

# Paving the path forward

If you've ever walked through our village, glanced at a crumbling sidewalk, or waited a little too long for water to drain from your street, you could be forgiven for thinking to yourself, "What's the plan here?"

We're relieved to report that there is, in fact, a plan — a Capital Improvement Plan that's about more than just fixing roads or adding a few benches to a park. It's about us, and our collective investment in the community of which we want to feel proud, in which we want to feel safe, and to which we want to feel connected — for years to come.

The truth is, a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) can sound like a big bureaucratic bundle of "things government does." But, at its heart, it is a deeply human endeavor. In addition to serving as a formalized infrastructural to-do list, a CIP is a strategic and prioritized plan that ensures our hard-earned taxpayer dollars are allocated wisely, our competing needs are balanced, and our community vision remains clear.

The Village of Saranac Lake's Capital Improvement Plan Task Force has been hard at work drafting a plan that considers both current needs and future goals. Created in March, this task force has spent the past nine months engaging with village staff, a municipal consultant and the community at large to identify and prioritize projects using focused criteria. These criteria help us make thoughtful, community-driven decisions, by evaluating each project's economic benefit, financing options, community impact, alignment with strategic goals, level of risk and effect on the village's operating budget.

The CIP enables us to be proactive, rather than reactive. It considers maintenance and improvement of our roads, parks, buildings and water systems. It takes care of things we depend on daily but might not always think about. It isn't particularly glamorous, but it embodies a commitment to wisely spending taxpayer funds. It's an act of stewardship, balancing necessary improvements with the money we have and planning for projects in ways that spread costs out over time. In that same vein, we can (usually) avoid costly last-minute fixes by keeping a plan in place and focusing on proactive maintenance. This helps us stretch every dollar and reduces the strain on residents' wallets.

Just imagine the impact on our village if we get this right: better roads, increased efficiency of water systems, beautiful parks, resilient emergency services and a more vibrant downtown. By following a well-organized CIP, staff have a blueprint to pursue grants and other funding opportunities, ensuring our village has the resources it needs to meet current and future demands. Sharing these priorities publicly is also basic good government — it keeps us accountable, aligned and connected to the people we serve.

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This is our chance to build out community infrastructure that reflects our values. Our village is so much more than a smattering of streets, pipes and trees; it's where we make memories, raise families and connect with neighbors. And these are the corresponding capital projects that make our village a little safer, a little more beautiful, a little more accessible and a little more prepared for whatever challenges come next. At the end of the day, the CIP is really our community's love letter to itself, written in concrete, brick, water mains and the occasional park bench.

It is the primary tool we should be using to intentionally build a stronger Saranac Lake — one that's ready for tomorrow, while rooted in today.