



Ten Important Reasons to Stay Engaged ***Jennifer Karras - Former Alderman, First Ward***

"Our vote on Election Day is, in some ways, only one small role we play in the governance of our city. Work of governance involves all of us; we must be engaged to share our voices, ideas and input. Only by marching together does society turn toward its best self."

Chicago faith leaders Rabbi Seth Limmer and the Revs. Otis Moss III, Ciera Bates-Chamberlain and Michael Pflieger in their Opinion published in the Chicago Tribune, April 2, 2023.

Tomorrow, the Lake Forest mayoral election comes to a close. Whether you're happy with the outcome or not, here are ten important reasons to stay actively involved in our local government and community:

1. Reliable news sources have all but disappeared. The Patch and Lake Forester continue to run occasional coverage of community news. That's not enough to stay well informed of issues and matters being addressed by our school and City boards, commissions and of course, City Council. Agendas for City board, commission and Council meetings are available 48 hours prior to a scheduled meeting. Find them online or sign up for the City's weekly eNews for details on upcoming public meetings.
2. Trust has declined and respect for others has deteriorated. For nearly 90 years the residents of Lake Forest have put its faith and trust in the Lake Forest Caucus. Yet, its decision in November to throw out a public vote because the result didn't affirm its mayoral candidate left us scratching our heads. No one should question the value and validity of the Caucus system. It works and is vitally important. Caucus leadership, however, must be held responsible for deviating from established bylaws that guide their procedures. Maintaining good government and restoring our faith in the Caucus depend on it. Our Caucus should also hold our elected officials and board and commission members (Caucus backed candidates for those positions) accountable by observing them throughout their service.
3. Civic duty. At some point, able adult residents should raise their hand to volunteer. Lake Forest is blessed with so many special organizations, including the Lake Forest Library, Gorton Center, Open Lands Association and Elawa Farm, that have boards in addition to the City's 20 boards and commissions. There are ample opportunities to lend your energy, experience, expertise and ideas. Doing so enables these groups and Lake Forest to thrive. As Plato wrote, "This city is what it is because our citizens are what they are."

Lake Forest for Transparency

4. Meet and appreciate thy neighbor, and not just those next door or down the street. Lake Forest is roughly 17 square miles with some 20,000 residents who share a mutual love for everything it offers us. Interacting with fellow Lake Foresters as volunteers is a wonderful way to meet others who live here for the very same reasons.
5. Engage in open and honest debate. Discussion of issues and policy is more constructive when individuals with diverse voices and viewpoints take part. We're not always going to see eye-to-eye, but we can agree to come together and work in the best interest of Lake Forest. Let's also encourage a discourse free of partisanship and one that's respectful of each other.
6. Lake Forest belongs to everyone living in it. We've experienced an incredible influx of new residents over the past two years. More than 1,400 new families. I hope our newest neighbors are motivated to get involved, donate their time and share their intellectual capital to help lead Lake Forest forward, building on our treasured legacies.
7. Conscientious stewards of our extraordinary natural gifts. It's our responsibility to protect our environment, particularly Lake Michigan, the Skokie River and our ravines, which are part of our storm water system. We have a collective obligation to make sure they're managed sensitively.
8. Preservation of our beautiful town and historic districts. Lake Forest is distinctive for its steadfast commitment to preservation. Our town's beauty, architectural history, lakefront and open lands is what attracts new families and what brings back grown children to raise their families. We have a dedicated Lake Forest Preservation Foundation and Historic Preservation Commission that ensure we adhere to the guardrails set forth in our historic preservation ordinances.
9. Our children and their children. One of our highest priorities is the education of our children and Lake Forest is fortunate to have an admired and strong public school system that graduates outstanding students and citizens. There are many ways to support our public education system, from joining an Association of Parents and Teachers (APT), the Spirit of 67 Foundation, Lake Forest High School Foundation, LFHS Boosters and Applause, to being considered for a school board position.
10. VOTE. Before you head to the polls, know the candidates and issues appearing on the ballot. Gather first-hand information. Stay in contact with your elected representatives, attend ward meetings and meet the Caucus candidates when they're presented at the Annual Meeting. Consider attending the Caucus Spring Meeting (TBA), City Council, Plan Commission, and other meetings of interest. You can also watch them live on Channel 17 or view a replay of a recent meeting from the City's website.

Thank you to the thousands of Lake Foresters who volunteer. Lake Forest is a much better place to live because of your contributions and generosity!