

# Homewood water source project nears completion

BY ERIC CRUMP

ewcrump@hfchronicle.com

Homewood's biggest public works project in at least a generation, the switch in water provider from Chicago via Harvey to Hammond, Indiana, via Chicago Heights, is nearing completion.

Public Works Director John Schaefer said there is one key piece of equipment left to install, a generator at the pump station in Thornton, but the water line installation was finished in September, and the pump house was placed in October after being constructed off-site.

The generator has been delayed, one of a number of challenges imposed on the project by recent worldwide supply chain problems, but Schaefer expects it will be in place by May.

"Lead times have been crazy. We've been waiting a long time for that," he said.

Another early challenge for the project required rethinking the delivery of the piping that would run from Thornton to the Homewood water plant on Ashland Avenue. Originally, pipe was doing to be delivered in stages as the installation progressed. Then the provider told the village that staging would drive the cost up \$365,000.

To save the added cost, the village took delivery of all the piping at once and found places to store it until it was needed.

## Testing, testing, testing

While the finishing touches of the physical system are pending, public works has been focused on thorough testing of the water that will be coming to Homewood residents when the system is enabled.

Visitors to village hall might have noticed a water pipe display just inside the west doors. That's a demonstration of what the loop tests look like, Schaefer said.

Six sets of pipe taken from residential service lines in Homewood were installed at a Lansing pump station owned by Chicago Heights to run the tests.

The source of drinking water will be the same before and after the provider switch. Both Chicago and Hammond pull water from Lake Michigan.

Schaefer said there is only a slight difference in treatment process between the two cities. Chicago uses a blended polyphosphate additive. Hammond uses zinc orthophosphate, which serves the same purpose.

"What it does is basically put a coating



Eric Crump/H-F Chronicle

**ABOVE:** A display on the lower level of Homewood village hall shows what the water testing setup looks like. Homewood Public Works has been working with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to verify the safety of water that runs through the village's new lines.

**BELOW:** Homewood Public Works Director John Schaefer walks past the pad outside the new pump station where a generator will be placed, one of the last pieces of the new water supply system.



inside the pipe to prevent any lead from lead service lines from leeching out into the water," he said.

The chemical composition of the water is virtually identical, he said, but extensive testing is required by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency out of an abundance of caution.

"IEPA has been working very well with us," he said. "We both want to make sure this is going to be high quality water. There

will be no issues with health."

When the project was presented to the Homewood board in 2019, Trustee Karen Washington expressed concern about making the shift. The memory of disastrous water source shifts in Flint, Michigan, in 2014 and University Park in 2017 were still fresh.

Schaefer underlines the differences in those cases. They both involved switching from ground water to river water, which

disrupted the line coating that prevents lead leeching.

In Homewood's project, the water source will remain the same, and testing will verify the integrity of the line coating before the provider switch begins.

Homewood also is opting for a gradual phase-in of the new system, allowing for continued testing to confirm that water quality remains high throughout the process.

"We've done this testing. We know what the results should be," he said. "We'll make sure we get those results when it gets into the distribution system."

He said the switch over could begin in July or August, and it will start with blending 25% of Hammond/Chicago Heights water with the current supply from Chicago/Harvey.

"Once we feel everything is like it should be, we'll go to 50%, then 75%, then eventually 100%," he said.

Each incremental adjustment will take at least two weeks while testing is conducted. Water will be taken from various points in the system, including residential sources and normal sampling sites.

## Education

In addition to continued testing, the village is focusing on providing the community with information about the project and answer questions residents have. Descriptions and explanations can be found at the project's web page, <https://bit.ly/homewoodwaterinfo>.

Schaefer said he's glad to get questions, whether posed directly or posted on social media. Both help him address what residents want to know, and give him a chance to address any misunderstandings.

For example, he noticed a comment on social media recently claiming that changing to an Indiana water provider would mean less stringent regulation and quality oversight.

Not so, he said. Water quality is regulated nationally by the EPA. Each state agency has to abide by the same rules.

And the gradual switch will not begin until the IEPA signs off on the project and grants the village an operation permit.

"They look at our data. We have to get approval before we can turn that valve on," he said. "The bottom line is we are not going to jeopardize the water quality and the residents of the community just to make a deadline. We will make sure the water just as good as it is now if not better."

"There's no compromise. The water will be safe."

UNDERGRADUATE  
**OPEN HOUSE**  
SATURDAY, APRIL 30



 **Governors State**  
UNIVERSITY