



Memorandum

TO: Kevin J. Jackson, Village Manager

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "KJ", enclosed in a light blue circular stamp.

FROM: Rob Sproule, Public Works Director

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FOR: Village President and Board of Trustees

DATE: January 13, 2026

SUBJECT: 2025 Fall Leaf Collection Season Summary and Operational Review

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide a review of the 2025 Fall Leaf Collection Season.

Background

The 2025 Fall Leaf Collection Program was significantly affected by an unusually late leaf drop followed immediately by the snowiest November on record. Despite these challenges, Village staff, contractors, and residents worked collaboratively to manage leaf accumulation, snow removal, and street sweeping under difficult conditions. More than 350 tons of leaves were collected by street sweepers in December alone, and LRS provided extended bag collection service at no additional cost. While the season was demanding, the Village's current leaf collection model prevented far more severe operational and safety issues that would have occurred under the former system.

Program Overview

The 2025 Annual Fall Leaf Collection Program was scheduled to run from October 27 through December 5. Early in the season, leaf volumes remained low, and many trees retained their foliage well into November. By the third week of November, leaf drop increased sharply, prompting staff to evaluate whether the scheduled program would

be sufficient. After assessing conditions, staff initiated discussions with LRS regarding a one-week extension through December 12. This update was communicated to the community, noting that LRS would extend the program at no additional cost and would continue collecting bagged leaves placed in the parkway. The week of the Thanksgiving holiday (November 27) ultimately produced the most significant leaf fall of the season.

Leaf Drop Progression and Pre-Winter Operations

The Village's street sweeping contractor completed a full sweeping cycle during the week of November 17, with plans to return after the leaf collection program concluded. At that time, conditions suggested a manageable end to the season.

However, the situation changed rapidly.

Weather Impacts

Beginning early on Saturday, November 29, the Village—and the greater Chicagoland region—experienced the largest November snowfall ever recorded. The first event produced more than eight inches of snow, and between November 29 and December 7, the Village received over fifteen inches in total.

During this period:

- LRS continued to collect bagged leaves.
- Public Works staff and residents were forced to shift from leaf management to snow removal.
- Plow drivers were directed to clear streets "curb to curb" to maintain safety and parking access.

As a result, leaves remaining in the roadway at the onset of snowfall were pushed to the curb line or buried beneath accumulating snow and ice.

Throughout December, temperatures rose above freezing only three times. Snow, ice, and frozen leaves remained in place until late in the month, preventing meaningful sweeping or leaf removal.

Operational Response

By December 18, conditions improved enough for Public Works to consider resuming sweeping operations. Staff contacted the Village's sweeping contractor, who deployed up to nine sweepers to work alongside the Village's two in-house units.

Despite challenges—including holiday parking, lingering ice, and leaves frozen to the pavement—multiple sweeping passes were completed during the seven days when weather allowed. During this period, more than 350 tons of leaves were collected.

Public Works continues to prioritize sweeping, with in-house crews operating more than twelve hours per day. Efforts have focused on arterial streets and east–west secondary routes, with progress now extending to north–south streets. Staff are also clearing piles at intersections where snow plowing created accumulations. Discussions have already begun with the Village's new 2026 sweeping contractor to conduct an additional sweeping cycle as early as February if weather conditions allow.

Partnership with LRS

LRS has been an excellent partner throughout this unusually challenging season. In addition to completing the extended fall program, LRS agreed to collect additional leaf bags placed in alleys during residents' normal winter compost collection—without requiring green stickers and at no cost to the Village or its residents. This service is expected to continue through the end of March.

Assessment and Lessons Learned

In my professional assessment, the difficulties experienced this season were directly tied to the rapid onset of winter and the extended freeze that followed. The Village experienced:

- The snowiest November on record
- Minimal melting conditions until late December
- A compressed period of heavy leaf drop immediately before major snowfall

Despite these conditions, staff and residents successfully removed tons of leaves from streets, yards, and curb lines. Importantly, the Village's current leaf collection model prevented far more severe issues. The brief warm period over Thanksgiving allowed residents to bag leaves that otherwise would have been placed in the street. Under the former model—combined with historic levels of landscaper fly-dumping—the situation

would have been significantly more difficult to manage and would have posed greater safety and drainage risks.

Conclusion

The 2025 leaf collection season presented extraordinary challenges driven by unprecedented weather patterns. Village staff, contractors, and residents responded with flexibility, persistence, and cooperation. While conditions were far from ideal, the Village's operational approach, combined with strong partnerships and community participation, ensured that streets remained safe and passable and that leaf accumulation was addressed as effectively as possible under the circumstances. Staff and Village contractors continue to work diligently to improve street and sidewalk conditions. This work will continue through the winter as weather conditions allow. The lessons learned this season will inform future planning and strengthen the Village's preparedness for similar events.

For questions, please contact Rob Sproule, Public Works Director, via email at rspoule@oak-park.us or by phone at 708-358-5702.

cc: Lisa Shelley, Deputy Village Manager
Ahmad Zayyad, Deputy Village Manager
Jack Malec, Assistant to the Village Manager
Christina M. Waters, Village Clerk
All Department Directors