and pursuing desired outcomes.
- **Eisenhower Expressway (I-290) Expansion Project** – As Oak Park’s project lead, Cole was appointed to the Eisenhower Expressway (I-290) Environmental Impact Study Corridor Advisory Group, a multi-disciplinary team responsible for providing technical and planning guidance to shape a highly complex and controversial \$2.6B highway expansion project in the Nation’s first multimodal corridor, featuring passenger rail, a freight rail spur, and the Eisenhower Interstate Expressway;
- **Regional Planning and Project Development** – As an appointed member of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning’s Land-Use Committee, which provides metropolitan planning and economic development services to 240 municipalities and over 6M residents, Cole assisted in developing northeast Illinois’ first (and award-winning) Regional Comprehensive Plan, GoTo 2040. The plan, and the way Cole approaches many complex projects or problems, relied upon an ecosystem approach to examining relationships, identifying stakeholders and partners, and crafting a thoughtful vision of the future, accompanied by practical steps for getting there, inclusive of performance metrics to assess progress, an innovation in regional planning at the time;
- **Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs** – Appointed to the West Central Municipal Conference Intergovernmental Committee, representing approximately 50 governmental entities accountable to over 500,000 residents. Also appointed to serve on the O’Hare Airport Noise Compatibility Commission, focused on ameliorating residential sound impacts;
- **Grants and Contract Management** – Collaborated with neighboring jurisdictions to secure \$14M in federal funding to create the West Cook County Housing Collaborative, a multi-jurisdiction assemblage focused on sub-regional access to affordable housing, having also directly managed or coordinated oversight for over \$12M in transportation-related grant and member-directed funding; and
- **Sustainability and Resilience** – Administered development and operational oversight of the Community Choice Electrical Aggregation program, which resulted in community power savings exceeding 4.6M over 2.5 years. Also oversaw development of an innovative neighborhood smart grid project involving the electric utility, State of Illinois, Korean national government, and an innovative energy not-for-profit, Pecan Street, LLC.

Assistant to the Village Manager – Apr 2006 to Jan 2010

Reporting to the Village Manager, the Assistant to the Village Manager is responsible for supporting agenda coordination, research and special projects, and promoting service quality excellence by applying quality assurance tools and techniques to maximize operational efficiency and effectiveness. The following results are indicative of Cole's performance:

- **Innovation and Technology** – Created citizen request management system to enhance service delivery through improved staff tracking and follow-up; and
- **Quality Assurance** – Combined elements of the Baldrige Criteria with the University of California Irvine's Model for Sustainable Process Improvement to dramatically reduce permit review timelines while at the same time reducing errors and enhancing client experience.

Quality Services Manager – May 2004 to Apr 2006

Reporting to the Deputy Village Manager, the Quality Services Manager collaborates with department heads and their staff to promote organizational excellence through improved work relationships, enhanced policies and procedures, and alignment of departmental activities with organizational and community goals. The following results are indicative of Cole's performance:

- **Performance Metrics** – Development and implementation of a new performance measurement framework, including assisting department heads in linking resource commitments to key intended outcomes.

Permits Supervisor, and other Building and Zoning Assignments – Nov 1996 to May 2004

Reporting to the Director of Building and Property Standards, the Permits Supervisor directly supervises front office counter operations and personnel, as well as provides indirect supervision of plan reviewers and field inspection personnel.

- **Quality Assurance** – Promote citizen satisfaction and improved operations through reviewing and improving communication strategies, identifying and resolving service deficiencies, and monitoring feedback from a variety of internal and external stakeholders;
- **Supervision** – Direct supervision of front permit processing and zoning personnel; and
- **Zoning Administration** – Served as Secretary to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

EDUCATION

DePaul University – Chicago, IL (June 2002)

Master of Science in Public Service Management, awarded With Distinction

- Concentration in Metropolitan Planning and Urban Affairs.
- 2002 Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development Scholarship Recipient.
- 2002 American Society for Public Administration Student of the Year.

DePaul University – Chicago, IL (June 1999)

Bachelor of Arts, Liberal Arts

- Dual concentration in Writing and Ethics.
- 1999 DePaul University Independent Research Award for Excellence: Externship.
- 1999 DePaul University Independent Research Award for Excellence: Capstone.

CERTIFICATIONS – NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (NIMS)

- NIMS ICS-100: Intro to the Incident Command System.
- NIMS ICS-200: ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents.
- NIMS ICS-300: Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents.
- NIMS ICS-400: Advanced ICS for Command and General Staff.
- NIMS IS-700: National Incident Management System: An Introduction.
- NIMS IS-800: National Response Framework: An Introduction.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

- New York City/County Management Association, former Board of Directors Member;
- International City/County Management Association, former Government Affairs and Policy Committee Member; and
- American Society for Public Administration 2007/2008 Chicago Chapter President.

Candidate Introduction

ROBERT COLE

EDUCATION

Master of Science – Public Service Management with Concentration in Metropolitan Planning and Urban Affairs, DePaul University (Chicago, IL).

Bachelor of Arts – Liberal Arts with Concentrations in Writing and Ethics, DePaul University (Chicago, IL).

NIMS FEMA Certifications

EXPERIENCE

Village Manager, Islamorada, Village of Islands, FL	2024 – 2025
Village Manager, Village of Scarsdale, NY	2021 – 2023
Deputy Village Manager, Village of Scarsdale, NY	2015 – 2021
Assistant Village Manager, Village of Oak Park, IL	2010 – 2015
Assistant to the Village Manager, Village of Oak Park, IL	2006 – 2010
Quality Services Manager, Village of Oak Park, IL	2004 – 2006
Permits/Zoning Supervisor (and other roles), Village of Oak Park, IL	1996 – 2004
Private sector financial services management and quality assurance	pre-1996

BACKGROUND

Islamorada, Village of Islands, is an affluent Florida Keys community, home to approximately 7,000 residents. As the Sportfishing Capital of the World, the local economy is largely based on tourism and tourism supported industries. Community members are actively engaged in local government affairs. In recognition of sensitive environmental resources of statewide importance, including the Florida Bay and others, Islamorada is located in a state-designated Area of Critical State Concern. Residents are passionate about environmental protection and the Islamorada team is recognized for their efforts to maintain and enhance ecosystem integrity.

The organization employs 157.5 FTEs, with 10 department heads reporting directly to the Village Manager. Islamorada’s total budget is \$88.3M, inclusive of a \$39.7M General Fund.

The three most significant issues facing Islamorada, Village of Islands, are:

- **Climate Adaptation and Resilience.** As an island community nestled between the Florida Bay and Atlantic Ocean, comprised mainly of low lying coastal plain geography, Islamorada rests precariously on the leading edge of the myriad environmental, social, and economic implications of sea level rise and other threats. Islamorada approaches this complex problem using a multi-disciplinary approach informed by best available science

and rigorous studies to inform policy and budget alternatives.

- **Area of Critical State Concern (ASCS).** Designation as an ASCS in 1974 included improved access to state and federal funding opportunities. However, the regulatory framework also established maximum build-out targets, i.e., a development carrying capacity for the entire Florida Keys. Maximum build-out was reached in late 2023 and efforts are underway to legislatively seek additional development authority. The process requires cultivating community support for a proposed balance between additional development, maintaining local quality of life, honoring environmental protection commitments, and ensuring adequate hurricane evacuation times, constrained by a single evacuation route (U.S.1).
- **Affordable housing.** The median home value in Islamorada is approximately \$1.4M, while the median rent is \$5,500. Distant from the mainland and served solely by the heavily traveled U.S.1, enterprises experience substantial difficulty recruiting and retaining employees. Additionally, it has become virtually impossible to provide housing options for youth to remain in Islamorada as they transition to independent living. Efforts are underway to support existing housing relationships, including Habitat for Humanity, as well as to cultivate public-private partnerships to develop additional units.

GENERAL, MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE

With approximately 30 years of progressively responsible local government experience, supplemented by several years private sector quality assurance and financial services management experience, I have a well-rounded understanding of what it takes for local government organizations to excel, as well as the exceptional ability to collaborate with others to execute accordingly. As a dedicated public service professional, I am sharply focused on leveraging my roles and authorities to support the needs of others – my staff, the community I serve, and the spectrum of partners a high performing local government organization must engage to achieve its goals.

I wish to serve Juno Beach because I strongly believe that my professional background and life experiences make me a wonderful fit for the organization and community. Recognizing the Town’s commitment to organizational excellence and continuous improvement, I am prepared to begin making an immediate positive contribution toward advancement of Town Council near- and long-term objectives and goals. From a personal point of view, my spouse and I are avid outdoor recreationists, and Juno Beach is a stunning location boasting abundant passive and active recreational assets to nourish our spirits and keep us healthy.

ROBERT COLE

Regional Experience

Recognizing the multi-jurisdictional context within which local governments of all size operate, it is noteworthy that my professional background includes substantial responsibility for building and maintaining relationships at the regional and sub-regional levels.

To illustrate, I served in appointed capacities on several regional and sub-regional entities. Examples include the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) Land Use Committee, responsible for supporting development of the Regional Comprehensive Plan for a six-county area comprised of over 6M residents, the West Central Municipal Conference's Legislative and Intergovernmental Committees, each representing approximately 50 governmental entities accountable to over 500,000 residents. In recognition of my intergovernmental, legislative, and project management skills, I was appointed staff lead for the Village of Oak's participation in a proposed expansion of I-290, an exceptionally controversial \$2B federal highway project traversing the southern quarter of the Village.

In Islamorada, our team collaborated with Monroe County, other Florida Keys local governments, and state and federal agencies on such critical multi-jurisdictional issues as emergency preparedness and response, land development and environmental protection, climate adaptation and resilience, and other shared opportunities and challenges.

Learning from Failure – Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

John Wooden, considered by many to be the best NCAA basketball head coach of all time, once commented, "Failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be." Missing the target is an opportunity to learn and improve. I employ a Plan-Do-Check-Act model to support continuous improvement and effectively navigate change. Inherent to that cycle is learning and making adjustments while collaborating and communicating with others. I'll illustrate one such learning example below, a high-profile project that failed to achieve the desired outcomes.

Based on the understanding that communities within the CMAP planning area have varying administrative and technical capacities for executing on strategy and achieving planning objectives, a collaborative was formed between low- and high-resourced communities to pursue federal grant funding to advance a sub-regional affordable housing strategy. The socioeconomically diverse West Cook Housing Collaborative (WCHC), comprised of staff and elected officials from five municipalities, was successful in securing an approximate \$14M HUD grant to support its work.

Ultimately, however, our team underestimated the political complexity of some of the communities involved in the project. Against a backdrop of policy fragmentation, support for advancing the project began to erode once strategies came into sharper focus and decisions needed to be made. While the experience confirmed that lower capacity communities require external technical support to achieve intended outcomes, it also revealed that political interests

ROBERT COLE

and relationships can derail an otherwise worthy effort. In retrospect, a greater advance effort at identifying all key stakeholders, educating project partners, and establishing an improved communication strategy may have changed the outcome; ultimately, the \$14M grant had to be returned to HUD.

Strengths and Weaknesses

To encourage and support public faith and trust in government, it is critical that public leaders and their staff exhibit commitments to ethical, accountable, efficient, and transparent governance. As public servants, we are obligated to work to make things better than we found them. My strengths include demonstrating integrity and respect for diversity of person and thought, leading with an infectious enthusiasm for public service and continuous improvement. I strive to empower and motivate others to pursue service excellence, demonstrate exemplary stewardship, and faithfully honor our shared ethical obligations to one another, the community we serve, and the broader world in which we live.

However, my enthusiasm and level of comfort with innovation and change can sometimes be overwhelming for others. I compensate for this potential problem by using communication, taking care to modify my approach to the intended audience. Having matured professionally through successive promotions, I've held positions ranging from a front counter building permit staff person to Village Manager. The perspectives and knowledge I've gained from each level of responsibility have helped me to listen more closely, understand more thoroughly, and communicate genuinely with persons I engage with at all levels of the organization.

Additionally, I am blessed that my life experiences, ranging from years of spending summers with my grandparents in rural south-central Kentucky, to splitting time between the Chicago suburbs, where my mother lived, and Chicago's inner city, where my father lived, have given me an uncommon ability among my professional peers to authentically engage with persons of diverse backgrounds, both within and external to the organization.

More than a skillset, I possess a deep appreciation and respect for the value everyone brings to the table and the stories that have shaped their lives. Leading with empathy, I've handled sometimes difficult decisions to terminate employees with intentional regard for their dignity and sense of self-worth.

Media and Public Communications

I've learned over the years that developing positive working relationships with the media leads to improved community and organizational outcomes. Being accessible, and as transparent and timely as circumstances allow, goes a long way toward cultivating mutually beneficial media relationships.

ROBERT COLE

First Six Months Strategy

Stepping into a new leadership role, the most critical initial action is to listen and learn. To that end, I would promptly schedule one-on-one meetings with staff and Town Council officials, also making myself available to community members. Additionally, I would undertake intergovernmental outreach to other entities, e.g., Palm Beach County, state and federal elected official offices, etc., to begin the important task of continuing or improving productive partnerships. Cultivating and maintaining respectful, trusting relationships is a theme that would carry through my entire tenure.

At the same time, the following would be priorities during my first six months:

- Identify and navigate any burning issues requiring immediate attention.
- Understand strengths and weaknesses of existing emergency preparedness procedures and public communications.
- Acclimate to Town policies, rules, and regulations.
- Evaluate status of Town Council priorities and assess strategic alignment, engaging staff to identify and implement opportunities for improvement.
- Examine budget fiscal trends, including consideration of opportunities to collaborate with staff to implement metrics to track organizational performance and track progress toward established goals.

SIX ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE MYSELF

- Ethical
- Strategic
- Collaborative
- Approachable
- Accountable
- Communicative

REASON FOR DEPARTING CURRENT POSITION

As a local government professional, I am dedicated to the highest ideals of honor and integrity in ethically executing my roles and responsibilities as Town Manager. I firmly believe that professional management is essential to effective, efficient, and accountable local government, dedicated to serving the best interests of all community members faithfully and with a high degree of public transparency. Reflecting on the past year serving Islamorada, I determined it was in my professional and family's best interests to resign and seek new appointment. Making that difficult choice, the door has opened for me to pursue this exceptional opportunity.

ROBERT COLE

MOST RECENT SALARY

My final Islamorada compensation was \$200,000. In addition, I received a \$4,000 monthly rent stipend, family health, dental, and vision paid at 100%, and an approximate 32% employer contribution to the FRS Investment Plan (plus 3% by employee).

Section 6

CB&A Background Checks

**Background Check Summary for
ROBERT "ROB" AUSTIN COLE**

Criminal Records Checks:

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Monroe County, FL	No Records Found
Westchester County, NY	No Records Found
Cook County, IL	No Records Found
State	
Florida	No Records Found
New York	No Records Found
Illinois	No Records Found

Civil Records Checks:

County	
Monroe County, FL	Results Pending
Westchester County, NY	Results Pending
Cook County, IL	No Records Found
Federal	
Florida	No Records Found
New York	No Records Found
Illinois	No Records Found

Motor Vehicle

Florida	No Records Found
New York	December 2022 – Accident June 2020 – Accident January 2020 – Accident

Credit

Excellent

Personal Bankruptcy

No Records Found

Sex Offender Registry

Not Listed

Education

Confirmed

**Background Check Summary for
ROBERT "ROB" AUSTIN COLE**

Employment

Confirmed

Social Media

Nothing of Concern Found

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681Y, credit and bankruptcy information are very sensitive and should not be used in the consideration of hiring. The information is included for each candidate because we do not want you to be surprised if third parties raise what they consider to be a concern. Also, some states have limited the reporting to seven years, so any records older than that will not be available in those states. In addition, motor vehicle reports are limited to three to seven years, depending on the state.

**Background Check Summary for
ROBERT "ROB" AUSTIN COLE
Personal Disclosure**

Personal Disclosure Questionnaire

Name of Applicant: Robert Austin Cole

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?
Yes No
2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?
Yes No
3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?
Yes No
4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
6. Have you ever been charged with driving while intoxicated, driving under the influence, operating a vehicle impaired, or a similar offense?
Yes No
7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?
Yes No
8. Please list all your social media accounts (Facebook / X (Twitter) / Instagram / LinkedIn, etc.) and your personal web page if you have one.
[Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#), and [LinkedIn](#)
9. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?
Yes No
10. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.

Attested to: 
Signature of Applicant

**Background Check Summary for
ROBERT "ROB" AUSTIN COLE
Personal Disclosure Explanation**

Question 3: Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?

My wife and I received an order for relief under Chapter 7 on May 23, 1997. While the filing was necessary at the time, I then worked diligently to restore my credit and maintain my financial responsibilities, as confirmed by my present 802 credit score.

As added background, the bankruptcy occurred at a time when I had left private sector employment to pursue completion of my undergraduate and graduate degrees. While I had some savings and was also working a part-time job, the part-time income was not adequate and our savings were exhausted quicker than we anticipated. With four children and important bills beginning to fall behind, we sought relief through bankruptcy as a last alternative. Thereafter, I was able to complete my degrees and transition to a successful public sector career.

The 1997 bankruptcy was a necessary action that enabled me to be a better father, spouse, and successful public service career professional. Without the bankruptcy, it is highly unlikely that I would have completed my college degrees; my family and career outcomes would have looked much different than what has turned out to be the case.

Question 7: Have you ever sued a current or former employer?

I was engaged in a dispute surrounding the terms and conditions of my separation from the Village of Scarsdale. Mutually agreed terms were achieved without a lawsuit advancing. There have not been any other such employer disputes at any point in my employment history.

Question 4: Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?

Approximately eight years ago, the Village of Scarsdale terminated its contract with Kelvin Guevara, an African American contractor operating in support of the Village's government and public access cable television operation. In response, Mr. Guevara filed an unsupported claim of discrimination against a protected class; he simply checked the box on a complaint form without any evidence provided in support of the allegation. I believe I was one of the defendants, along with the Village Manager at that time. As the matter progressed, Mr. Guevara withdrew the unsupported claim of discrimination; the matter was concluded in the Village's favor.

Question 10. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as a plaintiff or defendant.

Apart from the matter involving my current employer (Q7 response), I understand the following appear in the public record:

1. AMERICAN UNITED TRANSPORTATION INC.

This was a minor vehicle accident claim. While driving a Village of Scarsdale vehicle, a commercial livery service sideswiped my vehicle on the Bronx River Parkway at night following a Village Board meeting. The damage to both vehicles was minor, with only my side mirror

**Background Check Summary for
ROBERT “ROB” AUSTIN COLE
Personal Disclosure Explanation**

having been broken. Village risk management staff denied the firm’s claim for minor repair to their vehicle, a minivan. The firm filed the lawsuit and our risk manager decided to pay the minor claim rather than engage our counsel at higher Village expense.

**2. SANGALLI, VINCENT: A DISCHARGED EMPLOYEE AND MEMBER OF LOCAL 456
IBT**

I discharged the subject former employee in connection with a matter involving his egregious role in cultivating a hostile work environment for a member of a protected class. The decision was upheld through adjudication.

3. CAPOBIANCO GARRETT R: FIREFIGHTER DISABILITY

This is a case that pre-dated my appointment as Scarsdale Village Manager. Mr. Capobianco was seeking a firefighter disability pension and had been denied by the prior Village Manager. According to the legal procedures, there was an appeal pathway available to him requiring my review of the facts of the prior determination. On the advice of counsel, as well as my understanding of the facts at hand, the request was once again denied, precipitating the lawsuit. I do not know if this matter was subsequently concluded.

If additional details are needed for any of the foregoing, please let me know.

CB&A Reference Notes

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

Elizabeth Jolin – Former Village Council Member, Village of Islamorada 305-393-0994

Ms. Jolin assisted in hiring Mr. Cole as Village Manager in March of 2024. She worked with him for almost a year until she left in November that same year. He had an excellent job performance during that time and was an exemplary manager.

Mr. Cole brought a real sense of moral character, accountability, and ethics to the table. With that lens, he was not only able to identify key issues but also make needed changes for the better. He was not afraid to look closely at processes and ensure they make sense in their current situation. He had a very clear and consistent communication style. He instituted a weekly update for the townspeople, which fostered a sense of trust and reduced the general wariness and skepticism toward the government that the townspeople felt. This was created by poor management of previous administrations.

In stressful situations, Mr. Cole was very even keeled. He was careful with his words and did not bring emotions or his opinion about others' personalities to the table. He was always professional in meetings and when dealing with issues. He was unwilling to play favorites or go around the rules to help his friends. He was beyond reproach. If he was asked to do something unethical, or circumventing the due process of the law, he would not do it. This, unfortunately, did not win him many friends in the Village, and is one of the main reasons why he was pressured into resigning.

Mr. Cole makes good decisions. He is a highly competent administrator, and the Village will miss him. If a City or County is looking for an administrator who will be 100% ethical and by the books, he is the best one for the job.

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Cole:

- Honest,
- Ethical,
- Timely,
- Proactive,
- Innovative, and
- Consistent.

Strengths: Politically aware and able to manage the range of personalities and professional skills that he dealt with daily.

Weaknesses: Although he tended to micromanage to some degree, it is important to note that he came into a very poorly managed situation. Ms. Jolin does not fault him for looking very closely at operations. If he had been given more time in his position, he would have brought everyone up to a professional level and able to do their job fully, which would not have required him to spend so much time on the details. It was a temporary necessity for the time.

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

Judy Hull – Executive Director, Islamorada Chamber of Commerce 305-394-3539

Ms. Hull has been the Executive Director for over 20 years. They met in 2024. She has seen several Village Managers come and go during this time. Mr. Cole is one of the very best. He did an excellent job during his short time as Village Manager. There were many items that needed to be addressed when he arrived, and he was going through the list and addressing them all. He made great progress before he resigned.

Mr. Cole was intimately involved with the community. If there was a luncheon, a fundraising activity, or a big event like the Holiday Festival, he actively volunteered. He worked at a booth and interacted with the townspeople. He put his money where his mouth is. The Village builds a 35-foot Christmas tree for the Holiday festival. After the festival they take it down, move it, and build it back up again. The tree stays in the new location for the entire holiday season. Mr. Cole was on the ladder building the tree. Ms. Hull is not aware of a single other Village Manager who was as involved in Village events as Mr. Cole was. He said he supported the Village and then went to work proving it.

Mr. Cole was methodical and organized in getting the Village back on its feet. The staff needed a great deal of supervision because they had been through several City Managers in a short time and did not have a clear direction. He brought order to chaos. The Council frequently asked for more projects than the staff could realistically achieve. They asked Mr. Cole to handle huge issues before the next meeting, which he could not reasonably accomplish. He gave them a timeline and a clear chart of what the projects were and how many they had in the air at any given time. He helped them get organized, prioritize their ideas, and develop a feasible schedule.

Mr. Cole worked well with his staff. He has a soft-spoken demeanor. There is nothing embarrassing about his conduct. He is a fantastic Manager. When the new Council came in, they brought their own personal agendas and unfortunately forced him out. His departure was a surprise for the Village. Ms. Hull recommends him for any position.

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Cole:

- Involved,
- Smart,
- Well-spoken,
- Respected,
- Calm, and
- Organized.

Strengths: Involvement with the community.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

Peter Frezza – Environmental Resources Manager, Village of Islamorada 305-393-0982

Mr. Cole was Mr. Frezza's direct supervisor during his time with the Village of Islamorada, which began in 2024. He had a great job performance and was a good boss.

Mr. Cole got things done. Some people called him a micromanager, but Mr. Frezza did not see that. He was hands-on, and an active leader, but if the Department Heads really knew what they were doing, he relied on their expertise.

Mr. Frezza recently received a phone call from a resident thanking him for something that Mr. Cole did. A neighborhood had been complaining for years about a drainage issue. When Mr. Cole heard about this issue, he organized the team headed by Mr. Frezza to adjust the landscaping in a way that improved drainage and eliminated flooding. The new landscaping was beautiful, and the resident thanked Mr. Frezza for how nicely it turned out. Drainage had been an ongoing problem, but was only resolved by a competent Village Manager.

Mr. Cole was very involved in the community, which included everything from garbage cleanups to concerts. He was innovative and thought through new solutions to problems. The City hired a contractor to trim some trees. A resident whose property was next to the public space where the trimming was to occur wanted his trees trimmed at the same time. Because his trees were on private property, Mr. Cole could not help him in that regard, but he put this resident in touch with the contractor to see if he could have his trees trimmed at the same time. By scheduling his service on his private property when the contractor was already in the neighborhood, he was able to drastically cut down on the mobilization cost. Mr. Cole finds a way to help the townspeople find solutions to their problems, even if the answer is different than what they originally wanted.

Mr. Frezza is not aware of anything controversial or embarrassing in Mr. Cole's behavior. He does not know the details of why Mr. Cole resigned. He recommends Mr. Cole as a City or County Manager for any location.

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Cole:

- Approachable,
- Dedicated,
- Hard worker,
- Energetic,
- Vocal, and
- Charismatic.

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

Strengths: Collaborated well with the public. He excelled at listening to the residents and helping them get to a resolution for whatever concern they had.

Weaknesses: He tended to talk a little bit too much, which reduced not only his productivity, but whoever he was interacting with. What could have taken just a one-minute answer, sometimes turned into an entire 15-minute conversation.

David Pope – Former Village President, Oak Park, IL 312-498-6001

Mr. Pope was the Mayor of Oak Park from 2005 to 2013, and they worked closely together. Mr. Cole worked on issues that were local and close to home as well as opportunities to pursue funding at the state and federal level. During the 2008 financial crisis the passage of TARP funding presented opportunities for shovel ready projects. Mr. Pope worked closely with Mr. Cole to put together an overview of projects to bring funding and support to Oak Park.

Mr. Cole is a very strong performer. He works collaboratively to understand the direction and then creates a strategy to achieve it. He works collaboratively and effectively with his staff. He was rated highly as an employee of the Village.

Mr. Cole, left to his own devices, will make the right decision for the right reason, which is exactly what an organization wants in an employee. He was very good about keeping others informed and he listened to the input of others. He is timely in completing assignments.

As the Assistant Manager, Mr. Cole was visible in the community and did extremely well at giving presentations and working with the community, but public outreach was not his primary role. He held meetings about a prospective development site with the City Planner to engage and obtain input from the community. They used an information gathering tool where people could express what they liked and did not like. He helped facilitate the process and answer questions. Residents really appreciated his straightforward, matter of fact approach, and he garnered trust.

When it came to finance, Mr. Cole had a stronger handling of business decisions and the budget than others in the organization. He looked at the resources and impact and made sure that they received the most bang for their buck. He wanted to make a positive impact on the community. He understood the end goal and wanted to help get there. His work was not just a job for him.

Because Mr. Cole can clearly understand and define the parameters of whatever initiative they are taking, he is able to apply the necessary level of effort while bringing the right resources to bear. Unforeseen circumstances always bring an element of stress, and he was good at anticipating the issues in advance and then collectively problem solving on the response. He never becomes rattled, rather he maintains a calm presence.

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

Mr. Cole appreciates urban environments as well as natural environments and sees the interaction of them. Not only did he consider streets and infrastructure, but he wanted to enhance the natural environment in ways that supported the needs of the residents.

Mr. Cole has not been involved in any controversy. He left Oak Park to become a City Manager, and they were sorry to see him go. They would have loved to keep him. He is universally respected in the community.

Mr. Pope would hire Mr. Cole. He has been in different roles and understands both the responsibilities of the departments as well as how they interact together. Any community would be fortunate to hire Mr. Cole.

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Cole:

- Smart,
- Insightful,
- Responsible,
- Caring,
- Good in his communication and interactions with staff, and
- Outdoorsy.

Strengths: Sees potential issues in projects that others miss, which is very beneficial in the planning process. Has a level of insight that is well beyond most others.

Weaknesses: He was the Assistant Manager in Oak Park and did extremely well. Mr. Pope cannot say how he would do as a Manager for a community because he has not seen him in that role. That said, Mr. Pope is confident that he is equipped to handle whatever is thrown at him.

Madelaine Eppenstein – Friends of Scarsdale Parks & Scarsdale Forum, NY 914-262-6656

Ms. Eppenstein has lived in Scarsdale since the mid-1980s. Ms. Eppenstein met Mr. Cole in 2015 when he was hired. She holds Mr. Cole in very high esteem and has a sense of admiration for him. He is really missed by the community.

Ms. Eppenstein is part of a 100-year-old 501(c)(3) that has been called the Scarsdale Think Tank, though its official name is the Scarsdale Forum. Its members are prominent leading citizens who look at issues of importance to residents and then provide recommendations to the Village. She interacted with Mr. Cole on community issues that are important to the residents. Mr. Cole is absolutely charming. He is very friendly and open to collaborating with everyone. They worked well with him on a variety of issues.

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

The Village has a magnificent eleven-acre piece of wetland between the high school sports field and the library. However, this green space was used as dumping grounds for contractors and the Village, it is where they dumped the plowed snow and more. Ms. Eppenstein wrote a grant and brought it to the Village. Mr. Cole participated in the process in several important ways. From the beginning of his tenure, he was active in the volunteer activities of residents which were always done in collaboration with the Village. The grant led to a community planting day in 2015 where they planted bare roots, and this became an annual tradition that Mr. Cole has always been supportive of. The land now hosts mature native oak trees, and they have successfully reforested this very important wetland. While he participated in the planting, he is almost a professional photographer, and he created a photographic record of the project which is still posted on the village website. Mr. Cole has an unbelievably collaborative personality. He also helped build raised frames for a new pollinator garden in the parks.

The Scarsdale Forum has been a tireless advocate for road safety. Since 2015 they drafted three comprehensive reports about road safety and advocated for many initiatives. One issue related to a state mandate of a 30-mph speed limit for smaller villages. Scarsdale wanted to lower the limit to 25, which is safer considering the amount of traffic they have. Mr. Cole was part of the process of lobbying with the state and they were successful in lowering the speed limit, which was a significant accomplishment.

Recently Mr. Cole was instrumental in collaboratively working with both Village and State legislators to have a traffic signal placed on the state road that basically bisects the Village. The state installed a crosswalk, but they still had several pedestrian and car accidents. While this state road runs through two residential areas, by several houses of worship, and the high school, it is more of a highway. The intersection was very hazardous. Mr. Cole gained support from legislators for the traffic signal which has improved the safety of the community.

Mr. Cole's written work is impressive and scholarly, both in his writing style and research. He has a comprehensive understanding of the issues, and his documents are a pleasure to read. His writings are very professional. His in-person presentations are equally impressive. He does extremely well in open meetings because he is very prepared, has a professional demeanor, and speaks with great clarity. His ability to convey the Village's position is outstanding.

Vines were destroying the tree canopies. They met with Mr. Cole, and he was very cordial. He spent over an hour with them and never once looked at his watch. He contacted the attorney prior to this meeting so he was already aware of what the options were. He explained that volunteers could enter public property to cut the vines off trees, but it was at their own personal risk.

Ms. Eppenstein worked with two of the previous Village Managers. One was politically well connected and pawned her off on a staff member, he had no interest in interacting with her. While most of the recommendations she made were implemented, he was just rude. The Manager after this one was more cordial. However, every interaction with Mr. Cole has been enjoyable. He gives great advice, is open to answering questions, cooperates where he can, and

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

goes to bat on issues that are important to the residents. He was always very professional, truly competent, and very nice. He has that human side that is so important.

Ms. Eppenstein would hire Mr. Cole. He is very well liked in the community, and very well respected. Many of the residents feel a sense of shock that he is no longer with the Village and are trying to grapple with the loss. Whoever hires him will have a tremendous asset.

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Cole:

- Personable,
- Collaborative,
- Dedicated,
- Supportive,
- Well spoken, and
- Professional.

Strengths: Truly cares about his work and the community, charming, collaborates with everyone, very cordial.

Weaknesses: None identified.

**Joshua Ringel – Former Assistant to the Village Manager, Village of Scarsdale, NY
914-310-9371**

Mr. Ringel has known Mr. Cole since 2015 and they worked closely together until 2019 on a variety of projects. Mr. Ringel reported to Mr. Cole. Mr. Cole was a good mentor and Mr. Ringel attributes his current role as a City Manager to Mr. Cole and others who gave him advice and opportunities to learn. When they worked together Mr. Cole was the Assistant Manager.

Mr. Cole was great to work with because he was prompt and straightforward. When he asked the staff to do something, they knew exactly what he wanted. He is very clear in his communications which avoids the need for multiple conversations. He kept others informed and never missed a deadline. Nothing in his job performance was concerning.

Mr. Cole did not have many hires during the time they worked together but the one hire Mr. Ringel knows about was excellent. His decisions in general are good. He made many positive changes to the budget process and the government structure. He also involved the Board in a more collaborative manner. He essentially changed the status quo as much as he could, while dealing with demanding residents who had high expectations.

While the Manager went to some of the community events, Mr. Cole was involved in Boards and Councils as the Assistant Manager. He improved the website to better communicate what the

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

County was working on. Traffic safety improvements were very basic and not truly impactful, and Mr. Cole understood that the Village had an obligation to address the liability. He worked with the Board and the community and improved the safety of the Village.

Mr. Cole was the sole person responsible for putting together the capital budget, which was around \$60 million in 2019. He worked with department heads and presented information to the Board. The process was out of date, so it was a heavy lift. He was very inclusive of others and worked very hard. He was also willing to allow lower-level staff members to be part of the process so they could learn.

The Village had a cable operator that was not performing well, and Mr. Cole let him go. Mr. Cole handled the process well and never lost his temper. Mr. Ringel is not aware of any controversy involving Mr. Cole either personally or professionally. Nothing in his background or conduct would concern a reasonable person.

Knowing the players in Scarsdale, how the organization transitioned over the years, and the Board's interpretation of the charter, he was not completely surprised by Mr. Cole's departure. While Mr. Ringel agreed with the interpretation of the Board, they did not handle the process well or in the way that they should have.

Mr. Ringle would hire Mr. Cole 100%, and without a second thought. He has a wonderful and interesting background. Scarsdale is known in the region for being the training ground for Managers, and many of the quality leaders in the state are a product of the Scarsdale school of government, including Mr. Cole. He is enjoyable to work with, a good mentor to staff, and he is well respected in the community.

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Cole:

- Mentor,
- Prompt,
- Straightforward,
- Collaborative,
- Communicates well, and
- Respected.

Strengths: Clarity in his speech, has a presence, confident, extremely ethical, good mentor.

Weaknesses: His straightforwardness can sometimes be misinterpreted if you do not know him well. Once you get to know him you see that it stems from professionalism.

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

Christine Sciandra – Executive Assistant, Village of Scarsdale, NY 914-565-9106

Ms. Sciandra has known Mr. Cole since 2017. Mr. Cole is one of the best people that she has ever worked for. He is very fair, really knows the profession, and is highly respected by residents. He does not just talk about what he wants to do, he sees goals through to completion. He introduced various initiatives, like a bimonthly department head meeting to gather feedback from the staff, which had not been done before.

Everyone whom Mr. Cole hired is still with the organization. He hired their Assessor, Treasurer, Planner, and Deputy Manager among others. All employees are doing very well and are happy in their roles. He makes good decisions in general.

The Village was still manually producing the agenda, and nothing was organized. Mr. Cole created a system with proper electronic folders which are labeled clearly so staff can find what they need more efficiently. While the agenda is still not automated, he created a system that is more efficient, effective, and consistent, and information is more easily accessible to residents.

Mr. Cole is often out in the community. Everyone in the community loves him, and the residents were very disappointed when he left. He is a go-getter who got things done. He worked with the Treasurer to streamline the budget process. They upgraded a very antiquated system. He meets deadlines and never shows any stress, even though Scarsdale has a very demanding, high-end, and very educated residency.

The Village has several Homeowner Associations and Mr. Cole was good at working with the ones that needed action. He also ensured that whatever decisions were made were in the best interest of the community as a whole and not just a small group of residents. He always has the best interest of his community at heart.

While Mr. Cole has been involved in controversy due to the nature of his role, he did not create any controversy. Nothing in his conduct would concern a reasonable person.

Ms. Sciandra would hire Mr. Cole and would follow him to a new location provided it is in the same region. He was very fair with employees, and very astute at seeing the strengths and weaknesses of personnel. He was involved where he needed to be but also understood the limits of his role and stayed within them.

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Cole:

- Friendly,
- Innovative,
- Gets things done,
- Responsive,
- Good with staff,
- Cooperative with the Board, and
- Adaptable.

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

Strengths: Very personable, good at bringing a project or goal to completion, pleasant to talk to, friendly to everyone, treats everyone the same, very respectful.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Michelle Sterling – Member, Conservation Advisory Council, Scarsdale, NY 917-930-2008

Ms. Sterling chairs the Conservation Council, which is a Board-appointed environmental committee. The committee is very active, and they work closely with the Village. She has known Mr. Cole since 2015. They worked together on sustainability, facilities, and transportation.

Mr. Cole is fantastic, and he is a gem. He really cares about his work and the people he interacts with. He wants to complete the goals and do it in the right way. He does not dial it in or do the minimum. He is very knowledgeable, and he truly cares, which you can tell by his actions. Some say they care but do not follow through. He figures out a way to yes, which is what you want as a leader. He communicates well and keeps others informed.

Mr. Cole made good decisions. He always attended meetings and working sessions, even when they went late into the night. He was at the Village events. The Village has a tremendous number of Boards and Councils, and ultimately the buck stopped with him. He managed it all well. He was responsive and he was timely in his responses.

When departments were working on a project but not making progress in a timely manner, they elevated the situation to Mr. Cole. He spoke with the superintendent of that division to coordinate a resolution. He told the division leaders to let him know if something did not work as anticipated so they could try a different approach.

Mr. Cole's background is free from controversy. Ms. Sterling would hire Mr. Cole. He is an excellent manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Cole:

- Intelligent,
- Hard working,
- Caring,
- Conscientious,
- Transparent, and
- Honest.

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

Strengths: Very smart, very hard working, cares about what he is doing, great multi-tasker, very genuine, honest, and transparent.

Weaknesses: He is a lengthy talker. However, he is very smart, and his input is valuable. When someone is impatient and wants a two-second answer, he gives it but often government work is nuanced. He is not afraid to be honest and describe all aspects of a situation before he comes to a decision. This weakness is also a strength as it helps the public understand the reasoning behind decisions.

**Jim Palmer – Former President, New York City/County Manager Association, NY
914-552-2127**

Mr. Palmer manages a community next to Scarsdale and they shared stories and discussions on issues that were relevant. When Mr. Palmer was the President of the NY City/County Manager Association, he appointed Mr. Cole to the Board of Directors.

Scarsdale residents expect a high level of service and a professional answer. Balancing a budget and the needs of multiple constituents gets harder to do every day. Mr. Cole can balance the needs and priorities while giving credit to his team. He is very humble.

Anyone in the region would say that Mr. Cole is a legend. He lives and breathes the profession and is very efficient. The Village is complicated, and he led many departments while having the buy in of the other employees. He not only understood the implementation aspect of what they do, but the policy implications as well. For example, when it came to speeding, he led the way in encouraging the community to reduce the maximum allowable speed limit from 30 to 25 mph, and then he took the initiative to the state where it was successfully approved. Other Villages were quick to follow his lead.

Mr. Cole makes good decisions. He is innovative, a change agent, and he maintains an organization at a high-performance level. He always followed up and communicated well, and he gained support for various initiatives.

Lowering the speed limit from 30 mph to 25 mph involved a large group of stakeholders, and Mr. Cole spearheaded the efforts. He was persistent in a host of other matters that were a priority, particularly involving traffic.

Mr. Cole accomplishes his work in a timely manner, even when it comes to legislation. He handles stress through physical activity as he loves the outdoors. He is a very hard worker.

Reducing the speed limit was controversial. Also, the principal roadway in the community had a traffic calming measure that the community did not perceive as being efficient enough. Mr. Cole brought stakeholders on board and worked with the state to put a traffic signal in. He is very solutions oriented.

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

Mr. Palmer would hire Mr. Cole. He is the manager that everyone in this profession aspires to be. He has good experience, and he presents himself well. He has served first rate communities with high service delivery expectations, and he will help any organization get to the next level.

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Cole:

- Professional,
- Diligent,
- Thoughtful,
- Responsive,
- Good communicator, and
- Articulate.

Strengths: Professionalism, very well spoken, very articulate, very thoughtful, great listener, ensures you understand the question and provides a professional and thoughtful response. He is very smart and well educated.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Andrew Matturo – Former Police Chief, Village of Scarsdale, NY 914-582-2065

Mr. Matturo has known Mr. Cole since he was hired in 2015 as the Deputy Manager. Mr. Cole is extremely professional and supportive of the departments and department heads. He is very knowledgeable of municipal operations.

While Mr. Cole received recommendations from department heads when hiring, he made the final appointment. His decisions, both in hiring and in general, are good. He does not make snap decisions. He does his homework and finds all the information.

Mr. Cole is very innovative and open to new approaches, but he is not someone who comes in and makes several changes. He maintains operations at a high level. He attends community events and is always transparent and prepared to answer questions. He did his research and was always very knowledgeable about the issues. He communicated well with the public.

Mr. Cole was good about keeping others informed. He steered the conversation for meetings like emergency management planning. He was timely in completing his work. Scarsdale is very demanding, and, in a positive way, he held the staff's feet to the fire. He handled the stress well and never expressed or displayed discomfort.

Mr. Matturo is not aware of any incident involving Mr. Cole that would concern an employer. Mr. Matturo would hire Mr. Cole. He was extremely supportive of the staff, held them

Reference Notes
Robert Cole

accountable, and clearly communicated his expectations so the staff could meet them. He is very professional and was great to work with.

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Cole:

- Enthusiastic,
- Energetic, and
- Has a positive management style.

Strengths: Attention to detail, customer service, did his best to meet the expectations of a very demanding public, always very professional.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Prepared by: Amanda Jenkins & Lynelle Klein
Colin Baenziger & Associates

CB&A Internet Research

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Keysweekly
January 9, 2025

**ISLAMORADA CUTS TIES WITH MANAGER ROB COLE THROUGH A
RESIGNATION-FOR-SEVERANCE-PAY AGREEMENT**

By: Jim McCarthy

There were questions and accusations. Tempers flared and voices were raised as discussion ensued over the sequence of events which led four Islamorada council members to approve a separation agreement with Village Manager **Rob Cole** at a Jan. 7 meeting at the Founders Park Community Center. Before the vote, **Cole** read a letter announcing his resignation from a post he was unanimously selected to by a previous council just last February. A former manager in Scarsdale, New York, **Cole** said he decided to resign as village manager subject to the terms and conditions in the separation agreement, which was initially put on the consent agenda but later pulled by Islamorada Councilman Steve Friedman for discussion. Items on the consent agenda can be handled and implemented without any discussion among the council and public. The item was pulled and a lengthy, heated discussion began.

“This was a difficult choice for me to make,” **Cole** said as he read his letter to the council and public. “But it is the right one for me and my family.” Per the separation agreement, **Cole** will receive severance pay totaling north of \$100,000 between base compensation, housing allowance, vacation leave payout, 401k contributions and health insurance benefits. **Cole** will technically stay employed by the village until Feb. 28. However, he began administrative leave on Jan. 8 and will no longer be reporting physically to the village administrative building to perform village manager duties. Council members will need to act to appoint an interim village manager; no decision was made at the meeting’s conclusion. A discussion is expected at a Jan. 9 meeting of the council.

Many public commenters commended **Cole** for his work with the village, crediting him in keeping the residents up-to-date on various matters through his weekly newsletter. They also blasted the council for the lack of integrity and representation over the matter. “It comes to a point where I don’t want to live in this community any more. The whole thing is heartbreaking to me,” said Betsy Bullard. Beth Kamenstein said **Cole** was one of the more dynamic village managers Islamorada has seen. “This action gives the appearance of a coordinated effort to make profound changes without our input,” she said. “There’s nothing wrong with Mr. **Cole**. He’s been an exemplary employee,” said Van Cadenhead. **Cole**’s selection came after the council elected not to renew the contract of then-manager Ted Yates; the vote was 3-2 during a July 2023 meeting. Between Yates’ departure and **Cole**’s arrival, the village used the services of three Monroe County department heads who performed the day-to-day duties as village manager.

Before the separation agreement was approved via a 4-1 vote, the lone “no” vote, Friedman, attempted to provide the public with some transparency by speaking for roughly 17 minutes as to how **Cole**’s resignation and the separation all transpired. Friedman, who pulled the issue off the consent agenda, said he was troubled in how the matter of severing **Cole**’s relationship with

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

the village came about. Friedman said he knew **Cole** “liked his job and was not seeking to resign.” Friedman said the matter first came to him on Dec. 18 via phone call from Village Attorney John Quick. Friedman said the call was in relation to an email Quick sent the day before to council members concerning a written complaint made by a village employee against **Cole**. Friedman said he was having IT issues setting up his village email account and didn’t receive or review Quick’s email with the employee’s complaint attached. Friedman said Quick gave him a brief summary of the email. Friedman also said that Quick was “conducting a poll” of the council members to see whether they were in favor of offering **Cole** a severance package in return for his resignation. At the time, Friedman said, he understood **Cole** was doing his job well. Friedman said he had no knowledge then and has no knowledge now of any conduct by **Cole** that would have “justified coercing him to resign in return for several weeks of severance.” Friedman said he wasn’t in favor of the proposal offering **Cole** severance when it was initially presented by the village attorney. Rather, Friedman wanted to keep **Cole**.

“I told him (Quick) I was not in favor of such action because I knew no basis to suggest that Rob be forced out of his position and because I believe every employee in the village is entitled to due process to address the merit or lack of merit to a complaint against them before being disciplined, terminated or coerced,” Friedman said. “At the time of the call on Dec. 18, I had no knowledge or evidence (and) still have no knowledge or evidence that would justify criticizing **Rob**’s job performance, much less a request for his resignation in return for a severance package,” Friedman continued. “Consequently, I was extremely uncomfortable with John’s request to state whether I was in favor of making such an offer.”

Friedman told Quick he was aware **Cole** responded to a rumor circulating throughout the village that he had some responsibility for the decision made in Tallahassee to cancel funding for a new Islamorada Fire Rescue boat. A total of \$300,000 in state funds was included in the legislatively approved budget last session. To the surprise of many local officials, however, those funds ended up being vetoed by Gov. Ron DeSantis. Rep. Lauren Mello, of Naples, sponsored the appropriation for a fireboat in Islamorada. She came before the council in December and stated that it was “vetoed at the local level.” In his comments, Friedman said, **Cole** submitted a detailed and factual response refuting the rumor in an email provided to council members on Dec. 12. Friedman said that email dispelled the idea that he had anything to do with the fireboat funds being canceled.

Friedman said on its face, the employee complaint did not appear to come anywhere near justifying a severance package. No details were provided as to the employee complaint during Friedman’s comments and throughout the duration of the meeting. Friedman said Quick told him that he was the last council member and that his vote against severing ties with **Cole** was “in the minority.”

“I asked if the minority was 3-2 or 4-1. John told me it was 4-1,” Friedman said regarding the call he had with Quick. “At no time since our initial phone conversation on Dec. 18 or to this day did John provide me with options or legal recommendations beyond asking me for my vote in favor or against offering **Rob** severance in return for his resignation,” Friedman said. Friedman

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

said the matter surrounding **Cole** and discussion over a severance package should have been addressed among the full council at a public meeting. Friedman said he told Quick if severance was offered, it should be for the maximum amount, which would be 20 weeks' pay. In a subsequent phone call with attorney Alison Smith on Dec. 19, Friedman said he was informed that a decision was apparently made to offer **Cole** six weeks' severance.

“I asked how the other four council members could possibly have come up with the same number of weeks of severance offer without speaking to one another,” Friedman said. “Alison told me she could not say because discussing her conversations with other council members would violate Sunshine law. “In an email to John, I asked the following question: is it possible that the decision to offer an employee severance on behalf of the council without any prior discussion among the council members based on each council member’s conversation with you as an intermediary might violate the Sunshine law?” Friedman continued. “John responded to me in an email on Dec. 20 informing me that he did not serve as an intermediary because he did not convey any discussion between the council members.” Friedman said he attempted to call a special meeting on Dec. 20 for a discussion on matters related to the village manager’s employment and to discuss making a request to the village attorney to provide legal counsel with proposed alternative procedures to address, investigate and attempt to resolve the village manager complaints. There was no support, however, from other council members for Friedman’s desire for a special meeting. “The village has terminated nearly 20 different village managers in 20 years. Is the council to terminate village managers simply because a village employee may lodge a complaint that has not been investigated, much less verified, and for which the village manager has not been afforded an opportunity to respond?” Friedman said. He concluded by saying what occurred was “totally unacceptable.” Friedman proceeded to ask fellow council members whose idea it was to ask the village attorney to “poll the question of severance for **Cole**,” what were the reasons for wanting to sever the relationship, why they thought it was prudent to force **Cole** to resign and what was the plan for a replacement.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
November 20, 2024

Key Largo sewer treatment district maintains board makeup

Author/Byline: JILL ZIMA BORSKI

The Key Largo Wastewater Treatment District met Nov. 5 for a mere half-hour. First up was the board election, and board officers stayed the same as the past two years. Nicolas Rodriguez remains chair, Tim Maloney is vice chair and Sue Heim remains secretary-treasure. Robby Majeska and Philip Schwartz remain as commissioners. Next, the board approved a mutual aid agreement between Key Largo Fire-Rescue Department and the district for emergencies. After discussion, the district said it would extend a mutual aid agreement option to the county, too. District staff then shared reports and said Islamorada, which is the district's largest customer, was recently charged \$32,000 for its wastewater salinity being higher than allowed in the interlocal agreement to treat the village's wastewater. The village's salinity problem was attributed to high tides and/or a storm event, according to staff.

Islamorada's Plantation Key Wastewater Plant has been criticized recently for creating problems for the district including a pipe rupturing eight times near Mile Marker 93, with each repair costing village residents five-figure sums.

Islamorada Village Manager **Rob Cole** visited the Key Largo wastewater treatment plant mid-September and sent a letter that same day to Key Largo Wastewater Treatment District Manager Peter Rosasco to gauge the district's interest in taking over Islamorada's wastewater system.

"If we're potentially heading toward a logical transfer of our system to KLWTD, it would make sense for both the North Plantation Key work, pit monitoring technology and more to match-up against what you have and what will best integrate. So, let's see if we can establish a clear path forward," **Cole** wrote.

However, the district board said it would not entertain such a takeover until Islamorada corrects the ongoing problems with its collection and transmission system.

Key Largo's district has a 22-year history. In 2002, Florida House Bill 471 created the Key Largo Wastewater Treatment District and a five-member board of commissioners to oversee district business. Commissioners must be registered voters and reside within the boundaries of the district through their four-year term of office. Elections are nonpartisan and held every two years to create staggered four-year terms.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
September 18, 2024

Sewer district discusses cloud storage, Islamorada issues

Author/Byline: JILL ZIMA BORSKI

The Key Largo Wastewater Treatment District is upgrading its computer data to cloud storage and discussed the related monetary investment in training staff and in automating county land parcel information via geographic mapping software. During their meeting earlier this month, the KLWTD board heard that the cloud upgrade will include the benefits of workflow facilitation for field employees and staff due to remote accessibility, as well as increased security, resistance to ransomware, unlimited storage and decreased downtime. No server upgrades are required. With backups every 20 minutes, there is little chance of loss of data and protection for customer accounts. The upgrade expense is \$19,800 for 2024 and about \$59,000 for 2025. In August, Finance Director Connie Fazio showcased the proposed 2024-2025 budget of \$27,770,213. It shared a preliminary estimate of \$15.386 million in non-departmental revenue and \$12.384 million in capital improvements revenue. The district board also approved the yearly contracts for General Manager Peter Rosasco, legal counsel Nick Mulick and Fazio, which totaled just under \$352,000. The district also regularly reports its wastewater treatment in terms of gallons of influent per day. In July, it processed an average of 2 million gallons of influent per day and remains in compliance with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection guidelines.

The commissioners spent time discussing what they described as a lack of response from Islamorada's wastewater department, saying the village does not provide engineering data for which the district repeatedly asks. The district treats village sewage under contract. "We do one thing (wastewater treatment) and we do it right," Rosasco said. He proposed giving Islamorada a one- to two-page memorandum regarding the agreement surrounding the valve that separates the village's wastewater from the Key Largo wastewater, and the problems they have with their system. He then disclosed what he described as the eighth break in Islamorada's water main on Sept. 1 around 5 p.m. near Mile Marker 92, roughly the same place as the past seven breaks. Sixteen trucks responded to remove sludge from the roadway and bike path between 8 p.m. and midnight, and 68,000 gallons were recovered. Rosasco said this typically occurs when there is a holiday weekend, and this latest break was over the three-day Labor Day holiday weekend per the pattern. "It wasn't our break," he added.

In a prior meeting with Islamorada Manager **Rob Cole** and Wastewater Director A.J. Engelmeyer, Rosasco said they indicated they could fix the problems in their programming.

"They operate (their system) on an on-off system creating (pipe) breaks in the same area and blocking traffic," Rosasco told the KLWTD board. "They're not solving the problem. If they go forward with their new pumps, it will create problems. ... We want them to make a decision sooner rather than later. This is why we think the pipes are breaking, and this is what we think you need to do. We get promises but don't get any action. We've asked for information that hasn't been forthcoming. We've gotten (from the village) a collections system project which was non-

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

responsive and opposite to what they had promised. ... It's very frustrating. I can put (the memo) in layman's terms and send it to the public officials."

A commissioner pointed out the two meetings Rosasco had with **Cole** and Engelmeyer, and a meeting with former village manager Seth Lawless, further indicating the problem has simmered for a while. "Seth told me five to six years ago they were aware of the problems with the sewer line and the hammer breaks," Rosasco said. "We have not received their hydrology reports ... for two years. They are withholding (information)."

Rosasco suggested looking into the interlocal agreement between the district and village "from a legal standpoint" and deciding how to move forward. "What (Islamorada) plans to do is not in the best interest of the district — and frankly, not in theirs," he said. At that point, a board member suggested adding to the memo, "If you do this, we'll bill you \$1-2 million."

Reaching the end of the discussion, Rosasco said, "They're not taking the appropriate steps to solve the problem. We offer to give them our expertise for free and then they don't do it. ... They're our No. 1 customer and we want to accommodate them, but we have to be able to address them." The district board agreed communication had to progress up to Islamorada's elected officials, characterizing the issue as "dereliction of duty."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
July 23, 2024

Islamorada project to get second look

Author/Byline: ED PIERCE

The Islamorada Village Council decided during the July 9 meeting to hold another discussion regarding the development of affordable housing on village-owned lots at the corner of Woods Avenue and Gardenia Street. In June, the council voted to defer making any decision about the issue until staff could formulate better options for councilors about possibly linking the development there to a larger-scale project.

In 2017, the council approved a resolution awarding eight affordable unit allocations from the Building Permit Allocation System (BPAS) to create workforce housing on village lots there. The council awarded the rights to develop the site in September 2021 to Gorman & Company with a stipulation that if they chose not to or were otherwise unable to develop the site, Habitat for Humanity of the Upper Keys would be awarded those development rights.

This time, however, Councilman Henry Rosenthal, Mayor Buddy Pinder and Vice Mayor Sharon Mahoney voted to support a motion to place the Woods Avenue development item back on the agenda for an upcoming council meeting, while Councilors Mark Gregg and Elizabeth Jolin voted against the measure.

In another item, Gregg asked the council to consider directing village staff members to initiate a review of Islamorada's Comprehensive Plan build-out limit. "It seems like each year we keep selling out more and more and more to build more and more and more," Gregg said. "Pretty soon there won't be any more fish and there is no more coral. There won't be many more trees, nothing but rooftops, and so the question I would like to answer is how much is too much?"

Village Manager **Rob Cole** said the timeline to review and update the plan is in the fall of 2025. He said that several studies are underway currently looking at growth in the village, but he urged caution in proceeding in this area in order to allow staff to gather complete data and provide strong forums for public engagement about the matter. **Cole** said he would speak to the village's Comprehensive Plan consultant to see if there is a reasonable way to expedite the process to have both the plan and practical recommendations completed by next year.

The council was also briefed by Islamorada Environmental Resources Manager Pete Frezza about the feasibility of the village establishing a new vessel exclusion zone as a result of resident concerns about the emerging boater raft-up area off Sunset Drive beach on Lower Matecumbe Key. Frezza said such an exclusion zone is permitted under Florida Statute 327.46 and such a restriction may only be imposed in the interest of public safety and protection and would require the council to enact an ordinance creating the zone. According to Frezza, the exclusionary zone would be 300 feet from shore at the knee-high water line. It would be reinforced by a series of nine buoys and would potentially run about half the length of Sunset Drive. Boats, including

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

paddle boats and kayaks, would be prohibited from using the area for recreational purposes.

To create this exclusionary zone though, Frezza said a number of factors would have to be weighed by the council, including how to enforce the restriction, environmental impacts to seagrass and coral caused by drilling damage to anchor the buoys and navigating the complex permitting process to work on the project. He also estimated the costs for the creation of such an exclusionary zone at between \$80,000 and \$100,000.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
July 5, 2024

Expanded rideshare service begins in Islamorada

Author/Byline: CITIZEN STAFF

The village's rideshare service is now offering longer daily hours due to a new agreement unanimously approved recently by the Islamorada Village Council. The new agreement with the Freebee rideshare provider has expanded services to 357 hours a week, an increase of 147 hours. The service currently carries passengers at no cost to and from destinations inside the village. Service outside the village to nearby Tavernier Towne, Mariners Hospital and the Good Health Clinic was added three years ago.

However, during June's meeting, Vice Mayor Sharon Mahoney and Village Manager **Rob Cole** acknowledged that passengers could be charged a fee possibly in September as Monroe County, which recently approved its own agreement with Freebee for service in the Lower Keys, looks to create a county-wide transportation program, which could possibly reduce or eliminate the village's costs for providing the service. "We would need to get it out there sooner than later, so we don't have people freaking out over, now, you're going to be charged starting September something," Mahoney said. **Cole** agreed that the village could make the public aware before a charge is instituted.

Vehicles in the village's Freebee fleet continue to include two Telsa X seven-passenger vehicles and one XL van. As of July 1 the three are now operating simultaneously from 7 a.m. to midnight. Previously the vehicles had staggered hours, with one operating from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., the second from noon to 10 p.m. and the third from 2 p.m. to midnight.

The additional hours have increased the cost from \$342,500 annually to \$553,330; however, the council also approved accepting a Florida Department of Transportation matching grant of \$276,665, which will result in a \$65,839 annual reduction in spending on Freebee while providing expanded services.

The proposed annual agreement has an option for renewal for two additional one-year periods.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
June 28, 2024

Village defers action on housing project

Author/Byline: ED PIERCE

Actions to move forward with the development of affordable housing unit at the corner of Woods Avenue and Gardenia Street have been deferred by members of the Islamorada Village Council until staff can formulate options for councilors about possibly linking it to a larger-scale project. In 2017, a prior council approved a resolution awarding eight affordable unit allocations from the Building Permit Allocation System to create workforce housing on village-owned lots there. Councilors awarded rights to develop the property in September 2021 to Gorman & Company with a stipulation that if Gorman elected not to or was otherwise unable to develop the site, Habitat for Humanity of the Upper Keys would be awarded those development rights.

Village Planning Director Jennifer DeBoisbriand told councilors a letter was sent in May to Gorman informing them that Islamorada was going to award the development rights for the Woods Avenue site to Habitat for Humanity. She said Gorman did not respond to that letter.

During the council's June 13 meeting, a resolution was introduced to reserve the eight affordable unit allocations but after a lengthy discussion, Councilwoman Elizabeth Jolin motioned to have village staff compile all available options which could tie development of the Woods Avenue site to a larger potential affordable workforce housing project including the village-owned Machado property.

Jolin said, at the very least, staff could report back to the council with an analysis of a larger-scale project, which would provide additional information, so the council could make a more informed decision.

The council voted 3-2 to defer the affordable unit allocation resolution and have staff detail potential options at a future meeting, with Jolin and councilmen Henry Rosenthal and Mark Gregg supporting the measure and Mayor Buddy Pinder and Vice Mayor Sharon Mahoney voting no. During its June 11 meeting, the council bypassed a recommendation by the village's evaluation committee to award a \$4.8 million contract to Earth Tech Enterprises of Fort Myers for the Founders Park Breakwater Restoration Project.

Islamorada Environmental Resources Manager Pete Frezza said that the committee had received 10 proposals overall for the restoration project, which will strengthen and update the jetty surrounding the park's Plantation Yacht Harbor Marina. The jetty was originally built in 1960 and is vital protection for park infrastructure and vessels there from destructive wave energy. Frezza said the aging jetty at Founders Park sustained erosion damage from Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Wilma storm surges and evaluation committee members determined the proposal by Earth Tech Enterprises was the best. He said the company has the experience and expertise for such a project and has been used previously for project by Monroe County and Key West.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Mahoney questioned why other local companies were not chosen for the project. "I just have a problem with the fact that we have companies local here who need to survive and who have done great jobs, and I've gone to some of their sites and looked at them," Mahoney said. "I just can't understand why we don't take better care of our own. We don't want them to move out of the Keys." Because the \$4.8 million in funding for the project is derived from a Florida Department of Environmental Protection grant from federal funding, a local preference option was not allowed to be included in the request for proposal for this project, Frezza said.

Village Attorney John Quick advised the councilors that they were not obliged to take the lowest bidder for the contract.

The council then voted 5-0 to award the contract to Adventure Environmental, which finished in a tie for second among companies submitting proposals, and came in \$40,000 higher than Earth Tech Enterprises among bidders. Also at the June 11 council meeting, councilors voted 5-0 to work with the Miller Legg Company of Tampa in formulating a new master plan for Founders Park.

Village Manager **Rob Cole** said four companies submitted documents as a result of the village's request for proposals for architectural consulting work on the project and the evaluation committee reviewed them and recommended Miller Legg. He said evaluation committee members thought Miller Legg's proposal had the best approach, had previously worked on similar projects, and was highly qualified and experienced.

Michael Kroll, Miller Legg president, attended the council meeting and fielded questions from councilors, including one about the growing popularity of pickleball in community recreation and if it planned on addressing it in the new master plan recommendations for Founders Park.

Kroll said Miller Legg is aware of the pickleball trend nationally and intends to use a multi-facility approach for its Founders Park recommendation, incorporating pickleball courts but also giving the village flexibility by providing other sports opportunities as well.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
May 29, 2024

Council defers permit allocations to review guidelines

Author/Byline: ED PIERCE

Members of the Islamorada Village Council had just started meeting earlier this month when a motion was introduced to defer items on the agenda regarding awarding administrative relief building permit allocations. Administrative relief is when a building permit is issued to an applicant who has been in the village's Building Permit Allocation System (BPAS) for four years without receiving one.

Councilwoman Elizabeth Jolin entered the motion asking that the administrative relief process currently used by the village be halted until Planning Director Jennifer DeBoisbriand establishes clearer guidelines that the council would need to approve for issuing the limited number of remaining building permit allocations. DeBoisbriand said that would include a thorough review of Islamorada's BPAS policy, a vacant parcel analysis and two public engagement meetings. She said she expected to have the new procedure ready for review by the council's Oct. 8 meeting.

Both Mayor Buddy Pinder and Vice Mayor Sharon Mahoney objected to the delay citing it was unfair to current administrative relief applicants, including two who were scheduled to make their case for allocations that night during quasi-judicial hearings. "It's not fair to push these people to the end of the year," Mahoney said. "We're pulling the rug out from them in the ninth inning." Pinder agreed with Mahoney and said telling people who showed up for the meeting that they now have to wait even longer is not right. "These people have been waiting and followed the system for four years," Pinder said. "To pull the plug the night they come to the meeting is wrong."

Jolin said she proposed deferring the permit process because she felt that the council didn't have enough information to make an informed decision, while Councilman Henry Rosenthal said a plan is very much needed. Councilman Mark Gregg sided with Jolin and Rosenthal. "I don't feel there's a need to rush into this. I think we need to take a step back," Gregg said. "It's time for us to stop the piecemeal approach. I think it would be nice for the public to participate in this."

Village Manager **Rob Cole** said deferring the process would allow the town to incorporate differing public viewpoints and enable DeBoisbriand to return a set of comprehensive recommendations to the council in October.

The motion to defer until Oct. 8 unless the process is expedited sooner passed 3-2, with Pinder and Mahoney voting no. The council then voted 3-2 to direct the Village Attorney John Quick to prepare a moratorium on new administrative relief applications for 120 days by the next meeting with Pinder and Mahoney again in opposition.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
April 19, 2024

Vacation rental policy to get council review

Author/Byline: SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN

The Islamorada Village Council slogged through four and a half hours of business at the first of their two regular council sessions on April 9, dominated by more than 90 minutes of discussion on one specific land-use issue related to Councilman Mark Gregg's family member. There were four quasi-judicial ordinance requests — grouped and heard together — to amend the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) by Windley Cove LLC from residential medium to mixed use, and another request to amend the zoning map from residential single family to highway commercial for the property on Windley Key. There were also requests made by Windley Isles LLC to amend the FLUM for its property also on Windley Key and another for requesting an approval for a zoning map amendment from residential single family to highway commercial on the subject property, located at 85331 Overseas Highway, comprising 13,300 square feet of land. At the core of the council disagreements was the overarching concern about what Councilwoman Elizabeth Jolin described "as the vacation rental problem" on Windley Key.

Gregg recused himself from the vote on the applications because the applicant, Jocelyn Tiedemann, is a family member. Even though Gregg couldn't vote on the application, he lobbied for approval throughout. While Tiedemann made her case for land-use changes that would allow the properties to become vacation rentals, Vice Mayor Sharon Mahoney and Jolin pushed back at various intervals. The properties in question are just south of Hog Heaven, and Mahoney said she's heard input from neighboring residents about the increasing rowdiness at vacation rentals in that area. Planning Director Jennifer DeBoisbriand said that any vacation rental license would still have to meet Section 6 of the village code, and that staff recommended approval of all four applications. Former council member Deb Gillis, who sits on the village's Local Planning Agency, said the LPA voted 6-1 in favor of these requests, adding "everything seems above board to the LPA." Jolin said Windley Key has the highest density of commercial property in the village and is appropriate for vacation rental use. However, Mahoney called it a "crummy situation" since the density in that area will be further affected. Islamorada resident Sue Miller said during public comment that "the one thing we don't need more of is more vacation rentals." Jolin offered a compromise of sorts, asking the council to consider vacation rental restrictions be imposed to nuance their decision.

Village Manager **Rob Cole** said code enforcement issues with other vacation rentals shouldn't be a reason for denying the application and offered to examine the possible need for additional code enforcement staff.

Eventually, Jolin asked Tiedemann if she was comfortable tabling her request so the council can address the entire vacation rental situation at a future meeting. Mahoney insisted the council "fix the (vacation rental) problem." Gregg made a motion to continue the four items until the land-use hearing on Aug. 8, which was approved.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

In other village business, Monroe County Sheriff Rick Ramsay presented a refund to the village for \$83,000, representing savings his office realized in providing municipal policing services to the village in fiscal year 2023.

Gregg touted the village's acquisition of the Glynn property near Venetian Shores in a video presentation. The environmentally sensitive area, with hardwood hammock, mangrove wetlands, 2,000 feet of frontage on Florida Bay and a natural habitat for tree snails and indigo snakes, closed on March 29 and will be preserved in perpetuity. The Glynn family recorded the property in early 1955 and the village paid \$650,000 for it.

Village lobbying firm GrayRobinson gave a summary of the legislative session. One item specifically mentioned was the bill Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law that takes homeless individuals off Florida's streets and places them in encampments monitored by law enforcement.

Councilman Henry Rosenthal asked what GrayRobinson has done specifically for the village at an annual cost of \$108,000, to which the appropriation of \$300,000 for a village fire rescue marine emergency response vessel was referenced, even though that has not yet been signed by the governor. **Cole** encouraged more council preplanning and an action list for GrayRobinson before the next legislative session.

Mayor Buddy Pinder raised the possibility of a Sister City partnership. Gillis said during public comments that several years ago, the village had such a partnership with a city in Mississippi. Village Attorney John Quick suggested the first step would be to look for cities with similar size, geography or historical characteristics, and the benefits would be learning about policy, transportation, tourism and sustainability.

Cole briefly reviewed that Public Works doesn't have a permanent place for equipment, with much of it positioned at Founders Park. He suggested as part of the overall Founders Park master plan that it would benefit the village to find an alternate site for either rent or purchase. He will start identifying properties.

A resolution for a work authorization with Avalon Gardens Inc. for the completion of a canopy planting project around mile marker 87 passed. Two ordinances on second reading failed. One that would increase the purchasing parameters for the village manager from \$25,000 to \$50,000 without council approval failed. And after months and months of discussion, a motion for a referendum vote on four-year staggered council terms narrowly failed, with Pinder casting the deciding vote.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
April 3, 2024

New Islamorada Village Manager Cole outlines goals, challenges
Author/Byline: RICHARD TAMBORRINO

Less than two weeks into his new job as the Islamorada Village Manager, **Rob Cole** is gradually navigating his way through the many issues and challenges before the council and the community. He took some time to sit down recently for a conversation about his goals, expectations and the many tasks at hand. Perhaps one of his first challenges will be to fill the open finance director position, since Maria Bassett resigned to relocate to Virginia the day before **Cole** was officially installed. Bassett has remained on staff for now.

"The finance director position is a mission critical one," **Cole** began. "Maria has been very helpful so far getting me up to speed." He added that filling the position could occur in a variety of ways. "We may seek a transitional person to fill the position for interim support in the short term, while we seek a more permanent person with either public sector experience or perhaps a former chief financial officer. It all depends on who's out there." He added that public and private sector accounting are vastly different and indicated he would take his time finding a person with the right blend of experience.

Cole was asked about having one-on-one meetings with the five council members, saying he initiated meeting requests with each member to understand the "burning issues" at hand and to make sure all are "on the same page." His initial meeting was with Vice Mayor Sharon Mahoney, who said by phone she was very impressed with **Cole**.

Cole, careful in many of his responses but equally skilled as a public speaker, understands the "politics of his position" but doesn't convey any real appetite for that arena. "I'm focused on making sure there are 'no weak cogs' in the village staff and that public safety is our highest priority. I recognize my fiduciary public stewardship role in this community."

So far, village staff has been "warm and receptive," he said, adding he intends to "model the behaviors" he expects from staff. He's also a proponent of reciprocal learning — hopeful he's able to educate staff while being educated himself. "It's all about time and behaviors" he said about his onboarding process.

Asked what his onboarding process was like — a concern raised by Councilwoman Elizabeth Jolin several months ago since that was an obvious gap for new council members — **Cole** said he's reviewing the village charter and ordinances online to get up to speed.

He was asked if he was aware that a federal investigation into village activities as well as two state ethics investigations were ongoing. While not visibly surprised by the question, he said, "Until I'm fully briefed, it would not be appropriate for me to weigh in on that," adding "there's a framework for the processes that handle that."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Robert A. Cole

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Cole has a firm grasp of regulatory requirements and understands the "unique characteristics" of the village. He acknowledged that the environmental distinctions between the Keys and other parts of the country are different, but surprisingly similar in many ways. But he emphasized he understands "the boundaries of his role," adding the Florida Sunshine Law is stronger than his what he experienced in Illinois and New York and affects land use regulations more stringently.

Cole conveyed his goal for "transparency and communication" and a commitment to empowering staff to be fully informed and part of the process. **Cole** exuded a sense of confidence as he described his village manager responsibilities, emphasizing his strong environmental ethic and its relationship with complex land-use issues. But while he didn't discuss the turbulent nature of the village's challenges in achieving stability in this key role over the past several years, he appeared poised to be a strong voice for the council.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Newsbreak

March 3, 2024

Village poised to finalize new manager hire

By Richard Tamborrino

The Islamorada Village Council is set to approve the contract that would pave the way for **Robert Cole** to become the first permanent village manager in over nine months at its Tuesday, March 12, council session. With an employment contract and compensation negotiations now complete, all that's needed is an affirmative vote from the council at next week's session. Since **Cole** is already in Florida, he could conceivably start with the village immediately thereafter. **Cole** shared that he moved to Key Largo prior to the interviewing process so he could "experience the area, the environment and the community" in preparation for his interview with the council. "I've been to Founders Park several times, fished at Snake Creek and taken in as much as possible," he said.

Having done due diligence preparing for this new venture, **Cole** was also clear that his goal is "to mesh the fundamentals of city government with its people." He said preparing for this potential role requires that. **Cole** touted his strengths in financial accountability and in developing programs and policies in his 30 years in public service. "Public engagement and public transparency are my strengths," he said. "The community needs to understand the whys of decisions that are being made." He continued that he respects elected officials and the tough decisions they are charged with, and that his role is to "provide them the information they need to make important decisions," to help them "understand the implications of decisions they're faced with and to help them reach conclusion on those decisions."

Cole was most recently the village manager in Scarsdale, New York — a community of 18,253 — having previously served as deputy village manager and public information officer over his eight years there. He has a master's degree in public service management from DePaul University, which provides him with a foundation in public administration and government affairs. He whimsically shared that "as a kid I wanted to be a grizzly bear researcher," which evolved into a desire for a wildlife career and then grew toward a strong attraction toward public service. **Cole** and his wife, Olga, who have four grown sons, have plans to spend their first 30 days in an Airbnb, then transition to a seven-month rental in Key Largo, assuming his contract is approved. He is currently visiting one of his sons in Gainesville, who is completing a fellowship in hyperbaric medicine and is expected to move to the Keys and practice in that field thereafter. Their other sons work in archeology, the shipping industry and the non-profit sector.

Cole touched on his strengths in areas like budgeting, community sustainability, emergency management and urban planning. He stressed that shaping organizational culture was one qualification that he believes can be achieved through dialogue between staff and elected officials, two traits that could serve the village well. When asked what his expectations were for this potential transition, **Cole** said he hopes "I'm welcomed into the community and that

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

residents feel free to share their ideas. I want to integrate their viewpoints and perspectives with the council and staff and chart a strong course for this community. I'm willing to debate (issues) to the extent debate is necessary," stressing again his goal of conveying to residents "the whys of things."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Scarsdale10583
September 27, 2023

Who’s the Boss? Scarsdale Village Manager Rob Cole Resigns Due to Change in Definition of Role

Author: Joann Wallenstein

In a surprising turn of events, the Scarsdale Board of Trustees has parted ways with Village Manager **Rob Cole**. At the opening of the Village Board meeting on Tuesday night September 26, Mayor Justin Arest read a statement explaining the absence of **Cole** from his usual spot on the dais. The statement was difficult to parse at first, but after a closer reading we understood that the Board and the Village Manager had fundamental differences about the interpretation of Village code and the lines of authority. This came to light when the Village retained law firm Keane & Beane to review best practices.

This audit illuminated two different philosophies on Village governance. It was **Cole’s** understanding that Scarsdale had a “Council-Manager” structure giving independence to the Village Manager’s office, rather than granting the elected officials the power to govern. Keane and Beane determined that the Board of Trustees should run Village government and set priorities for the staff, rather than having the Village Manager’s office call the shots. The statement below clarifies this saying, “Scarsdale has preferred to keep its long standing system whereby the Village Manager ... works as an executive assistant to the Mayor and Board of Trustees.”

Once **Cole** understood the definition of his role, he was no longer comfortable in the position and resigned. He said, “...I learned that the Village of Scarsdale is not, and has never been, a Council-Manager form of government. I am unable to comfortably serve the Scarsdale community under this unfortunate circumstance.” During the meeting, the Board added a resolution to the agenda to terminate **Cole** without cause, which was passed with a vote of 6-1.

Cole first came to Scarsdale as Deputy Mayor in 2015 from Oak Park Illinois where he served as the Assistant Village Manager for 19 years. In 2021, Village Manager Steve Pappalardo retired, and **Cole** was elevated to the position of Village Manager. He holds a B.S. and a Masters in Public Service Management from De Paul University.

Read the statement from Mayor Justin Arest below:

Tonight, I need to address an important issue about our Village Code that has been flagged for the Board by our Village Attorney, Keane and Beane, which also may explain why **Mr. Cole** is not sitting next to me this evening. I am going to give a little background and then explain the crux of their discovery at a high level. When Keane & Beane was retained as Village Attorney in September 2022, they began a review of Scarsdale’s code to ensure that we are operating with best and current practices. With Keane & Beane’s assistance, we have made necessary changes to our Noise Ordinance, telecom laws, and laws regarding unsafe buildings and structures. This work is still ongoing, and we intend to continue making all necessary code improvements so that

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Scarsdale is a model for 21st-century local government.

To backtrack a little, I also want to share a bit from my own experience on the Board for two terms prior to becoming Mayor. As a Trustee, I understood that our code divided certain responsibilities between the Mayor, Board, and Manager. While it had been stated that we have a Council-Manager form of government, I was unaware of exactly what that meant. I was also unable to locate the section of code to evidence that. In myriad contexts, I have always felt strongly that governing is done with laws and policies not by following tradition alone. If tradition is different than our code, it is our obligation to comply with the law and discuss whether we can learn from the tradition to make the law better.

When I became Mayor, I asked the Village Attorney to research this to ensure that we, as a Village and your elected representatives, were providing the proper oversight as dictated by law; and that the Board and the Village Manager had clarity as to how their roles were defined. What I did not know until I broached this question with the Village Attorney is that independent from my experience, our Village Attorney had similar questions about the nature of our form of government and had begun to do his own research into the roles of the Scarsdale Board of Trustees, Mayor and Village Manager.

In July, as part of the firm's code review, Keene and Beane informed the Board that although Scarsdale informally had the position of Village Manager since 1942, our predecessors on the Village Board opted against a true Council-Manager form of government. When the position of Village Manager was formally defined in 1949 by the Board at that time, following the work and report of a separate commission to study the matter, it was decided that our Village's elected officials would retain their vested powers. And in regards to the Village Manager's office, they stated that "Scarsdale has preferred to keep its long standing system whereby the Village Manager...works as an executive assistant to the Mayor and Board of Trustees."

This intent is still showcased today in Chapter 57 of the Scarsdale Village Code. There have been subsequent modifications to our code and the Manager position, but none have taken the necessary steps to effectuate a transfer of authority. In fact, when additional rights or authorities were added to the Manager role by Board Resolution in 1962, the former Board was careful to note that "it is not intended that [this] resolution shall modify or detract from the statutory duties of any Village Official."

I want to thank our Attorney for the important work ensuring that we are all operating within the limits of the law. And I want to make something clear, these findings and the work ahead are not intended to interfere with the work that our paid professional staff does for this community daily. We support the longstanding tradition of deference to the experts who keep our Village running smoothly and who manage the day-to-day operations. The affairs of the Village will continue to be handled by the Village Manager's office and business will be conducted as envisioned since the role of Scarsdale Village Manager was created.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

We believe that this Board and future Boards should continue to focus on policy and budgetary matters. But we also understand and respect the expectations of our constituents- that they are electing the officials who are ultimately accountable and responsible for overseeing the management of the Village of Scarsdale as our code, as well as NY state law, dictates.

Before year's end, the Board will hold a public work session to discuss how we refine our code to ensure we reduce ambiguity and roles are clearly defined so we can operate in the most efficient way possible ensuring excellent governance and transparency. Thank you for your patience with us as we work through this issue methodically and carefully. There is more to be discussed and considered, and because of our Village Attorney's findings, we will revise our code to correctly define the powers, duties, and responsibilities of the Village Manager. Much of this will come from the appendix, section A318, which is the codification of a 1962 Board Resolution and will be incorporated into our code. A new draft Chapter 57 is already in the works and will be part of the same transparent and collaborative process that we follow with any proposed local law. We hope that many of you in our community will participate.

I mentioned that this is also related to **Mr. Cole's** absence. In his own words, "...I learned that the Village of Scarsdale is not, and has never been, a Council-Manager form of government. I am unable to comfortably serve the Scarsdale community under this unfortunate circumstance." Therefore, the Village of Scarsdale has no choice but to separate from **Mr. Cole**. We will promptly initiate a search for a new executive to advance the initiatives already in progress, ensuring that Scarsdale is and remains a model of exceptional village government in the 21st Century.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Scarsdale Inquirer (NY)
March 16, 2023

‘Somebody is going to die at that intersection’: Parents plead for stoplight at Edgewood and Post roads, but a solution is hard to come by

Author: Will Fritz

It’s not a new problem. And it doesn’t appear to be going away anytime soon. Parents in Edgewood are sounding the alarm about the crosswalk at Edgewood and Post roads near the elementary school — they say the intersection remains perilous for children and even adults to cross, four years after the installation of flashing lights that signal drivers to stop for pedestrians.

Those signals — officially known as rectangular rapid-flashing beacons, or RRFBs, were installed in the first half of 2019, according to Scarsdale Village Manager **Robert Cole**. Yet drivers ignore them all the time, two parents of current and former Edgewood Elementary School students say.

Christine Weston, who said she’s lived in Edgewood for 12 years, said it’s a personal issue for her. Her son, 11 at the time, was hit — though he wasn’t injured, fortunately — when a driver failed to stop for him in May 2022. “He was walking his bicycle home from playing with friends at Edgewood [Elementary School] after school, and the crossing guard was not there,” Weston said, explaining what happened. “He pressed the light, waited, cars stopped, but the car in the lane closest to the sidewalk did not stop, and it clipped the front of his wheel. He reeled [the bicycle] back, and his foot brushed the tire of the car. So he was hit, but he wasn’t hurt other than now he’s deathly afraid to cross the street.”

Realizing how much worse that incident could have been, Weston began pushing for stronger safety measures at the intersection. Weston said the problem has become more acute in recent years because there are now more children living on the west side of Post Road who need to use the crosswalk to get to Edgewood Elementary School. “After COVID, I started hearing stories from neighbors of mine who now have very little kids, and there’s more than 10 kids who are walking across now,” Weston said. “They were telling me horror stories of trying to get across and not being able to.”

One parent on the west side of Post Road, Glenn McClanan, said he’s frequently scared to walk his 6-year-old daughter across the intersection to school. “With my wife, I call it our daily brush with death,” McClanan said. “I know that’s dark humor, but it really is crazy.” McClanan said he doesn’t even think it’s a problem of drivers not seeing what’s going on — he thinks some intentionally don’t stop. “What I’ve found is, when I’m in the intersection and I hold up my phone taking a video, all of a sudden they’ll slow down,” McClanan said. “That actually makes me really sad, and it’s like you see us — I’m 6 foot 3 and I wear a bright red coat. The fact they pretend like they’re missing me is ridiculous, but it’s really sad they see me with my 6-year-old child and they refuse to stop.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Nancy DeGloria, the crossing guard at the intersection during opening and dismissal at Edgewood Elementary School, said drivers ignore her all the time, even with her reflective vest and large STOP sign. “They don’t want to stop!” she exclaimed in an interview with the Inquirer the afternoon of Tuesday, March 7. Not long after that remark, the driver of a Honda Accord stopped at the last second while DeGloria was trying to help a teenager cross Post Road. “It’s very hard, because I can’t cross anybody until I make sure they all stop, and they don’t even want to stop,” said DeGloria, who estimated she’s been the crossing guard there for about eight years.

Both Weston and McClanan said they know what the solution is: an actual stoplight. “I don’t understand why there isn’t one here,” Weston said. “Because even with cars turning onto Post Road, it’s a gamble as to whether or not your car is going to get hit when you’re making a left or a right because nobody slows down.” McClanan said the very design of the road makes people want to speed, and the only thing that may make any difference is a new light. “It’s a straightaway between lights, people are going from one major population center to another ... people are viewing it as a highway,” McClanan said. “I’m not somebody who wants to put a light at every intersection and whatnot. I wish you could just reduce the speed limit and that would be enough, but people are already ignoring the speed limit.”

Unfortunately, adding a stoplight on Post Road is no easy endeavor. That’s because it’s actually a state road, part of New York State Route 22. “We have been working diligently to remedy this situation. We must work with the state because we don’t control the Post Road,” Scarsdale Mayor Jane Veron said in an email.

Cole, the village manager, added more detail, acknowledging the RRFBs have not been effective in making the crossing safe. “By law, the flashing beacons do not require a vehicle to stop unless a pedestrian has established themselves in the crosswalk, while establishing oneself in a crosswalk before the vehicles stop is very dangerous for persons of all ages, but especially so for youth and those with limited mobility,” **Cole** said in an email. “The Village is continuing to press [the New York State Department of Transportation] for signalization (a red light) that, once activated, requires a vehicle to stop irrespective of whether a pedestrian has established themselves in the crosswalk.”

Cole said the state Department of Transportation initiated a study in fall 2022 on the intersection, which the village hopes will demonstrate support for a stoplight, rather than additional RRFBs, a solution the state is also considering, according to **Cole**. However, even if the village does get its way, adding a new light is still a process that could take years. “According to NYSDOT, installation of a traffic signal is a multiyear project. Regardless of the location, size of project, etc., they report that the design process, right-of-way acquisitions, equipment procurement, installation, etc., is a ‘long multi-year process,’” **Cole** wrote. “Thus, if they should decide to move forward with a red light, staff will endeavor to work with NYSDOT and our state elected officials to expedite the project timeline to the maximum extent feasible; surely not every traffic light installation is a long multi-year process.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Cole told the Inquirer the state Department of Transportation has suggested the village conduct more traffic enforcement at the intersection. However, he doesn't think that's a true fix to the problems at Post and Edgewood roads. Increased traffic enforcement, **Cole** wrote, "is costly to taxpayers, results in police being taken away from other pressing public safety needs, and perhaps most importantly, does not result in lasting changes to driver behavior along Post due to its regional/subregional travel characteristics. It is a nonsolution to the longstanding safety issues along Post Road, constituting a red herring insofar as discussions of pedestrian safety at this location are concerned. Scarsdale PD already performs heavy enforcement along Post Road, including periodic traffic missions focused on the Edgewood crossing, yet the crossing continues to be dangerous."

Cole echoed McClanan's earlier point — the very design of Post Road simply encourages drivers to speed. "Frankly, Post Road is dangerous by design and neither flashing beacons nor a traffic signal at the subject location are going to solve the myriad safety problems in the corridor, though a red light would be a substantial improvement at the point location — Post needs corridor-level redesign," **Cole** wrote. "Addressing corridor safety needs [holistically] has potentially enormous safety and quality-of-life benefits, while continuing down the ad hoc (one-spot-at-a-time) solution path, with each point [taking] years to resolve, does little to move the needle on this unsafe stretch of state roadway."

A solution can't come soon enough, Weston and McClanan said. McClanan said as the intersection is currently, he can't imagine letting his own daughter, or any other child, walk to school alone. "She says, 'Daddy, when can I walk to school by myself?'" McClanan said. "And I want to say 'when you're 10' or whatever, but as somebody who's definitely well past elementary school and is terrified to cross the intersection, I don't want kids crossing that intersection the way it is now. Somebody is going to die at that intersection."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Peekskill Daily Voice (NY)
December 9, 2022

Summer Bummer: Westchester County Town Deems Year-Round Pool Facility Too Costly To Build

Author: Ben Crnic

After weighing options, a Westchester County town has decided that building a pool facility that could be open all year would be too expensive to maintain. On Tuesday, Dec. 6, officials in Scarsdale decided that building a year-round pool facility would prove too costly to construct and maintain, despite many residents saying that they would prefer it to a seasonal facility, according to an announcement by the town.

The decision came after a meeting held by the committee assigned to look into the matter, which includes the town's mayor Jane Veron, and Village Manager **Robert Cole**. Officials said that a year-round pool would "impose too high of a financial burden on Scarsdale residents," according to the town's announcement.

Officials also attributed the decision to the complications that would come with building a pool facility that could be open all year, which might delay the construction process and add costs to the project. Operating the pool all year would also be difficult, officials said. In a survey held by the town earlier in the year, most respondents had said they would prefer a year-round pool, according to town officials.

Despite this, the town will now move forward with building a seasonal pool facility to replace the current one located at 311 Mamaroneck Road, which is at the end of its expected useful life, town officials said. "The Board looks forward to working with community groups and Scarsdale residents to shape and refine an appealing pool complex that best serves all members of our community, while preserving and honoring the essence of the pool experience, with its distinctive natural setting and easygoing, welcoming feel," town officials said in the announcement.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Scarsdale Inquirer (NY)
October 24, 2022

Sump pump control to manage water flow

Author: Todd Sliss

With an increase in severe storms that lead to flooding and backed up sewage pipes and storm drains becoming more prevalent in certain areas of Scarsdale, the village board of trustees at its Oct. 18 work session discussed one potential solution among the many being taken and/or considered. With some exceptions, Department of Public Works superintendent Jeff Coleman talked about having sump pump connections be certified as up to code — either properly and legally draining into the stormwater system or being routed into the property — when a homeowner goes to sell their house and when a homeowner is doing a renovation of \$100,000 or more.

Village manager **Robert Cole** called it “a key strategy in the overall effort to reduce those impacts” that will have “a meaningful impact, but it will not preclude the types of circumstances that folks have experienced in the past.” In other words, it’s a piece of the puzzle, not a complete solution.

Coleman estimated 300 to 350 houses are sold annually and another 100 to 130 doing \$100,000 renovations — this is not counting new houses that are built in compliance — therefore, significant progress could be made over the next decade or so. “We’re not going to solve the problem overnight,” he said. Trustee Jonathan Lewis called that “reasonably fast.” The Infrastructure, Municipal Services and Sustainability Pillar Committee consisting of Deputy Mayor Randy Whitestone, Lewis and Trustee Ken Mazer met over the summer with village staff, as Whitestone called stormwater management “a continuing priority for the pillar and I believe for staff and our fellow board members.” He called Coleman’s presentation that followed “one proposed step in the continuing discussion” to deal with “long-term issues.”

Coleman said the village has spent “a lot of money” looking into the local sewer system with smoke testing to identify blockages and bad connections, in addition to following through with any necessary repairs. “Many of the homes in Scarsdale are very old and their sewer laterals, which connect their house to the main, are equally as old,” Coleman said. “Some have been maintained very well and others have not been, I surmise, maintained at all over the years to the degree they’re functioning and there’s no reason for folks to call a plumber to come out and do something.” With other municipalities enacting connection laws, the village is looking into that option as well to “ensure the sewer lateral itself — the pipe that connects the home to the public main and exists on private property — as well as connections to the sewer, the internal to the home and from the exterior, are all permitted and allowed,” Coleman said.

Coleman said this would be part of a solution to have a sewer system that is “functioning properly and without backups, backflows, surcharges and problems” and avoid getting sewer water in the sewer and stormwater in the storm system. Coleman said a plumber or specialist

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

would certify that all connections are up to code and the village would certify those results. Trustee Karen Brew asked what legal sump pump drainage entails. Coleman said the system has to be properly buried in the property so the water can be “recharged into the soil” or a drainage system. In rare cases it can discharge into the grass for those who don’t have much flooding. Some sump pumps are illegally streamed into the sewage system.

When water isn’t draining properly, there is “more water than the sewer can handle,” Coleman said, noting the village is “doing our best to eliminate it in the public side, but the private side needs to be addressed substantially.” “The easiest way to think of it is the sewer system is a collection of pipes that are relatively small,” Coleman said. “They’re only 6 inches, 8 inches; in the larger portion of the system they are a little bit larger, but that’s all that’s in front of your home. When you look at a storm drain, we’re looking at something that’s typically 12 inches or 18 inches, much, much larger. That’s designed to carry stormwater. The sewer system is designed really to only carry sanitary sewer water and a little bit more than that.”

Lewis said it’s all “about health and sanitary management for people’s homes.” He called sewage backup “bad public policy, bad for the public health.” Brew had a “general concern with the burden that this puts on a lot of our homeowners” who might have bought a house with an illegally set up system. Brew said illegal hook-ups are “rampant in Scarsdale,” whether homeowners are aware of it or not. “I think it’s worth noting that homes that have that condition present already have a burden to remedy. Yet whether they’re told to do so as part of a pre-sale inspection or part of a major renovation and oftentimes in the context of a major renovation code-compliant issues, that should get identified by our building inspections staff” who would require the property owner to remedy that situation, “irrespective of whether this law is present or not,” **Cole** said. He also said that in any major reconstruction project homeowners are required to bring systems up to code and the village inspection team has added a checklist item to “look for illegal connections to the sewer system, and to call those out as requiring a remedy.”

Some trustees noted the same has been true over the years for underground oil tanks, asbestos and radon. “The practice of doing these kinds of things evolves over time and in theory helps to improve the overall quality of housing stock in terms of its code compliance and safety for [occupants] ... and impacts the environment,” **Cole** said. “It’s not an easy question and it ends up costing people money [when] they transfer the property.” Brew said construction laws should also be looked at and she noted much of the water issue in the village is due to the fact that there’s “no land to soak up the water and it’s a very rocky soil and we’re so built up and yet everywhere you look, there’s building and building going on, taking a larger footprint on the property; smaller houses are torn down, and bigger ones are put up and we’re just creating more of an issue,” she said. “It just seems there are bigger fish to fry here as well.” The village plans to look into how other communities are handling this issue and continue the discussion at a future work session.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Scarsdale Inquirer (NY)
April 2, 2022

Village files \$62.3M budget plan for FY 22-23; public hearing set for April 5

Author: Valerie Abrahams

The fiscal year 2022-23 tentative village budget filed March 18 includes replacing outdated vehicles in the village fleet, upgrading to the village’s aging water infrastructure, adding several staff, including a code enforcement officer, a tree trimmer, a pool maintenance mechanic, and a full-time naturalist at the Weinberg Nature Center. That translates into a levy increase of 3.7%, which for the average Scarsdale taxpayer is about \$216.67 per year, with a tax rate of \$4.9535 per \$1,000 of assessed home value. To balance the budget, the village plans to use \$1.17 million in fund balance. It also incorporated a \$1 million decrease to the library transfer, which is made possible because of the level of fund balance the library was maintaining.

“This will not in any way adversely impact the operations of the library,” according to Village Manager **Robert Cole**. The village also has \$1.84 million in federal funding from ARPA that will be used to fund some capital projects. According to a budget summary presented by **Cole** at the village board meeting March 22, the average tax levy increase in Scarsdale has been steadily declining over 20 years, while expenses continued to grow. **Cole** included a slide of the five-year rolling average of the tax levy increase since 2002, which showed that the levy increase was “kept low by continually deferring projects, which created a backlog of needed capital improvements.”

“What that’s done, in effect, is starved us for resources,” **Cole** said. “Our expenses, on the other hand, have increased and it’s created a structural deficit in terms of our nondiscretionary spending versus our discretionary spending. And what happens in those cases is we have to pay increases on things like health insurance and utility [costs] over time.” Therefore, the tax levy increase of 3.7% is “important to help catch up on these projects and curtail additional projects from piling up, which would result in additional tax burden during future budget years,” as stated in the budget document.

Cole said things like vehicles that need to be replaced on a routine cycle, as well as underground infrastructure “tend to get deferred” while the need to replace them grows. “We really are attempting to begin to turn that ship around ... to address what has happened in terms of long-term deferred maintenance, and to begin to head back into a state of good repair,” **Cole** said.

On the revenue side, 73% of the village’s \$61 million in revenues comes from real property taxes. The village continues to be “heavily reliant on property taxes,” **Cole** said, but he added, “We are continuing to look at other opportunities to generate new revenues as the fiscal year continues to progress.” This year’s budget process took a new tack this year, utilizing a framework for strategic and financial planning and a “vision to be a model of excellence and 21st century municipal operations and governance mission,” said **Cole**. The new approach also “supports transparency and accountability” as all budget discussions were available in hybrid

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

format and recorded for replay, he said. The foundation for budget discussions was the village’s new “four pillars of government” approach, which focuses on quality of life; infrastructure, municipal services and sustainability; public safety; and economic development and land use. “Each of these pillars helps focus our energies on identifying goals and aligning the resource commitments that we’re making in this year’s budget to the outcomes that they’re intended to achieve,” **Cole** said.

Taxpayers will have a chance to comment on the budget plan Tuesday, April 5, at 6 p.m. during a public hearing — in person at village hall or online via Zoom. Following the public hearing, the village board is expected to adopt the 2022-23 budget plan Tuesday, April 26, prior to the May 1 deadline.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Scarsdale Inquirer (NY)
January 24, 2022

Village reveals updated hazard mitigation plan

Author: Irene Li

The Scarsdale Board of Trustees held a public work session Tuesday, Jan. 11 to discuss the village’s Tropical Depression Ida’s After Action Report, and the 2021 Westchester County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, approved by FEMA in December with a directive for all participating municipalities to adopt the plan by Jan. 28.

On Sept. 1, 2021, the remnants of Tropical Storm Ida hit the region, pouring more than 8 inches of rain in a 24-hour period in Scarsdale, inundating multiple properties around the village with unprecedented flood waters. The storm caused flooding to the point where multiple village roadways became impassable, multiple cars were abandoned or their owners were stranded, and village-owned buildings were damaged. Recognizing this, the village updated its hazard mitigation plan for the first time since 2015 with upgrades for modern technology and systems that will more efficiently protect the Scarsdale community. “We’ve noted how severe weather events have changed,” said Trustee Jonathan Lewis. “We have some modernization to do.”

The Westchester Hazard Mitigation Plan was created in 2016 to reduce risk and future losses from natural or man-made hazards by adopting effective policies and management processes to maximize the resilience of infrastructure and minimize losses or service interruption. It was updated last year. Later this month, the board of trustees expects to adopt Scarsdale’s version of the plan, developed through a team effort by Village Manager **Robert Cole**, Assistant Village Manager Ingrid M. Richards, Village Planner Gregory Cutler, Superintendent of Public Works Jeff Coleman, Village Engineer David Goessl and Scarsdale police and fire chiefs, as “the best practice emergency management process of mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery,” according to the draft presented to the board.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Scarsdale Inquirer (NY)
December 5, 2021

Village launches updated, ‘more accessible’ website

Author: Valerie Abrahams

The Advisory Council on Communications (ACC) and village staff announced the launch of Scarsdale’s streamlined government website, redesigned to enhance the visitor experience. The redesigned website is intended to be “more user-friendly,” according to a statement released Nov. 29, with new “scene-setting photos” taken by former Scarsdale resident Jay Cohen to “telegraph a sense of place that is authentic and appealing, true to our hometown.” Local photographer Andi Schreiber also shared her work to enhance the site.

The communications team acknowledged the sports and recreation department registration platform “still needs improving,” and they will “continue to fine-tune the virtual experience at Scarsdale.com,” with the ultimate goal to “make it easy to find what you need on the site — whether it’s paying a bill or checking the compost pickup schedule.” ACC Chair Dara Gruenberg called the improved website “a true labor of love” for the members of the council, who worked on the project for the past year with village staff. That effort, she said, “demonstrates what good work can occur when our volunteers and paid professionals collaborate for the betterment of Scarsdale.”

The “more user-friendly” village website is designed to “encourage community engagement and to create more transparency within our government,” Gruenberg said, with thanks to the ACC Website Redesign Committee, led by Jisha Dymond, and to the village’s IT director Chris O’Brien, Village Manager **Rob Cole**, and village trustee liaison and former ACC member Sameer Ahuja, whose “help has been instrumental.”

Mayor Jane Veron said she is “exceedingly impressed” by the skills and expertise of the members of the ACC. “They have elevated our website, offering a more streamlined, user-friendly experience. The goal is to forge stronger connections with residents by making information more accessible,” Veron said, noting that the website’s “dazzling visuals” are “likely to attract” residents to the site more frequently.

Cole cited the “admirable volunteerism and collaboration” that went into the new website project, saying, “The village of Scarsdale benefits immensely both financially and operationally from the many residents who lend their professional expertise and generously donate their personal time.” **Cole** also congratulated the ACC and village staff for an “outstanding deliverable” that will “not only benefit the members of the Scarsdale community, but also serve as a refined portal through which Scarsdale is experienced by nonresident visitors, including persons contemplating making this wonderful community their home or new place of business.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Scarsdale Inquirer (NY)
October 1, 2021

Village hall union employees get 2% wage increase

Author: Nicholas Perrone

In a last-minute addition to its business agenda, the Scarsdale Board of Trustees voted unanimously Sept. 28 to increase the wages of unionized village hall employees by 2%. The unionized employees' salary increase will amount to \$30,078 and will be retroactive to Sept. 15, but only for personnel who were employed between June 1, 2020 and Sept. 14, 2021.

The village's 32 unionized employees are members of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) and work in the village in the court, police department, recreation department and others. They did not receive a wage increase in the 2020-21 budget due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which sunk village revenues and caused the village to enact austerity measures.

According to a memo to the board from village manager **Rob Cole**, the CSEA and the village had been negotiating a raise prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but couldn't reach an agreement. Following mediation and fact finding, the village and the CSEA agreed to reopen negotiations if nonunion employees received a wage increase. The board passed a resolution Sept. 14 to raise nonunion salaries by 2%. The nonunion salary increase, which totaled \$61,224, was covered by money received through the American Rescue Plan Act.

"The CSEA and nonunion employees did not receive an increase during the pandemic as we had implemented an austerity budget," said Mayor Jane Veron. "Now that we have better visibility into our finances and have received federal American Rescue Plan dollars, we will vote to make the adjustment, to recognize the hard work, dedication, professionalism and personal sacrifice of our CSEA employees."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Scarsdale10583
September 2, 2021

Hurricane Ida Wallops Scarsdale: 1,100 Without Power, Schools Closed

Author: Joanne Wallenstein

After Hurricane Henri failed to pack a punch ten days ago, many ignored the forecast for Ida, which proved to have a far more powerful impact on the Northeast. The massive storm brought record rainfall dropping over 3 inches of water in Central Park in just one hour. The rains flooded all major Scarsdale roads, leaving the Bronx River Parkway, the Hutchinson River Parkway and sections of the Post Road impassable. At 10:48 pm, on September 1, the Village of Scarsdale warned residents to stay home.

Their email said, “The Village of Scarsdale is presently experiencing widespread flooding. Please refrain from travel until the flooded roadways clear -- vehicles are becoming stranded and it is not safe to be out driving -- stay inside. If you experience water in your basement, please be cognizant of a potential electric hazard and seek professional assistance in the morning. The Fire Department is not assisting with basement flooding until after the storm has passed. Please contact 911 with any life-threatening emergency and defer lesser needs until after the storm has passed. Thank you and PLEASE stay indoors and off our local roadways for your own safety.”

We later learned that several drivers had to be rescued from their cars during the night. The flooding also closed another Scarsdale artery, Metro North Railroad, leaving thousands stranded throughout the area. As of 8:00 am on September 2 service had not resumed. Water and wind has left 1,100 without power in Scarsdale, and Con Edison is still assessing the damage. The outage map shows outages in Edgewood, Fox Meadow and Heathcote. In addition, flooding at a Verizon facility has caused a widespread service interruption.

At 5:41 am on September 2, Village Manager **Rob Cole** reported, “The flood waters continue to recede from our roadways, though there may remain problem areas throughout the morning. Residents are encouraged to minimize local travel and to avoid all flooded roadways – several persons were rescued during the overnight hours after having driving into flood waters.” An email from School Superintendent Thomas Hagerman at 6 am on September 2 delivered the sad news that all seven schools have experienced flooding and are closed, for what would have been just the second day of school. Crews are working to repair the damage and the district hopes to reopen on Friday September 3, 2021. He asked parents to keep children inside away from downed power lines and flooding. Residents are reporting flooded basements, knee deep in water, with no way to clear it.

In other news, hundreds were stranded at the US Open in Flushing Meadows. Though the matches continued in Arthur Ashe until 2 am, areas outside and even inside the stadium were flooded. The LIRR and subway service were suspended. The Grand Central Parkway and BQE were flooded and those who drove found their cars submerged in water. There are reports that

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

some slept over at Arthur Ashe Stadium as they had no options to get home. As of 8:30 am, the sun was out but the Bronx River Parkway looked more like a river than a road.

At 1:35 pm we received the following update from Village Manager **Robert Cole** on the state of affairs in Scarsdale: "I am amidst trying to get the latest ConEd info. The online outage map lists the best available outage updates. Right now, it still reports over 1,100 outages." "There is a cut and clear crew in the Village and they have three more locations to clear. In addition, they have repair assessment personnel circulating. No estimated restoration times yet and no restoration crews in the Village yet, as far as we are aware; cut and clear is a necessary prerequisite in many cases." "The Verizon outage appears widespread. One of their facilities was flooded and they are working to repair the damage, as we have been advised."

The roads still inundated include Brookby, Rugby, and Greendale – they are impassable due to flood waters. Areas blocked by downed wire and/or trees include Paddington/Ogden, Madison/Carmen and the Heathcote Bypass.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Scarsdale Inquirer (NY)
August 15, 2021

Robert Cole is new village manager in Scarsdale

Author: Nicholas Perrone

Concluding a nationwide 15-week search to fill Scarsdale’s village manager position following Steve Pappalardo’s retirement in July, GovHR, an Illinois-based recruitment firm, found that the most qualified candidate was already working in village hall.

Rob Cole, 57, deputy village manager since 2015, was sworn in as Scarsdale’s sixth village manager at the board of trustees’ business meeting Aug. 10.

In March, after Pappalardo announced his plan to retire, the board of trustees voted unanimously to enter into an agreement with GovHR to provide a six-phased three-to-five-month effort to find a replacement for Pappalardo. The village paid GovHR \$21,000 for the search. According to GovHR’s chief executive officer Joellen Cardematori, the search took multiple employees 400 hours and resulted in 56 applications across 16 states and one application from Mexico.

By the end of June, the candidate pool was narrowed down to seven applicants. Interviews eventually led the board to select two final candidates who were interviewed again in July, with **Cole** being the final pick. “Through this extensive, exhaustive and incredibly complete process, there is no doubt that **Rob Cole** absolutely stood out,” said Mayor Jane Veron. “Having searched far and wide, we found our new leader right in our midst. And how lucky we are for that.”

Cole said no decisions had been made about filling his now vacant deputy manager position, though an internal conversation about that would be forthcoming. Growing up straddling the Chicago suburbs with his mother and the inner city with his father, **Cole** had a diverse childhood experience that played a role in his decision to pursue a career in public service. Summer trips to his grandparent’s farm in south central Kentucky piqued his interest in a career in wildlife biology and he continues to be an avid outdoorsman, as well as a hiker and fisherman.

Cole wanted to research grizzly bears in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex in the Flathead National Forest in Montana. When that career choice didn’t quite pan out, he thought about what else he’d be able to do in the field of public service, eventually setting his sights on city management. “It really dovetailed nicely with my ability to help improve people’s lives,” said **Cole**.

After working a few jobs in the private sector as a quality assurance analyst, **Cole** decided to apply to Chicago’s DePaul University to study liberal arts with a concentration in writing and ethics. While studying for his undergraduate degree, he got an entry level job in the village of Oak Park, Illinois, and slowly moved his way up the ladder in the municipality over 20 years to become the village’s assistant manager. While working in Oak Park, **Cole** returned to DePaul University to obtain a master’s degree in public service management with a concentration in

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

metropolitan planning and urban affairs. During his time as assistant village manager in Illinois, **Cole** oversaw the development of a multihazard mitigation plan, managed and coordinated more than \$12 million in transportation-focused grants and was appointed the lead on a controversial \$2.6 billion highway expansion project, which he said showed his approach to analyzing and solving problems. “I try to figure out different solutions that maybe aren’t quite as evident to other people who are really focused in a sometimes myopic way of getting their particular agenda advanced or their particular needs met,” said **Cole**, who currently lives in New Castle, New York. “Sometimes it can be such a struggle within the government framework and the framework of communities that people get a little bit too focused on things to [the extent] where they don’t really look outside of their wheelhouse.”

Cole also worked on multiple committees during his tenure in Oak Park, including the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning’s land use board, the Collaboration for Early Childhood Care and Education strategic plan steering committee, the O’Hare [Airport] Noise Compatibility Commission and the West Central Municipal Conference legislative committee and intergovernmental committee. Being interested in moving up to deputy manager and eventually a manager position, **Cole** jumped at the chance to serve as deputy manager in Scarsdale.

In his six years in the position, he has been a point person for the press and the public throughout the pandemic, in addition to his usual responsibilities. He also has played a major role in preparing and presenting the village’s annual capital budget and has been a guiding voice in refining and implementing Mayor Jane Veron’s strategic and financial planning framework. Looking ahead, **Cole** said he wants “out of the box” solutions to improve the village’s internal operations. He said he wants to continue the effort to make the village paperless, which was first initiated in April when village treasurer Ann Scaglione announced plans to streamline budgetary processes and increase workflow by digitizing internal documents; she also has set up systems to allow residents to opt in to receive tax bills, receipts and reminder notices via email.

Using a surfing analogy to illustrate his point, **Cole** explained that you run the risk of falling behind if change isn’t happening. “You’ll see a set coming in and it looks like a good wave and so you’re planning, you’re watching, you’re maintaining, you’re adjusting when necessary and then you have to start paddling hard to catch the wave. You have to work hard to achieve your goals,” said **Cole**. “If you paddle hard enough and you time it just right, you catch that wave and you ride all the way into the shoreline ... the problem being if you start paddling too late or you’re not strategic enough, you can miss the wave and you’ll become irrelevant. Start paddling too early, you’ll get out ahead of the wave and the wave will crush you.”

Cole said the village is going to be more agile and strategic in how it approaches community issues and concerns by increasing communication, vetting ideas and thinking outside the box by challenging the status quo. He will also oversee many of the upcoming projects on the village’s radar including the municipal pool complex RFP, the “complete streets” traffic studies and the potential reevaluation of Freightway garage, though that isn’t yet an identified priority. “Let’s keep it maintained, not let it deteriorate further, address any issues that we encounter and then at

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

the ... appropriate time I'm sure we're going to have a public conversation that really fleshes out what the best options are for that location," said **Cole**.

Sharing his excitement for his new role, **Cole** said he believed the transition to village manager would be seamless since he's well integrated in the Scarsdale community and people know him and how he operates. He accepts that there will be significant challenges, though he said the change needs to be deliberate and cooperative. "I'm going to strive to make public service rewarding for our staff, and place organizational emphasis on transparency, accountability and responsiveness," said **Cole**. "When I say responsive, I'm saying being responsive to the needs of our residents, to the community and striving in general for service excellence."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Scarsdale10583
August 12, 2021

Rob Cole Named Scarsdale’s 6th Village Manager, Zoning Changes Enacted to Limit Home Size

Author: Joanne Wallenstein

At an in-person and virtual summer meeting of the Scarsdale Board of Trustees on August 10, 2021, Deputy Village Manager **Rob Cole** was named the sixth Village Manager in Scarsdale’s history. The mayor and members of the Board of Trustees expressed unanimous support for **Cole**, who they chose after an extensive national search.

The Mayor explained that the Village had “cast a wide net,” and interviewed an impressive roster of candidates from across the country. The Village surveyed residents to determine what qualities they sought in a Village Manager and spoke to Village Staff about their priorities. Veron said **Cole** was “undoubtedly the right person at the right time.”

Voicing her support for **Cole**, Veron said, “**Rob** embodies the values of our community and has the skills and capabilities to partner with us to shape the future of Scarsdale. It is clear that **Rob** has a deep understanding of our community, has internalized our goals and challenges, and has the insight and wisdom to chart our future course. His belief system parallels ours: collaboration, transparency, innovation; respect, dignity, responsiveness, progress. Most importantly, **Rob** knows that our Village is only as good as the people we employ. He recognizes that our department heads and staff are the best in the business. “

Joellen Cademartori of GovHR USA, the search firm that was retained to manage the process, was in attendance at the meeting and explained that 56 applications were received. After a comprehensive vetting process, 14 were presented to the Village Board, seven were selected to be interviewed and two finalists were chosen, from which **Cole** was chosen. Cademartori praised the work of the Village Board and staff, saying, “The efforts of the board and Mayor were unsurpassed. I have worked with many clients and you are probably the top five in my mind.”

In response to questions about why the Board undertook the cost of a national search when **Cole** was already in Scarsdale, Board member Sameer Ahuja said, “Had we not done a national search, I would not have been comfortable.” About **Cole** he said, “The ability to say no is as important as the ability to say yes. I have seen him push back and challenge staff. He will be a leader and a trusted manager of the day –to-day affairs of the Village.”

Looking back at Scarsdale history, Trustee Whitestone noted that the position was first created in 1941 when Village Engineer Arthur Boniface was named the first Village Manager. He added, “**Rob Cole** will continue that great tradition.” Jonathan Lewis said, “As we seek to transform our Village into a model, it’s clear that **Rob Cole** is the best candidates for this moment We aspire to nothing less than the highest standards. . . **Rob Cole** will not only meet but exceed these expectations.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

During Public Comments Dara Gruenberg of Hampton Road called in to say, “I am thrilled to congratulate **Rob Cole** on his appointment to Village Manager and I commend the board on their great selection. I have worked closely with **Rob** for the last several years through our work on the Advisory Council on Communications and in other capacities in my volunteer life and as a resident. I cannot think of a better person to take on the role of Village Manager. Rob is exceptional. He is a great listener, a problem solver and has a knack for taking creative ideas and turning them into reality. He has a refreshing can-do attitude and always makes times for residents. Congratulations **Rob!** I can’t wait to see all you will accomplish in partnership with our fantastic village staff, our hardworking village board, dedicated volunteers and residents. Michael Levine, Michael Rubin and Robert Berg also congratulated **Cole** noting his diligence and commitment to the residents and the community.

And **Cole** said, “Today marks a professional milestone for me – one of six village managers since 1941.... I will strive to make public service rewarding for the staff and emphasize accountability, transparency and responsiveness to residents. I look forward with great optimism to partner with Village staff to shape the Scarsdale of the future.... I genuinely love the Scarsdale community and cherish the opportunity to serve.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Scarsdale10583
May 27, 2021

Consultants Provide Analysis of Village's 100 Year-Old Water Distribution System: Rob Cole to Serve as Interim Village Manager

Author: Sammy Silberberg

How does Scarsdale address and manage its aging infrastructure? How does the town decide which improvements to make and how to keep up with the demands of residents? These are among the questions the Board of Trustees sought to answer when it commissioned the firm Woodard & Curran to create a Water Demand Study and examine the needs of the village's water infrastructure system. After reviewing 12 applications and interviewing five firms, the Board decided in September 2020 that Woodard & Curran was the most suitable choice to conduct this analysis. During the Board's Work Session on Tuesday, May 26, 2021, three representatives from Woodard & Curran presented their draft report to the community.

The Scarsdale water system consists of 98 miles of pipe, two pumping stations, and two water tanks. The focus of the report was the water distribution system. The firm compiled and digitized existing maps, created an updated system map, reviewed the system's maintenance history, developed a new hydraulic model, and created a capital plan for the water distribution system. To update the current mapping system, the firm reviewed over 500 paper maps, sketches, and notes and updated historic mapping information. They used this new mapping as the foundation for the hydraulic model. Using the model, they simulated and analyzed the flow of water through the system, evaluated fire flow availability, and gauged how the system responds to issues. The model accounts for friction from areas of older pipes and factors in where water is used most frequently. The standard recommended system pressure is 35 pounds per square inch (PSI), and Scarsdale's system achieves this figure except for a few spots in higher elevation areas. Pipe velocity was up to code throughout the system, and water pressure loss was worst in areas with unlined cast-iron pipes. In terms of fire protection, most of the system has greater than 1000 gallons per minute of protection, with a few higher elevation areas having less than 500.

When reviewing the system's maintenance history, the firm found several issue areas that consisted of older and unlined pipes. There were around 200 water main breaks and pipe failures between 2008-2020, which the representatives identified as a high number of issues, but said the figure was not unexpected. In developing an improvement plan, Woodard & Curran prioritized the areas of highest maintenance needs and ranked remaining pipe segments on the likelihood and consequences of failure. In total, 76 pipe rehabilitation projects were identified for an estimated total of \$103 million. The firm identified the top three priority projects:

1. Crossway: A section of unlined universal joint segment that is corroded. The proposed solution is the replacement of three-quarters of a mile of pipe along Crossway.
2. Garden Road / Mamaroneck Road: This is one of the areas of lowest pressure and lower fire flow availability. The proposed solution is a combination of lining and replacement for two miles

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

of piping.

3. Griffin Avenue: Another area of concern that the firm suggests focusing on.

Woodard & Curran and now in the phase of conducting a Rate Study to review the current rate structure and revenue. This study will include a cost-of-service assessment, a revenue and benchmarking assessment, and a rate model development and review. The firm's presentation also included information and resources for various government grants and funding sources that could be potential sources of revenue for the project.

After the presentation, Board members and staff had a chance to ask the representatives questions about the report and make suggestions for future work. Trustee Crandall inquired about putting some of the electric and cable lines underground while this construction work is happening to make the village more storm resilient. In a similar vein, Deputy Village Manager **Rob Cole** asked if it would be possible to tie in a high-capacity data line into Post Road and bring it to the Village Center to support business development. The representatives noted that different types of projects can be joined together while the pipes are already being worked on, and these are all considerations the Board will want to consider while making project decisions.

Ms. Crandall also asked about the issues the town of Greenburgh had when they replaced their pipes, and if the firm has done any studies on the toxicity of these pipes. The firm responded that Greenburgh's issue was not related to toxicity but instead had to do with conventional cement lining, which will not be an issue for Scarsdale if they choose a more modern construction material. Trustee Ahuja asked when the firm was choosing the projects for the water system, how much of the decision was based on subjective judgment versus scientific fact. The representative replied that there is a need for both when designing a plan. Engineers must evaluate where the areas of concern are based on their experience and look where the data on past pipe maintenance supports project work. He added that to develop a sensible project, subjective judgment must be applied to frame the construction in the most cost-efficient manner and to cluster groups of pipes together based on similarities and economic feasibility. Mayor Veron, as well as other trustees, also spoke about the sustainability practices that could potentially be incorporated into the project. Village Manager Pappalardo added that once funding is secured, it will be unlikely the village can accomplish more than one project every two years. He added that coordinating between the water department and the sewage department could make the whole project more effective. The Board eagerly awaits the results from Woodard & Curran's Rate Study and looks forward to the next phase of this massive infrastructure project.

Village Manager

At the Village Board meeting following the work session, Mayor Jane Veron announced that Village Manager Steve Pappalardo will leave on July 9, 2021 and that 54 applications were received for the position. The Board plans to interview some of these candidates throughout the summer. In the interim, Deputy Village Manager **Rob Cole** will become Interim Village Manager of Scarsdale. He has served here for six year and worked in Oak Park, Illinois for 19 years.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Scarsdale10583
April 21, 2020

Will Camps Be Open for the Summer? Camp Directors and Local Officials Comment

Author: Joanne Wallenstein

No one knows if school will resume before the summer, but what about summer camp? Now more than ever kids will want to get out of the house, play with friends and enjoy the great outdoors. Will day camps be open and will kids board the buses for sleepaway? We spoke to some local officials and camp directors to see what they are thinking. Will camp open on time? Will there be changes in procedures or restrictions? Here is what we learned. County Executive George Latimer said, Westchester County control a series of camps –the ones that take place at the county center that will have to be relocated. We have put county summer camps on hold for now. The decision about camp opening is part of the Governor’s Executive Order and he will make the decision.

How about in Scarsdale? Will the rec camp be open? Deputy Village Manager **Robert Cole** said, “The Westchester County Department of Health is the permitting authority for all camps throughout the County. The County has mailed out the camp permit applications, which are not due back to the County until 60 days prior to camp opening. Brian Gray, our Parks and Rec Superintendent, serves as president for the Westchester Recreation and Park Society (WRAPS). Through WRAPS, he distributed a survey at the beginning of April inquiring whether communities had made any decisions about pool and camp operations. At that time, no Westchester County communities had cancelled either pool or camp seasons, though some had delayed pool openings, as Scarsdale has; none had reported delaying their camp season(s). The WRAPS survey recently went back out again for an update, with responses due back over the next week, or so.”

Cole continued, “With respect to camp staff, most municipalities, including Scarsdale, began sending out employment offers to returning staff in December/January. We recently notified our interested team members that we are still planning on operating our summer programs, including camps; however, we also let them know that our plans are subject to the broader constraints we are operating under, i.e., they could be delayed or canceled, as conditions dictate. While we are continuing with interviews by phone, we are not making employment offers until program status can be confirmed.”

We asked Jim Libman from Camp Hillard if it was likely that Hillard would run and he said, “Camps are very optimistic, but nothing is a certain. The feedback we are getting is that parents and kids are crossing their fingers for camp this summer! The good news is all summer camps have been classified as essential childcare. Presently, The CDC is preparing safety guidelines for camps to operate and will be releasing those to state and local health departments in May. Camps are awaiting more information from State officials which should come in May. The ultimate decision to open camps will be made by the state and local health officials. After that decision is made each camp must feel that it will be safe for all their campers and staff.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Robert A. Cole

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

What about sleepaway camps? Will kids be boarding the buses in June? Here is the response we received from Amanda Krasnoff – Staffing and Programming Director at Camp Taconic in Hinsdale, MA. “Right now, we are optimistic that Camp will open this summer. We are working closely with other camps in Western, MA as well as the ACA, who is working closely with the CDC. There will most likely have to be some changes put into place, such as a later start date than anticipated, or the possibility of some out of camp trips being cancelled.

Ultimately, if the government and Department of Health allow us to, it is our decision on whether to open camp or not, and we will only do so if it safe for the entire Camp Taconic community. One of our biggest challenges right now is trying to figure out if our international staff is going to be able to get here. Many of our counselors and support staff come from other countries, and they are unable to get their visas until further notice, so we are hiring additional domestic staff in the event that our international staff is unable to arrive. There are definitely a lot of uncertainties at the moment, but the feedback we’ve received from our camp community is that kids will need camp more than ever this summer. Even if it’s a little different, or shorter in length, we still want to be able to provide our campers with a safe and amazing summer experience.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Scarsdale Inquirer (NY)
April 3, 2020

County looks to enact ‘hardship’ tax relief law

Author: Valerie Abrahams

A tax relief bill introduced by Westchester County Executive George Latimer to the county board of legislators this week would defer to July 15 any late fees for payment of county taxes, which are due April 1 but payable by April 30, for taxpayers facing economic hardships caused by the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Committee on Budget & Appropriations and the Committee on Legislation are expected to meet at 10 a.m. Friday, April 3, to begin deliberations of the tax relief legislation. According to Steve Bass, the county’s director of intergovernmental relations, a group of town supervisors will work together to develop a standard set of criteria that would define how a taxpayer would qualify under “economic hardship” to delay paying county taxes to July 15 as well as any late payment penalties.

The legislation would allow a waiver if people could show by April 30 that they lost their jobs or are facing economic hardships due to the pandemic emergency. The county and the towns are expected to work out the specific criteria for affected taxpayers in the next week or so. Whether the proposed tax relief law will be passed by the county legislators after a public hearing, and whether the town of Greenburgh and Scarsdale will adopt it, is yet to be determined. Under the proposed legislation, no town is required to offer the temporary waiver. County attorney John Nonna reportedly would be available to help town supervisors and managers understand the bill’s requirements, which the county hopes to define no later than April 20.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, federal and state income tax filing deadlines were extended from April 15 to July 15. This law, if passed, would ease the real property tax burden for many taxpayers in Westchester County. Under normal circumstances, there is a 2% penalty for late payment in the first month after the April 30 due date, and a 5% penalty in June and July. Under the proposed law, the 5% penalty would begin July 16 instead. “We did have a discussion with the county executive [Wednesday] on late payments on taxes and [he] basically said that he’s ... recommending that they [the legislators] authorize the towns to waive the penalties,” Greenburgh Town Supervisor Paul Feiner told the Inquirer on Wednesday, and he said he supports the proposed legislation. “Taxpayers are suffering real hardships and local governments need to help taxpayers out.”

Feiner said he also suggested the county consider letting people pay their taxes in two parts: half before May and the balance in the fall. “That would be even more helpful,” he said. “Originally, I anticipated that the county and towns would share the financial losses. ... but county is not going to be losing any money because they still want the towns to guarantee them 100% of the taxes, whether we collect it or not. So the town would lose money [if people defer] but my feeling is that I would support doing the hardship provision.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

In an email sent to the Inquirer Thursday, April 2, Scarsdale Deputy Village Manager **Robert Cole** wrote: “The Village of Scarsdale is aware that Westchester County is ... developing legislation that may provide authority for municipalities to provide hardship-based waivers of penalties for the late payment of County Taxes and County District Taxes through July 15, consistent with the extended deadline to file New York state and federal taxes.”

Cole noted that the April 30 due date for the county tax would remain unchanged and Scarsdale’s local taxes as usual are due July 15. He noted, if adopted, the legislation would provide a specified late fee grace period for eligible taxpayers.

Once in final form and passed by the county board of legislators, the town of Greenburgh and the village of Scarsdale would have the option to participate or not in the late fee waiver initiative. Adopting the change would require an authorizing resolution by their respective town boards. The Town Supervisors Association is looking to work with county officials to establish a uniform policy for all towns to enact the same policy.

“We are hopeful that the final version of the legislation includes a clear hardship definition that can be consistently applied throughout the county,” said **Cole**.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Scarsdale10583
August 20, 2019

Severe Storms Knock Out Power to 1,200 Homes and Close Post Road

Author: Joanne Wallenstein

Severe storms late Monday afternoon August 19 knocked out power to almost one fifth of Scarsdale homes. Deputy Village Manager **Robert Cole** said that strong winds downed power lines and trees and left 1,200 households without power.

Here is his report:

"At the peak of yesterday's storm event, an estimated 1,200 Scarsdale homes were without power. The outages were in connection with downed trees and wires caused by wind. The Department of Public Works responded to a variety of issues up until about 9:00 pm last night, at which a majority of homes had power restored, with the balance restored during the overnight hours.

For a period of time last night, Post Road was closed near Wayside Lane, and there were other lesser street closures, as well. Finally, staff are aware of one private tree that damaged a neighboring home."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Scarsdale Inquirer (NY)
June 15, 2019

Forum pushes village to enact pesticide code

Author: Nicholas Perrone

In an effort to convince the village to codify against pesticide use, the Scarsdale Forum’s Sustainability Committee released an update to its 2018 report on sustainable landscape management to protect public health, welfare, safety and the environment. The addition to the report — released on April 30 — outlines new policies adopted by municipalities around the country to counteract their pesticide use and recent litigation that arose due to individuals who were exposed to pesticides.

At the Scarsdale municipal pool complex, the village was using an herbicide called Tenacity for weed and clover mitigation in July 2017, according to Deputy Village Manager **Robert Cole**. According to the product label — filed with Environmental Protection Agency in 2010 — Tenacity can be harmful to both humans and animals if absorbed through the skin and can cause allergic reactions in some individuals.

In addition, the insecticide Dylox was applied to a number of local playing fields in 2015 for spot control of grub infestations. According to Dylox’s product label, the insecticide is hazardous to humans and domestic animals. The insecticide should not be used near aquatic invertebrates, where runoff is likely to occur and where birds might feed. The label further specifies that children or pets should not be allowed on treated areas until the material is sprinkled in and the grass is dry.

“These products can be directly absorbed and ingested by residents and pets on our playing fields and the grass around the pool through contact with grass that has been treated with the products,” the Forum stated in its 2018 report. “The obvious solution is for the Village to discontinue the use of chemicals such as Tenacity and Dylox at the pool complex and on Village playing fields and to find appropriate, effective alternatives.”

The village ceased pesticide and insecticide use in 2017, but a prohibition against the use of such chemicals has not yet been introduced into village law. “Since 2014, we have contracted with a firm for organic field care,” said **Cole**.

The contractor for organic field care uses humates, lime, CedarCure organics and 1-2-3 NPP organics to “strengthen the soil and make the turf grass more healthy and resilient to weed growth,” he said, which is a “key strategy of our current landscaping approach.”

The report addendum includes examples of municipalities that curb pesticide use. In March 2019 Miami banned the use of glyphosate-based herbicides (such as Roundup) by the city and its contractors. That same month, Los Angeles County enacted a similar ban on the use of glyphosate on county property. “Scarsdale can be a further leader in enacting this for our

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches Robert A. Cole (Articles are in reverse chronological order)

village,” said Darlene LeFrancois-Haber, the co-chair of the Sustainability Committee who also works as an internist. “It helps the health and safety of our public, it establishes us as a leader in a very important area.” The Forum is hoping the report will be used as an educational tool for residents, while also providing facts on pesticide use to support the need to codify against the use of pesticides. Passing a law locally might also inspire change in other Westchester municipalities, according to Michelle Sterling, co-chair of the Sustainability Committee. “We feel like we can be the domino here,” Sterling said. “You just need one town to do one of these things ... and the other towns will follow.”

Westchester County passed a pesticide reduction law in 1996. An amendment to the bill in 2000 phased out the use of pesticides on county property and prohibited toxicity Category II pesticides by Jan. 1, 2001 and toxicity Category III pesticides by Jan. 1, 2002, according to the Westchester County Department of Health. “It’s about leadership. It’s about being a positive role model. It’s about positively affecting all the other municipalities in our community,” said Sterling, who also serves on the Conservation Advisory Council.

The report does not include a provision to regulate against private use of pesticides, although the Forum would like residents to be more aware of what is being applied on their lawns. “I think it would be terrific if this report could serve as a piece of education for the entire village, residents included,” said LeFrancois-Haber. “There is no action, requested recommendation [or] statement in this report ... to mandate any kind of curb or ban on residential use.”

LeFrancois-Haber recommended using the Grassroots Environmental Education website which includes letters, calendars and contracts that residents can use with their landscapers to form an agreement against pesticide use. The co-chairs of the Forum’s Sustainability Committee also expressed an interest in being a resource for residents if they need information about pesticide use.

“Both the village board and staff are appreciative of the support and assistance members of our community display in working together toward the shared goal of a more sustainable future,” said **Cole**. “Not only are we experiencing a high level of [organic] program success, but our efforts are helping to encourage other municipalities in the region to adopt similar practices.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Scarsdale10583
November 15, 2018

Board of Trustees Commits to Communications

Author: Laura Halligan

In recognition of its efforts to assist the village in improving communications with residents over the past two years, the Scarsdale Board of Trustees voted to advance the ad hoc communications committee as a permanent village council. The new Scarsdale Advisory Council on Communications will continue to work with village staff in supporting public communications and promoting community engagement in public affairs.

According to Trustee Jane Veron, the move is “a tribute to the high quality and positive impact of this hard-working committee... I’ve never seen a group that has worked so hard, truly.” She continued, “The MVP is... Deputy Village Manager **Rob Cole** – and the voice of *Scarsdale Official* – enabling us to become more transparent and as open as we possibly can be.”

Mayor Dan Hochvert summarized the village’s interest in improved communications by reading the resolution: “There is substantial civic value in the effective and efficient exchange of information between village government and the public, using methods and practices that recognize the range of individual communication preferences and needs under both routine and non-routine circumstances.” He continued, “The Scarsdale Ad Hoc Committee on Communications... has demonstrated the value of resident volunteers working in an advisory capacity to shape communication strategies and promote community participation in local governance.”

Dara Gruenberg (Hampton Road), representing the committee, summarized the group’s recommendations to create a foundation for future communications activities: 1) establish a formal communications policy; 2) appoint a public information officer; 3) consider use of social media and develop related policy; 4) develop staff-generated content/communications materials; 5) continue to develop committee/council-generated content; 6) standardize a visual identity for Scarsdale/create branding policy; 7) better utilize Scarsdale Public TV in general communications; and 8) engage in proactive media relations and outreach.

Gruenberg then discussed suggested responsibilities for the group as it moves forward. First, it urges continued active village input in communications planning, “**Robert Cole** has been invaluable... the committee urges **Mr. Cole’s** continued participation,” she said. Gruenberg continued by stating that, unlike other boards and councils, communications committee members also participate in other village committees, and this practice should continue to provide a cross-section of ideas and variety of perspectives to Scarsdale messaging efforts. “Committee composition should be partially refreshed annually to promote resident participation,” she offered.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The committee also believes that the village should outline clear, actionable goals and specific assignments each year to continue progress and provide opportunity for measurable results. In addition, the group asks the village to use its 2017 communications proposal as guide in planning for longer-term projects. “The 2017 report continues to accurately illustrate the current state of communications and should be used as a guide for future projects and be updated as needed,” Gruenberg said. She then concluded her comments by relaying that, if the board established a permanent committee, the body should be advisory in nature, assisting a public information officer or designated staff person in completing tasks.

As the resolution states, the village hopes that the new council will help village officials to “foster public trust and confidence in local government” and to develop “communications that successfully reach diverse audiences...(and) cultivate an informed and engaged community, nurture enhanced public involvement in official decision-making, and constitute a hallmark of local government excellence.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

White Plains Daily Voice (NY)
November 10, 2015

EPA Issues Water Violation Notice To Westchester County

Author: Cathy Reakes

SCARSDALE, N.Y. -- Westchester County Water District 1 has received a Tier 2 violation from the federal Environmental Protection Agency for failing to make district-wide upgrades to its water system within a prescribed deadline.

The violation notice, sent to residents by mail with their monthly water bills, pertains to residents in the Village of Scarsdale and the cities of Mount Vernon, White Plains, and Yonkers, which receive drinking water through the district, said **Robert Cole**, Scarsdale deputy village manager. The water is safe to drink and use and is treated daily including receiving the appropriate chlorination to inactivate organisms such as giardia, bacteria and viruses, **Cole** said.

The district received the violation for not implementing district-wide upgrades required by the EPA that includes ultra-violet treatment in order to be more effective and detect such organisms as cryptosporidium. Specially, the district did not comply with the requirements from July 1 to Sept. 20. The county has until 2018 to bring its water treatment facilities into compliance.

Cole said that although the water supply is not presently subject to the ultra-violet treatment, ongoing testing has not detected any cryptosporidium in the drinking water and that testing will continue until the necessary upgrades are completed.

In the notice to consumers, residents are warned if they have specific health concerns, they should consult their doctor before using the water. It also warns residents with severely compromised immune systems, have an infant, are pregnant or the elderly, that they may be at an increased risk for infection. The district is currently installing two new UV disinfection treatment facilities in White Plains that will treat all of the district water. One will be complete in May 2017 and the other in March 2018.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
May 13, 2014

Oak Park survey: Parking in village is crummy

Author: Timothy Inklebarger

Oak Park is a great place to live and raise a family, but it doesn't come cheap, and parking in the village is still a major concern, according to the results of a survey conducted last year by the village. Eighty-nine percent of the 417 Oak Park residents who returned the survey say the village has an excellent or good quality of life, and 92 percent said it is a good place to raise children. Fifty-seven percent said the village is an excellent or good place to retire, which seems to be connected to the perception of availability of affordable housing in general. Only 37 percent of respondents believe affordable housing is excellent or good.

“[The 57 percent figure is] kind of a low number,” **Rob Cole**, assistant village manager, said during a presentation to the village board on Monday. “There’s a corollary to that: many of the citizens who participated in this year’s survey found that there’s an absence of quality affordable housing.” He suggested that their concerns over affordable housing could be a combination of the price and level of taxation in the village.

Displeasure with parking in the village remained steady, with 37 percent reporting that parking is satisfactory, up two percentage points from the 2011 results — the last year the survey was conducted.

In a separate question, 64 percent of respondents said parking is a moderate or major problem. “We have eased parking and created more parking overnight, but I think as we go forward, we should continue to look at our policies and figure out how to ease parking on our residents and how to make it more friendly,” said Village President Anan Abu-Taleb.

Residents said public safety was of less concern, with 94 percent saying they feel safe in their neighborhood during the day. That number dropped to 69 percent after dark. Only 49 percent felt safe from property crimes such as burglary and theft, and 59 percent said crime in general is a moderate to major problem. The survey cost the village about \$10,000 and was conducted by the National Research Center in Boulder, Co.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
December 3, 2013

Forum focuses on new state gun law

Author: Jeramie Bizzle

State Rep. La Shawn Ford, along with lobbyist Todd Vandermyde of the Illinois Rifle Association, hosted a community forum on Nov. 20 to provide information on the concealed-carry gun law passed in Illinois. The forum, which took place at the Little Red Wagon Coffee House, 818 S. Oak Park Ave., gave attendees a chance to ask questions and receive information about the law. Vandermyde, 49, said those who are interested in receiving their license and/or permit must meet requirements set by the state. “I don’t agree with 16 hours, I think no more than eight, depending on what you have,” Vandermyde said, referring to gun safety training requirements. “Illinois has a broad law on bodily force. You’re here to do one thing and that is to protect yourself and the one next to you.” Rep. Ford, 41, who originally voted against the law, said the discussion was informative and was glad to see everyone get involved. “More people will carry guns; studies show that when law is enforced, the crime rates go down. It is a deterrent and it protects people and their families. I just want what is best for the people of the 8th District.” Ford said.

Concealed weapons will not be allowed in schools and any establishments that don’t want them in their businesses. Oak Park Village Attorney Paul Stephanides said the village has received some questions about the law from business owners but it is up to the owner whether to allow concealed weapons in their establishment. “In order for business owners to prevent people from coming in with weapons, they must put up a sign. That’s in the law, not in the village laws.” Stephanides said. Little Red Wagon owner Valorie Mitts, 43, said she will more than likely put up a sign that will keep guns out of her business. “Oak Park is a family-oriented place, I have kids’ families and it would be scary to me. I see this law changing fast, people snap even without permits. I will put up a sign, I mean the session was informative and people went home with a wealth of knowledge, but I can’t see a good coming from it,” Mitts said. At the end of the forum, Vandermyde invited everyone to visit www.ILGA.gov and look under House Bill 183 (HB183) for more information of what the law prescribes. The concealed-carry gun law, which passed in July, won’t go into effect until January, making Illinois the last state in the nation to allow gun owners to carry concealed weapons. To be eligible for the gun license, you must be 21 with no felonies, mental health issues or two or more violent misdemeanors. Applicants must also undergo between 16 and 18 hours of training approved by the state police and complete a 70 percent hit rate to qualify.

Assistant Village Manager **Rob Cole** said the village will put out information concerning the law. “The state police has a website that will help them understand the law,” **Cole** said. “Those with weapons are trained and know they are not allowed to bring weapons into those establishments, but it defers to the property owner whether or not they want them. The sign by the Illinois State Police is available on the website in a PDF file.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
September 3, 2013

It's in the mail

Author: Dan Haley

Oak Parkers should check their mailboxes soon to see if they were chosen to take part in the resident survey the village is conducting to “gauge citizen views on a wide range of community aspects and issues.” The surveys, which will be showing up in mailboxes of Oak Parkers selected at random to help the village collect information, should take about 15 minutes to complete and will help policy makers better understand priorities for government action and citizen opinions on quality of life and public services, according to a village news release.

Oak Parkers who receive the survey are urged to promptly complete and return the document to ensure wide representation. About 1,200 responses are needed for a 95 percent confidence level. Survey respondents remain anonymous.

“Residents who are willing to take the time to complete and return the survey will be doing a great service for the community,” Assistant Village Manager **Robert Cole**, who is overseeing the project, wrote in the release. “The findings of this research will provide important information for planning how best to allocate municipal resources in the future.”

National Research Center Inc. (NRC), a social science research firm whose core business is community surveys, was hired to ensure the scientific validity of the survey results. NRC assisted with surveys conducted in Oak Park in 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2011. Results of these past surveys are posted online at oak-park.us and can be found by searching “community surveys.”

Surveys in 2000 and 2004 were conducted by telephone. But with telephone response rates plummeting across the industry and costs rising, mail has proven to be a more cost-effective approach. In addition, officials say, mail responses tend to be more candid than those gathered by a telephone interviewer.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
June 11, 2013

Oak Park seeks \$14M in federal funding

Author: Anna Lothson

Oak Park officials hope a “shovel-ready” project that extends the success seen on gentrified South Marion Street will catch the eyes of those at the U.S. Department of Transportation who recently announced \$474 million in the latest round of federal grants. The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, commonly known as TIGER, grants are aimed at aiding communities in completing projects that help create economic competitiveness, create and preserve jobs, increase transportation choice and access to transportation services, improve efficiency, are sustainable and enhance livability, among other qualities.

Although this is Oak Park’s third bid requesting federal funds for this specific project, the last two attempts being unsuccessful, **Rob Cole**, assistant village manager, said the village’s proposal may have “a leg up on other communities” because of the project’s readiness plus proof of past success. **Cole** points specifically to the redevelopment of Marion Street, noting that the new project could grow infrastructure investments north and south of the already developed area using the TIGER grant. **Cole** said the village has already seen a 5-1 return on its investment in terms of what was spent on the Marion Street project and what the village has gained in private investment in return.

The project that Oak Park is proposing is called the Inner-Ring Renaissance: A Model for America, and seeks \$14.48 million for a \$20.9 million project. The application specifies the funding will be used to expand the purpose of work already done. The concept of Oak Park’s Greater Downtown Area Plan targets “transit-oriented and complete street public infrastructure investments.” According to the application: “The primary project objective is to realize a compelling, economically vibrant, livable and compact downtown center that leverages the intrinsic value of existing public and private infrastructure to support federal livability principles through a combination of investment strategies that provide more transportation choices, promote equitable, affordable housing and enhance economic competitiveness.”

Based on feedback from previous TIGER grant applications, **Cole** said he believes Oak Park has aligned its proposal well with what decision-makers seek. Federal officials said they are seeking an “aggressive timeline” for announcing selected projects, and the “readiness” factor in Oak Park’s proposal makes it more doable than in the past. Oak Park had previously pushed through projects to better situate the village to receive federal funding, but it didn’t yield results. This time around, Oak Park has evidence to back up the project, **Cole** said. South Marion is highlighted as one of two massive projects completed in Oak Park since 2005.

The South Marion \$5.4 million project involved brick street pavers, bluestone sidewalk and 4,000 pieces of granite curbs, gutters, crosswalks and planters, replacing the asphalt and concrete

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

of the old street. It also called for updating inefficient streetlights and added pedestrian-friendly areas. Construction included replacement of aging water and sewer lines beneath the pavement. The investments expected in the Inner-Ring Renaissance project include replacing deteriorated underground water and sewer infrastructure, reconstructing streets and streetscapes, expanding sidewalks and pedestrian areas, increasing bicycle parking, improving intersection crossings, enhancing pedestrian-level lighting, adding public sidewalk benches, plaza spaces and landscaped sidewalk areas, and improving multimodal station access.

The application says the \$20.9 million project will be worth \$26.2 million after bringing in private investments. It's also expected to leverage \$4.24 million in energy savings. Overall, the project has the potential to increase travel efficiency in the area, linking both South and North Marion streets to Oak Park's larger downtown and helping people navigate more smoothly — both from a pedestrian and motorist standpoint, according to the application. "Oak Park sits in a unique position benefitting from embedded assets, including central location advantage and enviable access to myriad transportation options," the application reads. "In turn, Oak Park is an attractive location for investment consideration."

In terms of project readiness, Oak Park's application contains an environmental survey indicating that the proposed work would be completed by the end of March 2014. This would allow all contracts to be awarded by the end of September this year and for work to begin soon after. "The Inner-Ring Renaissance project is poised to immediately generate near-term economic activity while at the same time laying the proven groundwork for significant long-term benefits," according to the application.

And though it's the same proposal as the past two rounds, **Cole** said Oak Park officials have aligned its proposal closer to what the federal officials seek with each application. "We think we've done a good job," he said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
October 9, 2012

IDOT to host open house about ‘multi-modal plan’

Author: Anna Lothson

The Illinois Department of Transportation is hosting another meeting to gather input on the early stages of its overall plan to improve its roadways from a ‘multi-modal’ perspective. The plan, specifically called the Fiscal Year 2014-2018 Proposed Multi-Modal Transportation Improvement Program, will be detailed at a public meeting at the James R. Thompson Center, 100 W. Randolph St., in Chicago from 3-6 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 16. Although the presentation isn’t related to the last bit of information IDOT provided to Oak Parkers in June about the possibility of widening the Eisenhower Expressway, the Village of Oak Park is paying close attention.

A village memo was prepared that details nine key points IDOT must consider before moving forward with any plan. **Rob Cole**, assistant village manager, said it’s important for Oak Park to stay involved to ensure that IDOT doesn’t veer from its commitment to incorporating a multi-transit solution to easing traffic congestion. The concern from Oak Park’s view about IDOT’s plan is that it’s not in fact “multi-modal,” as the highway department suggests, **Cole** said. Instead it looks exclusively at the roadways and ignores public transportation (specifically the CTA Blue Line). “They have essentially divorced the repairs for the Blue Line from the highways,” **Cole** said. As a result, IDOT is missing opportunities to tackle the problems at the same time, which will only push problems further down the road, he added. “The CTA Blue Line is right in the middle of highway. The highway expansion [plan] is excluding that,” **Cole** said. “That’s not a multi-modal.”

Furthermore, **Cole** said IDOT needs to work with other transportation groups, like the CTA and PACE, to determine how they can work together to tackle the project at one time instead of looking at it solely from a highway viewpoint. “Agency boundaries don’t determine what the transportation needs are,” **Cole** said. “You need to look at all pieces of transportation amenities and make sure they are brought up to the same state at the same time. ... You can’t ignore the state of good repairs and focus on one simply because you are highway department.”

At past meetings, IDOT officials have said the life span of the Eisenhower and the Blue Line are nearing their respective ends, and they promised to incorporate the two when moving forward. The concepts that people will hear at next week’s meeting, however, don’t reflect that, according to **Cole**. He’s worried this move is a slippery slope and will apply to similar issues with IDOT’s highway expansion proposal impacting Oak Park.

One of the points outlined in Oak Park’s memo states that the five-year plan fails to recognize the importance of incorporating all the elements, and excludes an opportunity to save time and money. It also notes that no resources are assigned to public transit infrastructure needs located

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

within the highway median. “It doesn’t include anything to improve state of repairs,” **Cole** stressed. “They are viewing the project through a jaded lens of highway constraints.”

In the June meeting in Oak Park, IDOT officials, Oak Park leaders and residents collided over their views on the expansion proposal. Concerns about environmental impact, incorporating more public transportation options, and keeping the Ike within its current footprint were expressed then. Representatives from IDOT promised they’d be back for another public hearing in the fall, but **Cole** said he has yet to hear any news about such a meeting.

Tuesday’s meeting will be an open-house format, with a continuous audio-video presentation and exhibits illustrating the current fiscal year 2013-2018 plan. IDOT staff will be present to answer any questions related to the multi-modal program, project planning and development process.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
August 3, 2012

Oak Park awarded .1 million grant for improvements around Harlem CTA station

Author: Anna Lothson

A federal grant totaling more than .1 million, awarded to the Village of Oak Park, will help link Oak Park's downtown CTA station with the surrounding retail and commercial area on Marion Street and South Boulevard. The funds will target the area adjacent to the Green Line station in downtown Oak Park, with improvements running west from Marion Street along South Boulevard to Harlem Avenue. In addition to enhancing the area for surface transportation and pedestrian travel, the grant also will help pay for replacing deteriorated underground infrastructure, some of which dates to the 1800s. The Transportation, Community and System Preservation Program announced the grant on Aug. 2. The program provides up to 80 percent of the funding for comprehensive initiatives like Oak Park's Transit Gateway project. "This project will help make Oak Park an even more livable and sustainable community, and I thank President [David] Pope and the entire village board for their leadership," U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin said in a news release. "By leveraging federal dollars, Oak Park will attract new private investment and sustainable development that create and retain jobs. This is exciting news for Oak Park, which stands to be a regional model for local revitalization that incorporates transit, walking, biking and economic development." The .1 million grant was part of 63 million announced last week from the office of U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. Around 1,500 requests totaling .5 billion were received, of which the amount actually awarded is a fraction.

Rob Cole, assistant village manager, said the project fits in with Oak Park's commitment to promoting transit options that focus on promoting public transportation and pedestrian-friendly options. **Cole** said the grant can help build on the village's previous streetscape projects on South and North Marion streets. It can also help expand the purpose of the enhancement and spur growth in the area. The project, he said, will support the existing infrastructure and helps reduce the overall costs of future streetscape improvements. Because discussions have been focused statewide on highway transit options, **Cole** said it's refreshing to see alternatives being invested in. Overall, the project can produce regional and local benefits, **Cole** said. "It's really great to see, at least from a policy standpoint, an interest in these types of projects," he said.

Pope agreed, saying the federal transportation officials are increasingly supportive of the type of strategic, transit-supportive reinvestments Oak Park is pursuing. "The federal government has a direct financial interest in supporting strategies that lead to reinvestment in established, infrastructure-rich communities like Oak Park that often comprise older inner-ring suburban corridors," Pope said. "The alternative of devoting resources singularly to building new highways in ever more remote, low-density areas has been shown over the past several decades to simply perpetuate sprawl, which then creates its own increasing demand for yet more investment."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
May 22, 2012

As Oak Park Apartments building goes on the market, Holley Court garage still needs repair

Author: Anna Lothson

Whiteco, the 14-story, 204-unit luxury apartment building, officially known as Oak Park Apartments, has had its share of controversy. But beyond the debates about its design, size, funding, and development, the adjacent parking structure, the Holly Court garage, caused a slew of its own problems for the village and the developer.

After the village expanded the garage in 2009, officials noticed there were cracks in the concrete. Oak Park paid for the expansion but it was determined that Whiteco was responsible for the repairs and consequent costs due to construction problems. Now that the property is on the market, however, the question has arisen: Whose responsibility is it if the property is sold?

Rob Cole, Oak Park’s assistant village manager, said the garage repairs aren’t complete but confirmed that conversations with Whiteco representatives have provided verbal agreements that the company would finish the necessary repairs.

Cole said the fact that the property is on the market doesn’t change the urgency of the repairs, and the village is in ongoing conversations with Whiteco about the progress. “We want it to be fixed and fixed right,” he said. From a legal perspective, he added, the village wants the project to be up to code no matter who owns the property.

The redevelopment agreement between Whiteco and the village also stipulates that the units remain rental property for 10 years following its opening, which **Cole** said is a factor the new owner can’t change. “They are bound to the agreement as it exists,” he said. “They can’t get rid of any portions.” **Cole** said any issues moving forward will be part of larger conversations between the village, Whiteco and any potential new property owner.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
February 7, 2012

Will Oak Park’s cap-the-Ike dream vanish?

Author: Marty Stempniak

Since the late 1980s, Oak Park has been thinking large, hoping to possibly mend the “scar” that cuts across south Oak Park, by putting a cap over the Eisenhower Expressway. And since 2000, village hall has taken steps toward making the possibly billion-dollar pipe dream a reality. But lately the issue has appeared dormant, at least to the public eye. One loyal supporter of the idea thinks the opportunity might be slipping away to “cap the Ike,” while on the contrary, village officials feel they’re positioned to make it happen. In a recent email, Oak Parker Fred Brandstrader urged village officials not to let the cap chance “slip thru our hands.” Dallas got a highway cap built in two years, he said, and nine others are in the works across the country.

“The cap is still totally possible but the window is closing,” said Brandstrader who served on a citizen committee related to the effort. “It needs to become a focus item for the village or we will miss this once in a lifetime opportunity, while communities across the country capitalize on theirs and realize their dreams.” Oak Park had a study completed on the Ike cap back in 2005, at a cost of about \$250,000, paid for with a state grant. Early estimates have said a full cap, Harlem to Austin, would cost some \$1.5 billion, while a scaled back version might cost \$464 million.

In May 2009, Oak Park OKd a \$955,000 contract for a feasibility study on the concept, with federal money set aside for cap-related studies, lobbied for by Sen. Dick Durbin, former senator Barack Obama and Congressman Danny Davis. URS was tasked with figuring out how the project might affect traffic, real estate values and air quality, along with creating visuals of the different options.

Three years later, only a small portion of that contract amount has been spent — about \$25,000. Oak Park has been stuck in a wait-and-see pattern on the project, as it doesn’t want to start doing detailed work on it until the state decides the future of the Eisenhower, said Assistant Village Manager **Rob Cole**.

For years, the Illinois Department of Transportation has been exploring how it wants to relieve congestion along the expressway, whether by adding extra lanes, lengthening the CTA Blue Line beyond its Forest Park terminus, or through some other means. IDOT is now in the process of weighing its options, and officials don’t expect any sort of decision until 2013.

Cole said Oak Park is loathe to start spending money engineering an Ike cap, only to have the idea turned upside down when the state unveils its own plans for the expressway. He disagrees that the window is closing, rather, the village is getting its ducks in a row so it has something to “fold into” the design of the highway. “Any representations that we’ve lost opportunities or we’ve fallen behind the timeline are false,” **Cole** said. “Quite the contrary, we’re ahead of the timeline.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

URS has been mostly inactive on the effort as of late. But back in September, the consultant started work to determine how an Ike cap might affect real estate values in the surrounding neighborhood, according to project manager Robert Andrews. The company did similar work several years ago related to Millennium Park. Part of that analysis will include looking at the consequences of similar caps on other communities. Andrews said, preliminarily, they have found that a cap could benefit surrounding real estate. They hope to wrap up that portion of the report in the coming months.

Rick Kuner, a transportation planner and former village trustee, sees the benefits of a cap, but is skeptical that it'll ever happen. He wonders why Oak Park should get hundreds of millions in federal money, and not other communities along the corridor that feel the same effects. "The concern I have with it is, in a really bad economy, where does anybody find the money to do it?" he said. "The other concern I have on it is: What makes Oak Park so special that we should get a billion-dollar investment while nobody else in the state gets a piece of that billion dollars?"

Village President David Pope acknowledged that the federal government is in a much different place, budget wise, than it was back when Oak Park started really looking at the cap idea 10 years or so ago. But it's important for the village to explore "the art of the possible" as the state continues envisioning the future of the Ike. "Obviously, the federal government is in a dramatically different financial position today than it was seven, eight, 10 years ago," Pope said. "There are realistic implications that the finances of the federal government are going to have on the reconstruction of any highway, not just the Eisenhower. And those resource limitations, along with the plans that exist at the federal, state and local levels, are going to have to be taken into account when we look at what we can do to achieve our ultimate goal, which is to improve the connections that exist among all areas of our community, and specifically those that are adjacent to the Eisenhower."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
November 29, 2011

Another try at federal funds for brick streets in Oak Park

Author: Marty Stempniak

The Village of Oak Park has just finished decking out South Marion with bricks and bluestone sidewalks, but it may already be moving on to \$43 million in similar upgrades around town. For the second time, village hall is applying for \$26 million in federal grants, hoping to spread the Marion Street upgrade in downtown Oak Park to Lake Street and Oak Park Avenue. With a match of local dollars, the total project would cost some \$43 million, according to **Rob Cole**, assistant village manager.

Oak Park was turned down previously for TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) funding last year, losing out to similar projects in Peoria and Moline. But after making some tweaks, **Cole** feels confident they'll win out this time. "It was a strong application last time," he said. "We received a lot of positive feedback on it, and we made improvements and adjustments where they felt it was a little bit weaker in the last round."

Oak Park is facing stiff competition, though, as the U.S. Department of Transportation received 828 applications from all 50 states, according to a press release. Those jockeying for position asked for a total of about \$14.1 billion, but only \$527 million is available. At the request of President Obama, the process is being accelerated, and winners should be announced by the end of 2011, months ahead of schedule. If Oak Park does gain federal funding, **Cole** said, it'd be difficult to tackle the whole project, and the village would likely only pursue parts.

After pouring \$5.4 million into South Marion earlier this year, Oak Park is next eyeing upgrades along Oak Park Avenue between Lake Street and Pleasant. The village board was originally to have discussed that project this fall, but that discussion will likely be pushed to early next year, according to Village Planner Craig Failor. An ongoing lawsuit between village hall and Oak Park and River Forest High School has delayed those talks, as the future of the downtown tax increment financing (TIF) district is uncertain.

Oak Park is pursuing the upgrades because it wants to unify all of its main shopping districts by spreading a similar look through its downtown. A similar idea was recommended in Oak Park's downtown master plan, and the timing is right, Failor said, since underground utilities are due for a fix-up.

After watching storefronts fill up along North Marion Street, Pat Zubak is convinced the original \$6 million street project was worthwhile. The director of the Downtown Oak Park business association thinks the village would see similar results in other parts of the village. "I think Oak Park has to go all out and attempt to win some of that available money," she said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

But others aren't as sold on the notion. Anan Abu-Taleb, the owner of Maya Del Sol on South Oak Park Avenue, said the benefits seem too vague, the options too few, and the costs too extravagant.

Abu-Taleb went through a similar street project in Downers Grove, and saw his revenues drop by 40 percent overnight. He thinks Oak Park should place as much attention on keeping the businesses it has as attracting new ones with brick streets. He's formed a group called Oak Park Avenue Neighborhood Streetscape to stay vocal on the issue, and is asking anyone interested to visit opans.org. "They have this attitude of 'trust me, it's going to be OK,' and I have a problem with that," he said. "I need to see numbers and I need to see other plans."

Trustee Adam Salzman, who voted against the South Marion redo earlier this year, agrees that Oak Park should slow down on the plans. "Given the way the economy is and how difficult it is to run a business in this kind of climate anyway, I don't think folks need their local government putting obstacles in their way to being able to recruit customers," he said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
November 11, 2011

Survey says: Residents mostly satisfied with Oak Park

Author: Marty Stempniak

Despite occasional grumbles about soaring property taxes and shoddy sewers, Oak Parkers are mostly happy with the village, according to recently released results of a community survey. Some 1,200 households were polled by the National Research Center, and 450 surveys were returned, according to **Rob Cole**, assistant village manager. Oak Park has been sending out the questionnaire roughly every four years since 2000, hoping to gauge residents' perception of the community. Overall, some 90 percent of respondents considered the quality of life in Oak Park "excellent" or "good," a 10 percent uptick from the first survey, completed in 2000. Possible reasons for that improvement, the survey found, could include increased satisfaction with public safety, ease of bike travel and the village's appearance, **Cole** told village trustees at a meeting last week. "All in all, the survey results say Oak Park is a very special place," he said. "The vast majority of the ratings are well above national benchmarks."

Oak Park fell short of those benchmarks in five categories, including employment opportunities, amount of public parking and the availability of quality affordable housing, according to a summary of the survey. Trustee Colette Lueck said the things respondents griped about — such as sewers, streets and job growth — echoed concerns they often hear spoken aloud. "They mirror, almost identically, the areas that trustees consistently get complaints about. So you know that what we're hearing and what people are saying in the survey are very consistent with each other," she said. Lueck worried about some of the low marks employees received for politeness at village hall. Village Manager Tom Barwin pointed out that Oak Park has had to reduce its training programs, and dozens of layoffs have left some departments stretched thin. They're attempting to swing the pendulum the other way by bringing aboard employees who excel in customer service. "We're working on understanding people's personalities and trying to hire people who are ferociously friendly and aren't distracted easily," he said. Trustee Glenn Brewer expressed concern that some 91 percent of residents said economic development is essential in the community, yet only 8 percent rated Oak Park as doing "excellent" in that arena, and 25 percent said it's doing "good." Barwin said Oak Park is budgeting to hire an economic development director next year to help focus those efforts, along with dollars to institute a Main Street program here to strengthen the smaller business districts.

Questionnaires were sent through the mail and participants were contacted beforehand by phone. At a 39 percent response rate, the survey has a 5 percent margin of error, and provides a scientifically valid snapshot of the community, according to **Cole**. Oak Park is increasing the frequency with which it conducts the survey to every three years, with the next one planned in 2014.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
August 25, 2011

Oak Park residents not eligible for flood assistance

Author: Marty Stempniak

The Village of Oak Park announced last week that residents who experienced flooding in their homes in July will not be eligible for federal aid. That's because the level of damage caused during a heavy rainstorm, July 23, was "insufficient" to declare the village a disaster area, according to a letter sent to the village from the Cook County Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. The county made the determination after examining flood reports from throughout the area. Village Manager Tom Barwin said the news is disappointing, though not a huge surprise when July's storm is compared to the much heavier rains in July 2010, which did result in assistance to private homeowners.

Last year's storm caused 10 times as much damage to public property and twice as much damage to individual homes, Barwin said. "I kind of figured this is how it would go, while hoping and advocating that we'd get some assistance," he said.

The state could have gone ahead and declared a disaster, despite the county's decision, but chose not to, according to **Rob Cole**, assistant village manager. Thus, there is no alternate recourse for Oak Park or other communities to obtain federal relief.

Oak Park, however, is considering starting a program where it would assist residents in installing flood-prevention devices, such as overhead sewers or backflow prevention devices. Public Works Director John Wielebnicki is gathering info on similar programs in surrounding communities and plans to propose options during upcoming budget talks in the coming months. Village staff is expected to present a report on the flooding to the village board in September, with an initial discussion likely starting at the Sept. 6 board meeting.

Some 321 residents in Oak Park filled out forms, outlining the amount of damage that flooding caused to their homes July 23. Village Trustee Adam Salzman — who lives in northeast Oak Park, and experienced sewage backing up in his basement in July — thinks flooding like the past two Julys is going to be a frequent occurrence because of climate change. He believes Oak Park should be better prepared next time around.

"You can't treat it like it's a deviation from the norm," he said. "We have a responsibility within village boundaries — notwithstanding what's going on with the county or the federal government — to make sure that our sewer infrastructure is equipped to handle that kind of extreme weather because it's just a fact of life in the 21st century."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
October 19, 2010

Oak Park considers cutting Ike lobbyist

Author: Marty Stempniak

For the past seven years, Oak Park has been paying a lobbying firm in Washington, D.C., to help keep tabs on whether the feds may look at expanding the Eisenhower Expressway. The bill has totaled more than \$1.3 million, and one trustee is questioning whether the village should continue paying for the lobbyist. “I have some concerns, and look forward to talking about it in the budget process,” Trustee Ray Johnson said. “It’s good to get these out early so we can flesh them out and better understand where we’re going.”

Johnson brought up those concerns during a budget meeting last week. He emphasized that he’s supportive of stopping the expansion of the Ike, which Oak Park has said would potentially cost the village precious properties on Garfield and Harrison. However, trustees previously got regular updates from the firm, which seems to have “tapered off” in 2010. He wants the contract to go away, or to better understand why things have been so quiet.

Oak Park started its partnership with Nossaman LLP in 2003. The firm was hired to provide “legal, technical-environmental and legislative services” related to the Ike. Trustees have been renewing the contract each year, most recently with a maximum cost of \$171,000 in 2010.

Deputy Village Manager **Rob Cole** declined to make the most recent reports from Nossaman public, saying that they’re protected under the pending or imminent litigation portion of the state’s Freedom of Information Act. He said the village has been diligent in keeping the costs for the contract down, most recently saving \$90,000 from the budgeted amount in 2009.

Village Manager Tom Barwin said it’s difficult for Oak Park to follow what happens in D.C. related to the Ike. He’s hesitant to kill the contract, and would be happy to provide more frequent updates from the lobbyist to the board. “It’s a hell of a fight to try to get 100-year-old state agencies that are used to doing the same thing year after year, decade after decade, to do something different,” Barwin said. “So, it is an uphill battle, and to win an uphill battle or even have a fair hearing, you need to be on your toes and up to date and engaged.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
June 29, 2010

More brick streets, blue stone sidewalks for downtown Oak Park?

Author: Marty Stempniak

The Village of Oak Park may spruce up several intersections in its main shopping districts, using more brick streets and blue stone sidewalks. If pursued, the project could carry a hefty price tag, but officials believe federal dollars could be nabbed to help fund the idea. Under the preliminary plan, Oak Park would dress up five different high-profile corners in a fashion similar to the 100 block of North Marion. That's where the village invested \$6.12 million to rip up a pedestrian mall, add a brick street and open it up for vehicular traffic. The village hopes that bringing those design elements to other areas of Oak Park's central business districts will help unify disparate shopping areas. "When we were developing Marion Street, the thought was always to bring those elements out and use it as a palate," said Loretta Daly, business services manager for Oak Park.

The five intersections being eyed are Lake and Forest, Lake and Marion, Lake and Oak Park Avenue, South Boulevard and Marion, and South Boulevard and Oak Park Avenue. The village's downtown TIF (tax increment financing) district – a fund created by freezing property taxes at a certain level and using the revenues beyond that point for development and infrastructure projects in the area – is set to expire in 2018. And with that, officials want to start talking about ways to utilize the fund before it sunsets, said Daly. Oak Park had renderings completed of the projects about a month ago, and started showing them off to members of the business community more recently. Daly emphasized that the idea is in the very early stages and has not yet been discussed by the village board.

Improvements to Marion have helped spur property owners into making significant investments in 20 or so buildings on or around Marion, said Daly. Those include the Sushi House, Lido's Caffe, Aripo's and Careful Peach Boutique. Oak Park hopes streetscape projects in other areas would stimulate similar investments. Obtaining federal funding for the project may also be a possibility, said **Rob Cole**, assistant to the village manager. In March Oak Park applied for \$18.4 million for the effort through the federal appropriations process. It would cost about \$23 million to redo all five of the intersections, according to the village's application.

If Oak Park were to eventually move forward with the project, it would take 12 months to be designed and 18 months to construct, for a total of 30 months. In the application, the village says it hopes to finish the work by Nov. 30, 2013. **Cole** expects to hear whether Oak Park will get the funding by early 2011. The village could also look to state or other sources to access other dollars. Village President David Pope believes Oak Park may be in an advantageous position, as the Obama administration is targeting federal dollars toward dense, pedestrian-friendly communities rather than sprawled-out exurban towns. "Oak Park is exceptionally well-positioned to benefit from this new emphasis by the federal government," Pope said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
September 22, 2009

Need milk? Grab your golf cart?

Author: Marty Stempniak

Could small electric cars and golf carts soon be a norm on Oak Park streets? The village is exploring whether it wants to allow “neighborhood vehicles” on its roads. Defined by the state, they are small, self-propelled, four-wheeled, gas- or electric-powered vehicles that travel at speeds between 20 and 25 mph. These could take on the appearance of anything from a golf cart to a small pickup truck.

The federal government started regulating neighborhood vehicles in 1998, while state laws – most recently amended in August – allow neighborhood vehicles on local roads at the discretion of municipalities. Neighborhood vehicles are somewhat expensive, with village officials estimating the cost between \$9,000 and \$20,000. But they’re more environmentally friendly and use less gas. They’re viable for local trips across town, grabbing a cup of coffee or going to pay a bill at village hall, said Village Manager Tom Barwin.

Hinsdale passed a law in November, allowing neighborhood vehicles on its local roads. Now Oak Park will consider its own ordinance and whether it’s a good idea to do the same. But the process is confusing, with both state and federal regulations in place. Illinois says the vehicles are not allowed on state routes – such as Harlem, North Avenue and Roosevelt Road. And roads with shared jurisdiction, such as Austin Boulevard, would need approval from both Chicago and Oak Park for people to use neighborhood vehicles on them. Chicago passed its own ordinance in February, allowing neighborhood vehicles to travel on streets that are under the sole jurisdiction of the city. Chicago also added some of its own requirements, such as stipulating that neighborhood vehicles traveling within its boundaries must have doors.

The state says neighborhood vehicles are only allowed on streets with speed limits of 35 mph or less. But **Rob Cole**, assistant to the village manager, says Oak Park may look at keeping them on streets with speed limits of 25 mph, since that’s their top speed. The state also requires drivers to have insurance, and for neighborhood vehicles to have headlights, brake lights and turn signals.

Cole says other issues need to be explored, such as whether Oak Park should require license plates on neighborhood vehicles, or if the village needs to install signage to help regulate them. “There’s a whole wide variety of issues and considerations,” **Cole** said. Village staff plans to explore the logistics of allowing neighborhood vehicles on its roads and will return to the village board with a recommendation as soon as next month, **Cole** told the board at a meeting on Monday.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
November 18, 2008

Oak Park may acquire trolleys next year

Author: Marty Stempniak

Oak Park may become the San Francisco of the Midwest by the middle of next year. The village is working to obtain a pair of trolleys to tool around Oak Park in 2009. At about \$185,000 a pop, the vehicles could be used for tourism and shopping-related trips. Oak Park is expecting to receive a federal earmark of more than \$600,000 to purchase what could be as many as three trolleys. That federal money would first go to Pace, which would buy the trolleys and then send them to Oak Park.

Trolleys would replace the village's current shuttle program, which offers two free vans that drive set routes in Oak Park. It will cost the village about \$170,000 to run the shuttle program next year. Switching to the 30-seat trolleys would likely cost more for gas but less for maintenance, since they're brand new. At current ridership levels, the village estimates paying \$5.68 for each ride on the shuttle this year. With trolleys, that number would jump to almost \$6. That's assuming the number of riders (29,000) this year is the same next year. To help decrease that subsidy, Oak Park is considering charging \$1 to ride its trolleys and selling advertising on them. Recent studies say that riders would pay to ride trolleys in Oak Park. The same studies said adding the vehicles could strengthen tourism and shop local efforts.

However, some village trustees believe the trolleys would be a waste of taxpayer money and a duplication of services already provided by Pace and the CTA. "The idea that these shiny new buses...will increase ridership seems totally unrealistic," said Trustee Jon Hale. "I don't see how we can spend increasing amounts of money on something that hasn't worked." Other trustees believe the trolleys will bolster ridership and village revenues. "The reason people don't ride the shuttle is because they look like vans," Trustee Greg Marsey said.

Trustee Ray Johnson said officials, such as Congressman Danny Davis, have worked hard to obtain funds for the trolleys, and it would be unwise to reject those dollars. If Oak Park declines, funds would likely go to other interested communities. "I don't want to give \$600,000 or \$700,000 away to another community," Johnson said.

Village staff is calculating exactly how much it would cost to operate trolleys in Oak Park next year. That information will come back to the village board in the next few weeks in time for the board to make a decision before adopting the 2009 budget, said **Rob Cole**, deputy village manager. If the board, which seemed evenly split on the issue, decides to obtain the trolleys, **Cole** estimated that they would arrive around the middle of next year.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
February 26, 2008

Blue Line extension gathers steam

Author: Bill Dwyer

After three years of study and public input, officials of the Cook-DuPage Corridor Study presented preliminary plans for a major expansion of rapid rail and bus service in the western suburbs to the Regional Transportation Authority. That plan would include extension of the CTA Blue Line from Forest Park to as far west as Oak Brook, and the development of three north-south rapid rail and express bus transit corridors in Chicago, western Cook County and DuPage County. Last Thursday's presentation outlined what is still a very conceptual set of plans to deal with a wide variety of transportation and related economic issues throughout the west suburban area and Chicago's far West Side. Public comment will be solicited from the public, including an event to be scheduled sometime in late March at Oak Park Village Hall. Officials expect to have a final proposal to present to the public for comment in about 18 months. The preliminary plan presented to the RTA Thursday reflects a mix of two of five original design concepts first brought before the public two years ago-mainline and concentric systems. "We took some of the concentric and some of the mainline system and overlaid them into a final set of options to put forward for public comment," said Oak Park President David Pope, who serves as vice chair of the study's policy committee.

Benefits of an extension

People in Oak Park may have reason to support the heightened possibility that the CTA Blue Line would be extended and the overall width of the Eisenhower Expressway remain unchanged. However, Oak Park officials, who have been intimately involved in various aspects of the study, stress there are several other key elements that must be included for any final plan to ultimately gain the broad political support needed to be successful. A fully extended Blue Line would feature intersecting connections with three major north-south transit corridors, including the Cicero Avenue Transit Way in Chicago, what's called the "Inter-circumferential" rail line track and right of way that would be extended from O'Hare Airport down 25th Avenue in Bellwood and continuing south to Midway Airport, and the "J-Line" bus rapid transit corridor in DuPage that would connect numerous DuPage County municipalities, including Schaumburg, Addison, Elmhurst, Oak Brook, Lisle, Naperville and Warrenville. Any extension of the Blue Line would likely also have significant benefits for the enhancement of 1st Avenue, which could become a major transit route to such destinations as Loyola Medical Center and Brookfield Zoo to the south, and Triton College to the north. Pope said Friday the increased awareness of all the benefits an extended Blue Line has to offer is generating increased support. "I think we're making strong progress," said Pope. "Both the DuPage members of the policy committee and staff at the RTA are increasingly impressed with the value and potential value to the region of the Blue Line extension, and of the incorporation of the Inter-circumferential rail option that would travel through western Cook and the airports."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Just as importantly, said **Rob Cole**, an assistant to Oak Park Village Manager Tom Barwin, support is broadening in favor of the Blue Line extension over the establishment of dedicated High Occupancy Vehicle lanes on the Eisenhower. “HOV will only save two minutes [commute time],” said **Cole**, who serves on the corridor study’s technical committee. He said the building of additional lanes for HOV traffic could also constitute a back-door way to widen the expressway. “HOV lanes can be reverted into regular traffic lanes if it was determined they weren’t being adequately used,” he said.

Growing consensus

Both Pope and **Cole** are encouraged by what they see as a growing consensus between the city, Cook and DuPage representatives on the study. That consensus, they say, is based on a growing trust between the previously opposed groups, a trust that each group’s interests will, in fact, be protected and advanced. Such trust is essential for any progress to occur, since a super-majority of 70 percent of the policy committee must agree on any final plan. Pope and **Cole** said Friday that there is a widening agreement among politicians on how to proceed with what is basically a once-in-a-century opportunity. “There’s a growing sense of collaboration and mutual goals we’d like to explore,” said **Cole**.

Pope called the proposed development of the Mid-City Transit Way along Cicero Avenue “the most important element” of the plan. Pointing to a map, he noted, “This north-south run picks up many of those in the West Side community and would help reduce congestion.” A look at that map shows the Cicero corridor, which would feature express bus service intersecting with five Metra rail lines and the CTA Green Line and both branches of the Blue Line in Oak Park and Cicero. The result would be greatly increased access to a wide geographic area by low income people seeking distant employment.

New Urbanism

Pope, whose thinking is informed by a conceptual framework called “New Urbanism,” said such streamlined transportation options that don’t require commuters to travel downtown to make connections would benefit a wide variety of people. He lauded the study’s plan as a positive step toward “strengthening the region as a whole.” “If you can develop urban regions in a way people can live, work, shop and recreate within close proximity, you can reduce the negative impacts we see in sprawl,” he said. The thinking of the past 50 years, he said, has led to a region-wide situation in which poor transportation and land use planning have contributed to, not mitigated, urban sprawl. Any current and future plans, he insisted, must take into account both transportation and land use. “If we don’t have healthy cities and economically viable urban areas that attract and maintain diverse and viable populations, we end up with situations where people want to move further and further away,” he said.

Pope said he’s as grateful for what didn’t happen six or seven years ago as he is for what might happen over the next six or seven years. “If not for Rick Kuner, eminent domain would already be under way [to take Oak Park land for a wider expressway],” said Pope, referring to the

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

concerted efforts of former Oak Park trustee Rick Kuner, a transportation expert who blew the whistle on efforts by the Illinois Department of Transportation to ram through plans to significantly widen the Eisenhower by adding additional lanes, with no option for rapid rail improvements. Such plans would have cost Oak Park significant land adjacent to the expressway, threatening the loss of such historic structures as the Oak Park Conservatory and Rehm Park. “Kuner helped Oak Park and other communities prevent IDOT from beginning expansion of the Ike corridor,” Pope said. “He was on the cutting edge of ensuring IDOT wouldn’t just ram something down the throats of the communities in the western suburbs.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
March 28, 2006

VOP to-do list to predict agendas months ahead

Author: Drew Carter

The Village of Oak Park is in the process of creating the most comprehensive to-do list on the block. The list, naming roughly 165 items the board is working on, is the brainchild of President David Pope, who said at a study session Monday night that eventually it will be able to predict meeting agendas months in advance. The 21-page document is color-coded, sets priorities and divvies up the work among the village board, commissions and staff. “It is overwhelming when you first look at it,” said Trustee Robert Milstein. “We really need to narrow it down and decide what we are going to focus on, and what we are really going to focus on.” Trustees will review the list over the next week while on “spring break” to prioritize the items. The document lists plans for business districts; infrastructure issues, such as “Streets and alleys” and “Water and sewer;” personnel issues, such as “Teamsters contract” and “Personnel policies review;” transportation issues, such as “Review of traffic calming options” and “Area-wide parking study;” and others. Pope said he was “extremely gratified” village staff, led by Deputy Village Manager Lisa Shelley, was able to pull the list together. The list will be available on the village’s website within a week or two, Pope said. Milstein said the list will function as a communication tool with the community in that it will let people know when issues are coming up, and what the board has already accomplished. Each major item on the list is broken up into component steps. For example, “Neighborhood Walk Program improvements” begins with the step “Zones revised for more efficiency,” then goes to “Start program with new zones” and ends with “Target date for first inspections under new program completed.” The first two steps have an X to indicate the step has been done.

According to the list, which is a preliminary document, other achievements include:

- ☒ Adoption of Chicago Avenue concept plan;
- ☒ Beginning the process of developing a new comprehensive plan;
- ☒ Setting of guaranteed maximum price for the Holley Court garage expansion;
- ☒ Holding quarterly contractor forums;
- ☒ Making permit forms available online;
- ☒ Creating the profile for the new manager search;
- ☒ Beginning negotiations on police and fire pay and benefits;
- ☒ Preliminary recommendations on smoking ban;
- ☒ Creation of roundtable discussion with youth agencies.

The board also heard staffing recommendations for the interim until a new village manager is hired. **Rob Cole**, who heads the village’s performance measurement effort, will become acting assistant village manager. The study session started at 9 p.m. after the board was in a closed-door meeting for more than two hours “to discuss property acquisition and personnel.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wednesday Journal (IL)
December 13, 2005

OP village hall heads toward ‘community report card’

Author: Drew Carter

The Village of Oak Park has begun grading itself.

It has created statistics and survey information, which it will gather to compare with previous years and with other communities. “If we do this correctly, our residents will gain the benefits of improved levels of service and of lower costs to provide those services,” said Village President David Pope, who does this type of evaluation for companies for a living.

Known as performance measurement, the concept has long been part of the corporate world, where financial returns are weighed against costs and risks. For governments, financial returns translate into improved quality of life. “If you know your priorities and have a way to evaluate performance, you can begin to channel dollars in your budget to initiatives that are going to have the greatest impact on improving quality of life in your community,” Pope said. “The whole concept of performance measurement in city government is fairly new,” Village Manager Carl Swenson said, although some cities, like Portland, Ore., have been using them for approximately 15 years. “For municipal governments of our size, we’re certainly a leader.” Shortly after he was elected to the board in 2003, Pope began discussing performance measurement with Swenson, who enlisted help from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

Dealing with the data is complex, said **Rob Cole**, who helps all village departments establish and maintain performance measurements. Getting information is one thing; comparing it to other information can cause problems.

Oak Park pushed to develop a consortium of municipal governments in northern Illinois to share data, ensuring the village will compare its costs with similar communities. It was the second ICMA consortium in the country, the first being for communities around the Puget Sound in Washington State. Two more have recently sprung up in Oregon and Arizona. Not only will the village benefit from seeing how efficiently it provides services, but would be able to tap into other governments’ approaches to lowering costs.

The village board used a set of “key indicators” this fall in preparing the 2006 budget. Examples include everything from “green” targets, such as percentage of recycled paper, eco-friendly ink and low-energy light fixtures bought, to getting streets cleared to “wet” after snows within 12 hours, to raising citizens’ perception of safety.

Using the measures, the board can see the cost for attaining a goal, adding information to the process of setting those goals. For example, everyone wants smooth streets, but paving costs money. If having 90 percent of streets judged “good” costs \$1 million, is it worth \$1.5 million to get 95 percent rated “good”?

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Robert A. Cole
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Pope said trustees on this board and the previous one have been open to the use of performance measurement. But Trustee Robert Milstein has some concern over how and to what extent the concept will be used. “I think they’re useful tools, and we should use them,” Milstein said, [but] “I don’t want this to become ‘scientific management’” where the human element is removed entirely.

Having performance data to show how the village is doing will help put discussions about performance in a rational context, Pope said. If one person complains about a bumpy road, the village will still respond, but will be able to point to a recent survey of roads that show X percent of them are “good,” “fair,” etc. But Milstein doesn’t believe you can ever completely remove anecdotal evidence from the equation. “This is not a perfect thing,” he said.

Pope’s larger goal is to use the concept on a community-wide level, where taxpayers would be able to choose between, for example, an all-day kindergarten program at public schools or better streets. And it would allow the community to see how its governments are doing in all areas.

Citizens don’t think about divisions between different taxing bodies; they only see the quality of life results, Pope said. He hopes to see a community-wide planning process take place within the next year that will eventually result in a community “report card.”

Research Compiled by: Curtis Farr
 Colin Baenziger & Associates