

Flossmoor reviews plan for \$5.15 million of street rehab in 2022

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Flossmoor residents could see more than \$5 million in street rehabilitation across the village in 2022, but trustees are taking a broader look at how to approach road work.

John Brunke, the village's public works director, presented a plan to the board on Monday, Dec. 6, that would see Flossmoor rehabilitate approximately 9.1 miles of streets, or 21.7% of roads under its jurisdiction. That work, presented for discussion only, would be covered by the \$5.15 million bond sale approved in the April referendum.

But Trustee Rosalind Mustafa questioned where that leaves the village, with the project set to address 28.1% of streets with a Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating between 3 (or poor) and 5 (fair).

"That still seems like a lot of 3-5 or even lower than 3 [rated] streets that are remaining," Mustafa said.

Brunke said staff knew going into this

that the village needs a total of roughly \$15 million in total street repair. Depending on how the bids come in, Flossmoor might be able to get more done than expected with the money on hand. But the storm water issues are being handled first with the bond proceeds, and the remaining money was never designed to cover the entirety of road repairs, Brunke said.

"It's going to give us more of a jump-start but it's not going to get all the work that's needed done, unfortunately," he said.

The approach is to get the worst streets done first. The plan also includes building the village's Motor Fuel Tax fund during this time and addressing more roads through the village's annual street resurfacing program. Brunke's proposal would push the village's annual street resurfacing program for fiscal year 2023 to FY 2024 because of the large scale of the rehabilitation project, which he suggested could help the village build a MFT fund balance for another season.

But that plan left some board members torn about the strategy moving forward, trying to strike a balance between sinking everything into roads in greater disrepair and maintaining roads in better condition to avoid greater expenses down the road.

Trustee Brian Driscoll said he was hopeful the village could get on the higher end, or \$8 million to \$10 million worth of roadwork, done with the bond proceeds.

"I'm concerned," he said. "We worked hard to get the referendum, get the money."

Brunke said the Flossmoor Road Viaduct work alone is expected to cost \$5.7 million, though there is a hope for more grants that would allow some of that money to shift to roadwork. But Driscoll said he is worried that as MFT money gets smaller, \$300,000 annually is only going to fill potholes and the village will be left where it was roughly five years ago, facing many roads still in disrepair and without the funds to address them.

He said he feels like the village is "going down the path of the same mistakes we made before."

"I just don't know that this is the comprehensive plan we were looking for — to take all of our money at once, spend it and you're only going to get one-fifth of the roads taken care of," he said. "I'd like a more long-term comprehensive plan before we spend all our money for one-fifth of the roads next year and that's it."

But Brunke said, "The only other choice we have is sit and let our roads get worse. There's nothing else we can do other than this. We have to rehab. If we don't, they're going to get worse to a failing condition, and then we're at a reconstruction level."

Mayor Michelle Nelson suggested considering crack sealing as a different approach to maintaining roads and allow the village more time to catch up. She asked to see an alternate plan that includes it. Salmon Danmole, of Milhouse Engineering, said crack sealing can work on roads with higher ratings.

COVID surge spurs D161, D153 return to remote class

BY ERIC CRUMP

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Two schools resorted to remote learning in December as the area, and the world, experienced the second-worst spike in COVID-19 cases since the pandemic began in early 2020.

District 161 officials announced on Dec. 15 that in-person classes and extracurricular activities at Parker Junior High in Flossmoor were canceled through the end of the quarter on Dec. 22.

Two days earlier, District 153 announced that three classes at Churchill School in Homewood would return to remote learning after 11 students at the school tested positive and 70 were quarantined because of possible exposure to the virus.

Both school districts are testing students weekly for COVID-19 using the SHIELD testing method developed by the University of Illinois. The saliva-based test can detect COVID-19 and its variants in symptomatic, pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic people.

The new Omicron variant of the virus has dominated pandemic news in the month since it was detected, but it does not appear to be the cause of the current surge.

Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) officials said the first Omicron case in the state was detected on Dec. 7. The Cook County Department of Public

Health (CCDPH) said the first case in the Chicago suburbs appeared on Dec. 14.

The Delta variant remained the dominant strain of the virus, accounting for 95.8% of cases in suburban Cook County the first two weeks of December. Delta, in fact, accounts for more than 64% of cases since the pandemic began, according to CCDPH.

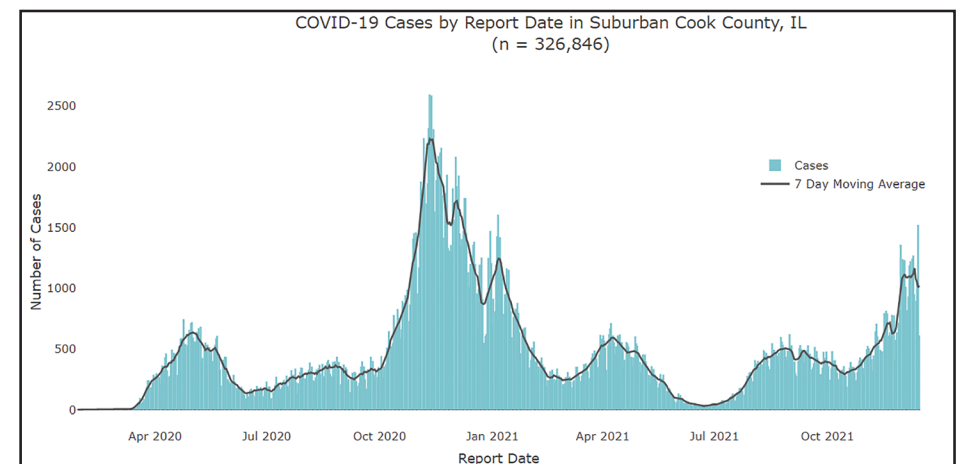
The Homewood-Flossmoor area reported a deep dive in cases during the summer, but saw a surge that peaked on Sept. 11, receded, then surged again starting in late October.

The current case rate is higher than at any point since the worst surge in the pandemic in winter 2020.

Nevertheless, Omicron has grabbed headlines for good reason. Although it is still new and scientists are still studying its characteristics, what they have reported so far indicates Omicron has the potential to cause big problems.

Omicron appears to be much more transmissible than Delta, which was twice as transmissible as the original virus. It also appears that current vaccines are much less effective at preventing cases of Omicron.

As reported by National Public Radio, a study conducted by a South African health insurer, Discovery Health, and the South African Medical Research Council, indicates the Pfizer vaccine is only 30% effective at preventing Omicron infections. It is 80% effective



Provided graphic

A snapshot taken on Dec. 17 showing the COVID-19 case trend since the pandemic began in suburban Cook County.

at preventing infection by the Delta variant.

The good news from the study is that Omicron appears to cause milder versions of COVID-19, with fewer hospitalizations and deaths. Vaccines appear to be effective at reducing the severity of disease.

"While we don't have all the answers right now, we know the general prevention strategies we've been recommending — vaccination, boosters, masking, testing, physical distancing — are our best protection against the virus and its variants," said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. "As long as the virus continues to circulate, it has the potential to mu-

tate into new variants. Vaccination can help stop circulation, but we need more people to get vaccinated."

As of Friday, Dec. 17, 62.7% of Homewood's population and 66.1% of Flossmoor's was fully vaccinated. Data is not yet available on the CCDPH website about booster rates.

The state and county initiated a vaccine push in December, with a flurry of mass vaccination and booster clinics. Visit dph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccination-clinics.html to find times and locations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, vaccines.gov, also remains a good starting point for finding vaccination locations.