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Sells lays out agenda for new Riverside village board

Focus on river access, central business district

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By [Bob Uphues](#)
Editor

While many people either didn't much care or intentionally chose to take a pass on Tuesday, Riverside held an election for its village president and trustees. The election was uncontested, which helps to explain the very low voter turnout — 21.61 percent, according to the Cook County Clerk.

But with the election of Ben Sells as president and Patricia Collins, Ellen Hamilton and Doug Pollock as trustees, those who follow local government in Riverside will soon see a number of changes in the way the village board conducts its business.

In an interview with the Landmark on April 10, Sells laid out his immediate agenda for the new board.

At the heart of his agenda is beginning to implement some recommendations from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's downtown comprehensive plan, which the village board is expected to adopt on April 15.

"I don't want to get pulled in too many directions at once," said Sells. "What I want to focus on is river access and the central business district."

Part of that process will be to forego the board's tradition of holding just one business meeting during summer months. Instead, the village board will meet twice a month through the summer to begin tackling the CMAP plan, Sells said.

"I want to have a meeting prioritizing the CMAP recommendations. By having two meetings per month, it will give us a chance to focus on that," Sells said.

Sells said that one part of the CMAP plan he'd also like to address is the recommendation to streamline the approval process for new development in the village. Currently, anyone seeking to develop land in Riverside must go through an often cumbersome process involving multiple advisory commissions.

Upon taking office after being sworn in on May 6, Sells said he will send letters to all commissions asking them to study their establishment ordinances and get input on modifying the commissions' duties, particularly ones that overlap with each other.

"It's time to take a fresh look at how we do things," said Sells, noting that one option, an idea from Village Manager Peter Scalera, might be to make the village's Plan Commission a kind of "super-commission" populated by members of the various advisory commissions in the village and making that body the clearinghouse for development matters.

Meetings moving to Thursdays

In addition to those possible changes, Riverside's village board will change its meeting date and time. Beginning in June, the Riverside village board will move its meetings to the first and third Thursdays of each



Ben Sells
Riverside president-elect

month at 7 p.m.

The reason for the change is to accommodate the work schedule of new trustee Doug Pollock, who works as village planner for Burr Ridge. That village's meetings coincide with Riverside's, and Pollock is required to be at those meetings as part of his job, said Sells.

While the board won't return to the practice of holding separate, discussion-only committee-of-the-whole sessions, Sells said meeting agendas won't be rigidly set. Instead, he explained, he may set the order of the agenda at the beginning of each meeting and set aside a portion of each meeting for "consideration," or a general, open discussion of ideas.

"We'll experiment with different ways of running meetings," said Sells, who is also going to discontinue the practice of assigning trustees as liaisons to departments, such as public safety, public works, building and recreation. Trustees will also no longer read the staff-prepared resolutions or ordinances up for consideration.

Instead, he said, staff members responsible for researching and writing the proposed resolutions and ordinances will present the items to the board. The goal, he said, is to involve staff members more in the process.

The only area where board members will still actively serve as liaisons is finance. Sells wasn't sure exactly how that role would play out, whether one or two trustees would serve as chairs of finance or whether he might create a finance committee of both trustees and staff to handle those issues.

Trustees, however, will retain their roles as liaisons to the various advisory commissions of the village, Sells said.