



Memorandum

TO: Kevin J. Jackson, Village Manager 

FROM: Craig Failor, Development Services Director 
John Melaniphy, Assistant Village Manager of Economic Vitality 
Rob Sproule, Public Works Director 

FOR: Village President and Board of Trustees

DATE: September 24, 2026

SUBJECT: **Renew the Avenue Business Support** and **Construction Update**

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to highlight Village support to businesses impacted by Renew the Avenue and a brief construction update. Lastly, the attachment to this memo includes a detailed list from the Office of Economic Vitality regarding touchpoints Economic Vitality Staff have made to date with businesses impacted by Renew the Avenue.

Renew the Avenue General Incentives and Support

1. Incentives

The following incentives were created to support the local Hemingway District businesses during the reconstruction project.

- a. *Avenue Parking Garage – Increasing Free Parking (February–December 2026)*
 - i. The incentive to increase free parking to be modified from 60 minutes to 90 minutes was approved by the Village Board to begin and end a month earlier than the previously approved March–November deadline.

b. Renew the Avenue Business Grant Program

- i. This grant program created three opportunities for businesses to receive an award of up to \$5,000 per storefront, per opportunity, regardless of sales tax generation. The three available opportunities are the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant (C-FIP), the Commercial Interior Improvement Grant (C-IIP), and the Social Media Grant Program (SMP). This is the first time in Village history that grant programs are available to non-sales tax-generating businesses. A business owner can apply for all three opportunities. This program is also available to all commercial property owners in the district. Below is a summary of the awards funded to businesses from the Renew the Avenue Business Grant Program. The application deadline is December 31, 2026. Total grant awards given to businesses during construction have been a total of \$88,808.50, supporting a total improvement investment of \$472,271.31 in the district.

Business	Program	Total Cost	Grant
Cucina Paradiso	C-FIP	\$ 13,454.17	\$ 5,000.00
CandyCopia	SMP	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 1,000.00
814 North Blvd	C-IIP	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
The Wolf Oak Park	C-IIP	\$ 73,700.00	\$ 5,000.00
Color Me Mine	C-IIP	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
Dandelion Bookshop	SMP	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 750.00
Trade Oak Park	SMP	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 10,000.00
Lively Athletics	C-FIP	\$ 7,469.00	\$ 3,734.50
Village & Vessel	SMP	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
Trade Oak Park 2	FSP/IIP/CFIP	\$ 90,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Yoga Loft	C-IIP	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
Yoga Loft	C-FIP	\$ 7,650.00	\$ 3,825.00
Dandelion Bookshop	C-IIP	\$ 3,800.00	\$ 1,900.00
Lively Athletics	C-FIP	\$ 3,198.14	\$ 1,599.00
Lively Athletics	SMP	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 1,500.00
Dental Care of Oak Park	C-FIP	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 4,500.00
TOTAL		\$ 472,271.31	\$ 88,808.50

c. Bike to the Biz

- i. The Renew the Avenue team created a shopper reward program to encourage individuals to "bike to the biz." This is an ongoing program in which any shopper can submit receipts for 4 businesses in the district (minimum spend of \$10 per purchase), drop off their receipts at

the UPS Store, and a winner is announced monthly. The winner receives a \$250 voucher to use at any of the three bike stores in Oak Park. There are no costs to the businesses; the Village is funding this program to support local businesses and encourage shoppers to find an alternative method to travel to the district.

2. Marketing

The Village has increased marketing of the business community during construction. Business directory maps were created and installed in the parking garage and shared throughout the website and online media to let shoppers and visitors know what businesses and services are open in the district. Additionally, Village staff has created a series of promotional videos of businesses in the Hemingway District. These videos showcase the stories of business owners and their stories, to help build a connection with the community.

Other videos are educational for the community to understand the details of the construction project, while still promoting shopping and supporting local. Village staff has created videos to showcase an "Avenue Shopper," which shows an individual with shopping bags walking through the construction dust to support the local businesses. Other videos focus on the parking garage and marketing the 90 minutes of free parking. Staff is currently working on two more videos to highlight the end of construction and the streets being reopened for public use.

Aside from the videos, staff also participated in an episode of the Inside Oak Park podcast. This episode covered the construction aspect of the project by Village Engineer Bill McKenna and Project Manager Brian Racine. The second half of the episode highlighted the importance of supporting local businesses by Business Services Manager Noemy Diaz and Hemingway Board President Moses Valdez.

3. Outreach

Aside from the incentives and marketing, Village staff have been meeting with business owners on a one-to-one basis to hear their concerns and help address any issues they may have. The Renew the Avenue team has an office at 104 N Oak Park Avenue, which staff have access to and can utilize to meet in the district with businesses. One of the items that was brought up to staff during these one-on-one visits was the concern of increased dust during construction and how it visibly impacts their establishment. Staff received this feedback and reached out to several vendors for bids to begin doing a monthly window washing of each business within the parameters of the construction project. Window cleaning began in July and occurs once every 3 to 4 weeks, weather permitting. The last cleaning is scheduled for November, which will also include any

awnings. There is no cost to the businesses for this service. Staff also worked with businesses to address any of their parking concerns. Whether it was for their employees or their customers, Village staff have worked with business owners to give them several options and identify the best solution for their needs.

The Renew the Avenue team sends out weekly emails to the entire business district to ensure everyone is in the loop on all items occurring that impact construction or anything occurring in the district. This newsletter is commonly referred to as the "Thursday Three" and is available to anyone who subscribes on the Renew the Avenue website.

4. Proposed Additional Support

As part of this year's holiday campaign to encourage local shopping, staff is putting together a coupon book that highlights all twelve business districts. Each business district will have its own section in the book to highlight businesses and any sales they have for the holiday season. Staff is recommending that any business in the Hemingway District that would like to participate in the program but cannot afford to absorb the cost of providing a discount, the Village steps in with one final incentive. The incentive would be a maximum of 15% off the total final bill. The business owner would be responsible for submitting the receipts of the transactions for reimbursement from the Village. Coupons would be valid from November 27– November 30, the weekend of Small Business Saturday.

There was a total of \$305,000 budgeted under the Business Services Division budget for the Renew the Avenue Grant Programs. Only \$88,808.50 has been spent year-to-date. Staff estimates an additional \$60,000 in grant awards for the remainder of the year, leaving a balance of \$156,191.50 that can be allocated to the holiday incentive.

Construction Update

Construction on the Oak Park Avenue Streetscape continues to progress steadily. The project remains on schedule and under budget, and it is still anticipated to reach substantial completion prior to Thanksgiving 2026. Weekly updates are being provided through the project website, email distribution lists, and the Village Manager's Report. Past updates are available on the Renew the Avenue project page: <https://www.renewtheavenue.com/construction-updates>.

A summary of recently completed and ongoing work is provided below. Public Works is available to address any additional questions related to construction.

Electrical Work

Electrical crews have completed installation of all light-pole foundations, traffic-signal foundations, and conduit on Oak Park Avenue between Pleasant Street and South Boulevard. Work has now shifted to South Boulevard, where crews are installing foundations and conduit for lighting, traffic-signal equipment, and EV-charging infrastructure. Upon completion of this segment, crews will begin pouring light-pole foundations and installing conduit on Oak Park Avenue between North Boulevard and Lake Street, as well as at the bump-out at the southeast corner of Oak Park Avenue and South Boulevard.

Underground Utilities

The underground utility crew is installing the final water-main segment beneath the viaduct this week, along with the last four catch basins. All utility work in the viaduct area is expected to be completed by the end of the week.

Roadway Construction

Last week and earlier this week, the contractor excavated, graded, prepped, and framed the roadway on Oak Park Avenue between North Boulevard and Lake Street. Concrete base-course placement began mid-week and is expected to be fully completed by week's end. Once finished, the concrete crew will transition to South Boulevard to continue roadway restoration.

Tree Infrastructure and Irrigation

Excavation for structural soil to support new trees will begin next week on Oak Park Avenue between North Boulevard and Lake Street. Over the next several weeks, the sprinkler contractor will install irrigation infrastructure for the tree pits and planter areas on this block following excavation.

Sidewalk and Paver Installation

Paver installation is ongoing on the east side of Oak Park Avenue between Pleasant Street and South Boulevard. After the east-side sidewalk is completed, crews will begin installing pavers on the west side of the block, followed by roadway brick installation on the block and within the Pleasant Street intersection.

Nicor Restoration Work

Nicor's paving contractor continues pavement reconstruction in the alley west of Oak Park Avenue between North Boulevard and Lake Street as part of restoration work associated with the gas-main installation completed earlier this year. Alley restoration is expected to be completed by the end of next week.

For questions regarding business support, please contact John Melaniphy, Assistant Village Manager of Economic Vitality, via email at jmelaniphy@oak-park.us or by phone at 708-358-5696, or Craig Failor, Development Services Director, via email at cfailor@oak-park.us or by phone 708.358.5422. For questions regarding construction, please contact Rob Sproule, Public Works Director, via email at rsproule@oak-park.us or by phone at 708-358-5702.

Attachments:

Economic Vitality and Development Services Renew the Avenue Touchpoints

cc: Lisa Shelley, Deputy Village Manager
Ahmad Zayyad, Deputy Village Manager
Jack Malec, Assistant to the Village Manager
Noemy Diaz, Business Services Manager/Administrative Officer
Christina M. Waters, Village Clerk
All Department Directors

Hemingway Business District Assistance During the Renew the Avenue Construction

This is a list to update the Village Board on the activities of the Office of Economic Vitality and Development Services Department during the Renew the Avenue Construction Project.

General Assistance

- Monthly Board Meetings – EV staff attends and participates in every monthly Hemingway Board meeting; staff collects questions, concerns, and needs for resource or information connections, which are promptly followed up on.
- Hemingway District Happy Hour events – EV staff attends and participates in after-work district happy hours to connect with business owners after hours to speak with them one-on-one and create trusting and open relationships through consistency and cultivating familiarity.
- Event/Marketing Assistance – EV staff has met multiple times with Hemingway district businesses to work on promotional ideas for the district and offer guidance on event implementation, including ideas for monthly promotional events throughout the construction project, and larger events such as the Block Party; EV Staff also attends meetings and offers direct guidance and support on the “On The Road Again” grand reopening event, counseled them on applying for a SPARK grant, and connected the Hemingway Board with Neighborhood Services on the special event permit process.
- Business Support Concepts – EV drafted a list of potential programs that could draw traffic or financially assist Hemingway businesses, including an interest-free loan program, hiring an event consultant, and developing a contest to incentivize customer patronage.
- National Small Business Week Programming – EV staff created a series of panel discussions regarding available resources for minority-owned and women-owned businesses, accessing capital for business reinvestment, opening a business in OP, and using AI for business; the event was attended by over 100 community business owners, and representatives and events were marketed extensively at district meetings, and information was shared via district member communications.
- Hiring of Influencer – EV staff contributed funds to help hire an influencer who promoted the Hemingway District Block Party on 4/11.
- Event Coordination & Marketing – EV staff consulted with Big Buzz Idea Group, a firm providing event and marketing services to NFPs, to discuss assistance with managing and marketing larger events and launching in-district shopping events; it was determined that their services well exceeded budget flexibility, but could be considered for future assistance such as the upcoming Chicago Avenue reconstruction project.

- Event Marketing – EV staff has engaged with Hubbard Media (101.9 FM) on a marketing campaign to draw customers to the district; the EV office will fund a \$7,500 on-site event where The Mix Road Crew will attend the “On the Road Again” reopening event, promoting the event to the broader Chicagoland area on their media and doing ticket giveaways for a two-hour period.
- Frontline Employee Training – in partnership with Triton College, the EV office initiated, hosted, and promoted free customer service training for OP businesses, with registration preference given to Hemingway businesses.
- Business Attraction – EV staff continues to make concerted efforts to find new businesses to fill current vacant spaces, including the former bank building at 104 N. Oak Park Avenue, available spaces in the Scoville Square building, and 701 Lake Street.
- Placer.ai – EV staff has met with Hemingway Board representatives on utilizing Placer to analyze data, including number, frequency, and demographics of district/event visitors
- Village Staff Support of Restaurants – EV Staff recommended to HR that priority consideration be given to Hemingway restaurants when ordering food for Village Hall (e.g., Mulata Kitchen + Coffee ordered for recent Lunch & Learn session).

Individual Businesses

- 7-Eleven – EV staff reached out to corporate regarding planned national closures; contact stated no planned closure of OP’s two stores (EV staff offered to assist in any regard)
- 133 Management – Staff has worked with the property ownership at 125-133 S. Oak Park Avenue regarding grant opportunities available for façade improvements, as well as finding different avenues to support their tenants with improvements to their individual businesses. Staff has worked with the property owner to discuss outdoor dining behind the establishment, as an alternative to their tenants’ during construction.
- AfriWare Books (M, W) – EV staff highlighted the store via the *Independent Bookstore Day* social media promotion (posts specifically involving the business tallied 314 “likes” and were shared 53 times).
- Avenue Nail Spa (M, W) – EV staff met with owner re: parking, grants, and marketing
- Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices (W) – EV staff met one of the office’s realtors at a Chamber business after hours; discussed and offered assistance regarding RTA.
- Billy Bricks – Development Services Staff have connected with the owner of the restaurant regarding the potential of upgrading some kitchen equipment and some interior improvements to benefit from the available grant programs.
- Café Cubano (M, W) – EV staff patronized the restaurant and met with the owner regarding RTA and other business needs; staff followed up on these discussions with an email outlining updates and options for each item discussed; EV staff has also responded to several other complaints from the business owner, offering

information on small business loans and connecting them with the RTA engineering team; EV staff also attended the Hemingway District happy hour event at Café Cubano.

- Candycopia (W) – Development Services Staff worked with the business owner as they were awarded some grant funds for hiring influencers to promote candy in the store. EV staff patronized the business, left a business card with an employee, and asked that the owner reach out if they needed any assistance
- Citrine – EV staff reached out to owner regarding a potential retention visit; received no response
- Collaboration for Early Childhood (W) – EV staff met with Collab staff to understand their support needs; staff shared grant and program information relevant to businesses and populations served by the NFP.
- Color Me Mine (M, W) – Development Services Staff worked with the business owners to assist them with their grant application. The owner participated in the Pick Oak Park holiday video.
- Cucina Paradiso – Development Services Staff worked with the owner in the build-out of the rear area of 814 North Blvd. Assisted the business owner with several grant opportunities available. EV staff attended Hemingway Happy Hour at Cucina, spoke with the owner, and shared contact information if assistance were to be needed.
- Dandelion Bookshop (W) – EV staff has communicated with the owner multiple times, including updates regarding Barnes & Noble and support regarding installation of a security system; Development Services Staff also highlighted the store via the *Independent Bookstore Day* social media promotion (posts specifically involving the business tallied 363 “likes” and were shared 38 times).
- FILONI (W) – EV staff reached out to the owner regarding a potential retention visit; received no response.
- Garland Flowers (W) – EV staff patronized the business and took time to speak with the owner about the RTA project, offering assistance moving forward.
- Gem Home + Jewelry (W) – Development Services Staff connected with them regarding the several grant opportunities available. Staff also highlighted Gem during the Bike to the Biz promo video.
- George’s Family Restaurant – EV staff set up meetings and visited the restaurant multiple times to discuss the project with the owner and staff; followed up with additional info and support in June and again in August, and has continued to respond to restaurant staff outreach.
- Grape Leaves Restaurant (M) – EV staff patronized the restaurant and reached out to the owner about potentially meeting to discuss the RTA project and its impacts on their business and the district in general; Development Services Staff connect with the business owner and manager regularly regarding grant opportunities and the expansion of the restaurant. Grape Leaves is also working on expanding its

dining by creating an outdoor patio in the parking lot that connects to their business.

- Heritage Tile – Development Services Staff connect with the business owner regularly regarding potential improvements to the space that would qualify for the grant program. EV staff spoke with an employee at Hemingway District Happy Hour at Lively Athletics, shared contact information if assistance were to be needed.
- Il Vicolo – Development Services Staff met with the business owner regularly regarding potential improvements to the space that would qualify for the grant program. EV staff spoke with the owner at Hemingway District Happy Hour at Cucina Paradiso and shared contact information if assistance were to be needed.
- Lively Athletics (W) – Development Services Staff met with the business owner to discuss the different improvements they had scheduled for their space and how they could benefit from the grant opportunities. EV staff visited the store to introduce themselves to new ownership; staff left a business card with an employee and asked that the owner reach out if they needed any assistance regarding marketing and promotional events; staff also attended the Hemingway District happy hour event at the business.
- Maya Del Sol (M) – when DTOP asked for suggestions for a location for their annual meeting, due to Nineteenth Century Club not being available, JM suggested potentially finding a restaurant in the Hemingway District to host the event (DTOP selected Maya Del Sol and the event was attended by 40+ people); EV staff also participated in a walk-through of Hemingway District construction led by Maya Del Sol owner (Anan Abu-Taleb).
- Mindful Motion Physical Therapy – EV staff met with the owner to discuss opportunities to promote and grow the business, which led to strong opportunities for the business owner; the owner led a group activity at one of the Small Business Week events; the owner led a workshop on mindfulness meditation for Village Staff as recommended by EV staff.
- Mosaic Counseling & Wellness (W) – EV staff attended the ribbon-cutting on 5/28; staff has previously spoken with the owner and offered assistance for the business's three OP locations; multiple staff members have attended front-line worker training offered by EV office, and the owner and staff have provided positive testimonials about the programs' benefits.
- Mulata Kitchen + Coffee (M) – Village Staff have met several times with the owner regarding grant opportunities and opportunities to grow the business within OP.
- Oak Park Bank – Director of Commercial Development, Chris Griffith, spoke on the Funding & Finance Panel during National Small Business Week; EV staff has continued to connect OP Bank with potential clients.
- Oak Park Training & Performance – EV staff sent the owner a welcome/introductory e-mail and provided a digital copy of the small business resource guide. Development Services staff met with the business owners on a new sign for their business front and how they could benefit from the grant programs.

- Oath of Honor Medical Training (M, W) – EV staff sent the owner a welcome/introductory e-mail and provided a digital copy of the small business resource guide.
- Olive & Well (W) – EV staff met with the owner to discuss assistance when sidewalks in front of the store will be closed (and ramps placed), as well as promotion of 90-minute parking.
- R Titus Designs (W) – EV staff responded to the business owner's inquiry regarding the status of Hemingway window-washing and relayed an update from the Engineering team. Development Services Staff have met with the business owners to discuss the grant opportunities and worked with them to fill out the application.
- Rustico (M, W) – Development Services Staff have met with the business owner to discuss the impact they have felt from construction. Staff produced a video of the business to highlight some of the dishes and drinks at the restaurant. EV staff attended the OPRF Chamber of Commerce 'Meet us for Lunch' event at Rustico.
- Scratch On Lake – EV staff spoke with the owner while patronizing the restaurant for lunch.
- Seoul Avenue – EV staff patronized the restaurant and communicated with the owner regarding any assistance needed during RTA construction.
- Spilt Milk (M, W) – EV staff has spoken multiple times with business ownership, connecting them to appropriate Village staff regarding outdoor dining, grant programs, window signage, and vendor booths at the Farmers Market. Development Services Staff have met with the business owners to discuss the grant opportunities and how they can benefit from them.
- Style Society / Yoga Loft Studios (M, W) – EV staff met with the owners to discuss potential support for their monthly vendor markets; EV staff also worked diligently with Style Society ownership when they were seeking a location for a revised business concept, and JM counseled the Style Society owner on landlord negotiations.
- Taglio: A Slice of Rome – EV staff sent the owner a welcome/introductory e-mail and provided a digital copy of the small business resource guide.
- The Oak Ave Barber (W) – EV staff patronized the business and met with the business owner regarding RTA and other business needs; EV connected the owner with DS regarding a profile on the RTA website and grant opportunities to reinvest in the business and building.
- THE WOLF (M) – Development Services Staff have met with the business owners to discuss the grant opportunities and how they can benefit from them. They were awarded funds for the improvements made to their business.
- Tony's Shoe Clinic (M) – EV staff reached out to the owner regarding a potential retention visit; received no response.
- Village & Vessel (W) – EV staff met with the business owner regarding RTA and other business needs; staff offered suggestions during the meeting, and as part of their follow-up for how to increase awareness and potential customers; shared external grant information; shared contact information for a discounted table at the

Arts District's What's Blooming event. Development Services Staff have met with the business owners to discuss the grant opportunities and how they can benefit from them. They were awarded some funds for some investments made to their business. Staff produced a video highlighting Village and Vessel and shared it throughout social media.

Parentheses next to the business name reflect that the business is fully or partially:

(M) – Minority-owned

(W) – Woman-owned

(M, W) – Minority/Woman-owned