



Sunfish Lake Quarterly

Winter 2024 Volume 25 Issue 1

Greetings Neighbors,

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season and are staying warm as winter settles in.

As we kick off the new year, on behalf of all residents I want to thank our exceptional staff for their outstanding performance throughout 2024.

Special thanks to: **Christy Wilcox** - City Administrator, **Char Stark** - City Treasurer, **Kori Land** - City Attorney, **Chief Brian Sturgeon** - West St. Paul Police, **Chief Dave Dreelan** - Mendota Heights Fire Department, **Dennis Schilling** - Building Inspector, **Lori Johnson** - City Planner, **Justin Messner** - City Engineer, and **Jim Naves** - City Forester. We are grateful for your tireless work and excellence in serving SFL. We are truly fortunate to have such a talented and committed team.

We also have some City team news. I extend a warm welcome to our returning and new Council members and express our heartfelt gratitude to those transitioning roles or concluding their service. **Steve Bulach** has been reelected, and **Tom Hendrickson** joins the City Council, bringing a wealth of experience from his tenure as Planning Commission Chair. **John Oakman** steps into a Planning Commissioner role, bringing extensive management and consulting background, and **Ginny Beckett** returns to the Planning Commission after completing Shari Hansen's Council term. We also thank **Dominick Driano** for his valuable contributions to the Planning Commission as he concludes his service. These smooth transitions collectively guide our community forward.

You have likely received your 2025 property tax statement and may have noticed that we were able to lower the City's portion of your property taxes. This achievement comes at a time when both the County and the School District have had to raise property taxes for 2025. Rest assured; we remain committed to being responsible stewards of the budget.

For residents who have not signed up for email notification please visit the SFL website and view the article at the bottom of the homepage regarding the excellent report the City received regarding PFAS testing on all three of our lakes.

Many residents reached out to me expressing concerns about security following recent burglaries and advocated for City purchase of the Flock Security System, an AI-driven license plate reader. After thorough research and numerous conversations with law enforcement officials, I concur this system would benefit our community. Key findings include:

- The Flock System is an economical option, with installation costs of approximately \$10,000 and annual fees of \$30,000, compared to bids some residents received from private security patrols of \$125,000+ per year for daily 8-hour evening manned patrols.

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City Council Dan O’Leary, Mayor Steven Bulach Tom Hendrickson Mike Hovey Shannon Nelson	Planning Commission Ginny Beckett Jeannine Naves Claire Noble John Oakman Kevin Wu	City Clerk/Administrator Christy Wilcox cwilcoxclerk@gmail.com	In this Issue Message from the Mayor Where Has All the Buckthorn Gone? Learn to Fix and Mend at a Free Fix-It Clinic 2025 Final Budget Summary Police Update
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 18281 West St. Paul, MN 55118	Free Confidential Paper Shred Event April 12, 9 a.m. - noon WSP Sports Complex (1650 Oakdale Ave, West St. Paul)		

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- Police chiefs in communities with high value residences using a Flock system praised its effectiveness in solving and deterring crime, particularly as it became known that a Flock system was in operation.
- While it is not a panacea and cannot solve all crime, the system offers real-time alerts for stolen vehicles and has aided other cities in apprehending criminals.
- The concerns of residents for privacy are acknowledged, however since many adjacent communities, homeowners' associations, and shopping areas have the Flock System, all of us are routinely being surveilled daily in our travels. The police chiefs I spoke with reported no complaints have been registered in their communities as the data obtained is under strict State statutes safeguarding privacy and requiring destruction of data within 30 days when not involved in an active investigation. Additionally, any data requested by the police must be securely logged in with reasons given, and audits must be sent to the State Bureau of Criminal Investigation periodically to ensure compliance.
- While the Flock system may not have prevented the recent SFL burglaries, it enhances overall security and makes our community less attractive to criminals.
- SFL has had instances of illegal dumping and occasional drug trafficking occurring. The AI Flock System can search for vehicles involved in such actions which can lead to apprehension.
- Neighborhood Watch Groups are lauded by all police departments as being a good community activity however, it is recognized that they do not have a high degree of success in lessening or solving crime. Law enforcement agencies indicate the degree of sophistication of criminals has increased and the AI license-plate-reader systems is currently an excellent system to aid in solving crimes.

A key question is, given the increasing sophistication of criminals, if SFL is one of few high-value property communities without a Flock system, does it increase the likelihood SFL will be a target for future criminal activity?

Since 90% of residents who contacted me directly advocated for SFL's implementation of the Flock system, accordingly, I moved to do so at the December Council meeting. However, several residents in attendance at that meeting expressed opposition to the Flock system, thus the motion was not seconded and failed. Subsequently, a Committee was formed headed by Councilmembers Steve Bulach and Shannon Nelson, to further research potential security solutions. As always, the Council welcomes input from residents, so please reach out to them if you would like to register your thoughts.

Stay well and enjoy the beauty of the winter season.
Dan O'Leary



SAVE THE DATE: ARBOR DAY 2025

The Arbor Day event is scheduled for Saturday, May 3rd this year. Plan on spending some time with neighbors and friends planting trees this spring.

WHERE HAS ALL THE BUCKTHORN GONE?

Jim Naves, City Forester

Nearly all wooded properties throughout the City were thickly covered by a tangled understory of invasive buckthorn, honeysuckle, and amur maple when Jeannine and I moved to Sunfish Lake in 2005. There were also a good number of old native trees including oaks in the 125-150 year old range. It reminded me of the frightening forest from the Hansel and Gretel story. Thick dark woods with narrow paths ready to swallow up unwary hikers.

Native trees and woody plants currently make up 10% or less of the trees in areas dominated by buckthorn and other woody invasives. This has led many property owners to take it upon themselves to remove and control woody invasives, leading to a visually dramatic opening of previously closed-in woodland areas. The City Forester is commonly contacted at this point by a neighbor to investigate a “clear cutting” incident because sightlines through a woodland are open again after 30 or more years of buckthorn green screening. There have been no actual “clear cutting” incidents during my time as City Forester, while there have been many buckthorn and woody invasive species removal projects.

The result of all this woody invasive removal and control is a partial return to how Sunfish Lake looked 30-60 years ago. In a sense we have together turned back the clock to when our woodlands were much more open and neighbors, while far apart, could still see each other. That past open woodland was perhaps a safer, more welcoming environment than a thick, tangled, dark buckthorn/honeysuckle/amur maple forest. I have always liked the comfortable feel and warmth of an “oak savanna”; an area with only 5-50% tree canopy cover. A woodland has 50-100% tree canopy cover.

The City supports the removal and long-term management of woody invasives. When property owners clear invasive trees, our woodlands become more open, shady tolerant wildflowers become more common, wildlife may become more visible, and we may even see our neighbors off through the woods. It is my hope that we will someday be able to do similar projects in our City’s parks. The trend seems clear to me and I think open woodlands make our properties seem larger and more welcoming. I hope you do, too.

LEARN TO FIX AND MEND AT A FREE FIX-IT CLINIC

Instead of trashing broken household items, bring them to a Dakota County Fix-It Clinic for free fixing or mending. Last year, Fix-It Clinics helped Dakota County residents save nearly 4,000 pounds of items from the landfill. These clinics are held monthly at rotating locations and are run by skilled volunteers who love to lend a hand. You’ll learn how to troubleshoot and tinker, and hopefully fix your items onsite or at home.

In addition to keeping useful items out of the landfill, these events bring people together and empower you to fix things on your own.

Show up to the upcoming Fix-It Clinic on Saturday, March 15, from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at the Dakota Lodge in West St. Paul. The event is free, and you do not need to register to participate.

Bring up to three items that need fixing or mending. The most common items people bring are lamps, vacuums and clothes for mending. You must be able to carry items into the clinic, so no overly large items.

For future dates and more information, visit www.dakotacounty.us, search *fix-it clinic*.

Partially funded by Dakota County and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.



2025 Final Budget Summary

At the December 10th Council meeting the Final Budget was adopted.
Below is a summary of the 2025 budget. If you have questions contact
the treasurer at Starkchar114@gmail.com

2025 Budget by Program

Debt	\$ 273,247.50
Public Safety	219,558.74
Engineering/Planning	113,470.00
Administration	74,483.00
Streets	60,590.00
Insurance/Legal	52,600.00
Forestry	20,850.00
Road Projects(Capital)	-
TOTAL FINAL BUDGET	\$ 814,799.24

2025 Final Budget



Budget Revenues

Levy	650,983.74	79.89%
Permits	4,000.00	0.49%
Charges for Services	3,000.00	0.37%
Fines	3,000.00	0.37%
Interest	6,000.00	0.74%
Special Assessments	119,147.51	14.62%
Miscellaneous	100.00	0.01%
Cash*	28,569.44	3.51%
Total	814,800.69	100.00%

Budget Highlights

Staffing :

City staffing has not changed.

2 positions-City Administrator

City Treasurer

Programs:

No capital program for 2025.

Digitization of paper records

Debt:

Principal reduction of:

\$245,000

*Cash source is the small city assistance and cash savings from 2024

POLICE UPDATE

The West St. Paul Police Department continues to investigate the four burglaries that occurred in Sunfish Lake in 2024.

We also need the assistance of residents to continue to report suspicious people, vehicles or anything unusual. We need to work in partnership with residents to enhance the quality of life in the community and bring back the sense of security that we all deserve.

If you would like to host a gathering in your neighborhood to discuss crime prevention or anything related to safety, please reach out to the contacts listed below and we can make that happen.



CPTED

Did you know that you can receive a home site survey from a certified officer in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design and Site Survey. Just ask and we can walk through your property and provide tips and ideas to reduce the chances of experiencing criminal activity.

RED REFLECTOR PROGRAM



For at least 40 years, the police department, in partnership with residents, have a program in place to let members of the police department know that they are welcome to drive up resident's driveways during regular patrol duties. This is a good time to remind residents of this unique notification system in place in Sunfish Lake. A red reflector placed on your fire number sign signifies to law enforcement that they are welcome and encouraged to drive into the driveway. If there is no red reflector, or a reflector of a different color, law enforcement will not drive into the driveway during normal routine patrol duties.

If you would like a reflector, we can provide you with one. Need help installing it? We can help with that too. Just reach out to the individuals listed below.

To report suspicious activity or a criminal offense, place call 911 if it is an emergency or the non-emergency phone number is 651-322-2323. You can also use the following link to have an officer dispatched to a non-life or death emergency:

<https://spark.backingfire.com/dakota911mn>

To request a residential or commercial site survey, host a crime prevention meeting, or request a reflector, feel free to reach out to:

Brian Sturgeon, Chief of Police 651-552-4201 bsturgeon@wspmn.gov

Matt Muellner, Patrol Supervisor 651-259-2607 mmuellner@wspmn.gov

Joe Gobely, Community Engagement 651-206-0023 jgobely@wspmn.gov