

WILL COUNTY FY2025 FEDERAL AGENDA

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & HOUSING

- ❖ Community Development Block Grant Program
- ❖ HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME)
- ❖ Affordable Housing
- ❖ Homeless Emergency Solutions Grant / Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) / Continuum of Care (CoC)
- ❖ Homeless Services Grants and Housing Vouchers
- ❖ HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program
- ❖ Transition from Homelessness Program

ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- ❖ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

- ❖ DuPage River Study
- ❖ Renewable Natural Gas (RNG) Plant
- ❖ Renewable Fuel Standard
- ❖ Complimentary Federal Policies and Incentives

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

- ❖ Will County Health Department and Community Health Center
- ❖ Medicaid and 340B Program
- ❖ Substance Use and Mental Health
- ❖ Opioid Epidemic – A Public Health Emergency
- ❖ Will County Peer Support Specialist Program
- ❖ Cottage Food Law
- ❖ Expand Access to Vaccines for Uninsured Adults
- ❖ Provide Funding, through WIC, for Breastfeeding Assistance
- ❖ Expand the Public Health Workforce and Prevent the Cliff in ARPA-Funded Services

INFRASTRUCTURE & LAND USE

- ❖ Transportation
- ❖ Competing for Federal Grants
- ❖ Infrastructure Plans and Studies
- ❖ Transportation Project Priorities
- ❖ Agricultural Exports
- ❖ Sewer and Water

PUBLIC SAFETY

- ❖ Emergency Management Performance Grant Program (EMPG)
- ❖ Port Security Grant Program (PSG)

- ❖ Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grant Program (HMEP)
- ❖ FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & HOUSING

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

The Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) has been a critical component to Will County's neighborhood improvement and affordable housing goals. Virtually every township and neighborhood in the County has benefited from this program. Many of the beneficiaries of the program are low- and moderate-income households.

Will County supports increased funding for CDBG in FY 2025. It is important to protect the CDBG program, as it provides positive and direct impact it has on Will County's ability to fund unique housing, infrastructure, and economic development needs.

Over the past 20 years, the Will County CDBG entitlement grant has leveraged funds at a \$4.40 to \$1 ratio. Implicit in this program goal is the reality that low-income neighborhoods do not generate a sufficient tax base necessary to pay for needed neighborhood improvements. CDBG leverages local and other federal funds to bring about the necessary improvements to these communities.

Other uses of CDBG funds:

- *Affordable Housing for Seniors.* Affordable housing is also a critical need in the County. As with many communities throughout the state, the senior population is growing and the need for affordable housing options are limited. To help seniors "age in place," CDBG funds are used to fund a Safe @ Home program that pays for home repairs and rehab such as roof repairs, HVAC, accessibility, and plumbing help eligible elderly stay safely housed. To date, the program has helped 116 senior households with critical rehab and repairs.
- *Sewer and Water Projects.* A substantial amount of the county's annual CDBG funds are directed towards sewer and water infrastructure projects. Typically, these projects impact between 150 and 350 households. An ongoing multiyear project funded by CDBG that will be completed this year is the transfer of water and sewer service from Township services to City of Joliet services, which includes 890 homes. This multijurisdictional project ensures safe water and sewer service to residents of unincorporated Fairmont. The unincorporated areas known as Preston Heights and East Joliet are also areas with deteriorating water and sewer infrastructure that will likely need assistance in the future. CDBG also assists low moderate income areas located within municipal boundaries of communities. The most recent project completed in Wilmington replaced a water main and lead service lines.
- *Support for Low-Income Populations.* In addition to public infrastructure improvement projects, CDBG also allows for 15 percent of the allocation to be used for public service projects. CDBG funds are used to support non-profits that serve low-income populations. Examples of projects include homeless prevention programs, Guardian Ad-litem training program for abused and neglected children, food pantry assistance, and housing counseling programs for foreclosure prevention and homebuyers.

HOME INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (HOME)

Since 1992, Will County has been awarded \$25.5 million in HUD HOME funds. The County deliberately utilizes these funds to support affordable housing projects, including acquisition, construction, rehabilitation, home buyer assistance, and tenant-based rental assistance. HOME

funds have enabled Will County to leverage over \$27 million in private investment and create opportunities to revitalize and build affordable housing projects.

Will County supports increased funding for HOME for FY 2025.

HOME Funded Projects in Will County:

- The County partners with Habitat for Humanity for development of affordable homes and each HOME investment leverages between 25 and 50 percent of donated time and material. A project currently underway is a 10-unit (5 duplex's) development in Elwood.
- \$2.2 million of HOME funds have been used during this Consolidated Plan to increase affordable housing through homebuyer programs including down payment assistance. This program was particularly critical as interest rates rose because it helped families close the gap. To date the program has assisted 65 low to moderate income households secure affordable homes throughout Will County,
- During the last program year, \$220,300 of HOME funds were used to help 57 renters secure units through tenant based rental assistance program.
- HOME funds are also used to rehab group homes that serve people with disabilities.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Will County has a limited supply of rental housing at a level of 13% compared to 35% regionally. The lack of available rental housing hinders the availability of affordable housing options serving low-moderate income families, and creates higher demand which increases rental rates and further creates additional hurdles for families to maintain stable housing. In a recent report by the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, the ability to afford housing Illinois is \$22.80 per hour, while most essential worker (such as retail, food service, janitorial, and health care workers) earn far below that. Affordable housing units for our residents are desperately needed. The construction of new units and policy updates that reduce barriers to development of multi-family and non-congregate shelters are County priorities.

HOMELESS EMERGENCY SOLUTIONS GRANT / EMERGENCY SOLUTIONS GRANT (ESG) / CONTINUUM OF CARE (CoC)

Will County supports increased funding for the ESG program for FY 2025. Will County has been awarded approximately \$2.5 million in HUD ESG funds since the program's inception in 1990. However, the county did not receive an allocation for FY2023.

The ESG program and the CoC programs are the cornerstones of the County's system to end homelessness. ESG funded street outreach, homelessness prevention and diversion, emergency shelter and rapid re-housing. Those services now need funding from other sources, or the County will be forced to cease services. The CoC program funds permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, transitional housing, and coordinated entry.

HOMELESS SERVICES GRANTS AND HOUSING VOUCHERS

Will County supports increased funding for homeless services grants and housing vouchers. The Continuum of Care program, serving Will, Kendall, and Grundy counties has successfully secured approximately \$4.5 million annually through competitive application to assist in ending homelessness. The County's ESG funds were used in tandem with the CoC funds for homeless prevention by providing much needed rental assistance to households at risk of homelessness. To

end homelessness, the Continuum of Care system needs increased funding to account for the loss of County ESG funds, changing market conditions and limited affordable housing stock.

HUD VETERANS AFFAIRS SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAM

Will County supports increased funding for the HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Program and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV). These programs provide rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA provides these services for participating Veterans at VA medical centers (VAMCs) and community-based outreach clinics.

TRANSITION FROM HOMELESSNESS (PATH) PROGRAM

Will County supports increased federal funding for the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) Program. The County receives approximately \$100,000 annually from the program through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This funding level has remained the same and does not account for cost of living increases. The lack of a PATH COLA means fewer individuals can be served.

Will County supports provisions in the following legislation and encourage inclusion in future legislative proposals:

- *Incentivize Increasing Affordable Housing Options* – Affordable and Homeless Housing Incentives Act of 2023 (H.R. 5176) would allow the profit earned from the sale of homes to qualified housing operators to be excluded from income for tax purposes. The Strengthening Housing Supply Act of 2024 (H.R. 6948) would authorize CDBG funds to be used for affordable housing construction.
- *Capital Support to Repair Public* – Housing Is Infrastructure Act (H.R. 4497, 117th Congress) and the American Housing and Economic Mobility Act (S. 1368 and H.R. 2768, 117th Congress) proposed investing \$75 billion to fully address the capital needs to repair public housing, \$45 billion in the national Housing Trust Fund, and \$200 billion for rental assistance.
- *Investment in Public Housing Construction* – Affordable HOME Act (S. 2234 and H.R. 5385, 117th Congress) proposed investing \$45 billion in the national Housing Trust Fund to build rental homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes and \$70 billion to preserve public housing. The bill provides funding to support an additional one million housing vouchers and creates a national right to counsel, among many other changes.
- *The Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act (AHCIA) of 2023* (S. 1557 and H.R. 3238) would restore the 12.5% Low Income Housing Tax Credit cap increase that expired in 2021 and further increase allocation by 50% over two years and improve the LIHTC to bolster affordable housing stock.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & WORKFORCE

WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA)

Will County's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs are administered through a partnership between the Workforce Investment Board of Will County, the Will County Executive, and the Will County Board. The Workforce Investment Board is made up of a diverse group of business and community leaders in Will County which sets policies for the WIOA programs offered in the County. These local programs are developed to ensure that the residents and employers of Will County are the focus of the funds and that there is flexibility to change those programs and initiatives to meet rapidly changing local workforce needs. In recent years, the Workforce Investment Board has seen an increase in job seekers and has made an effort to educate lawmakers on how programming helps customers find jobs.

Will County supports increased funding for the WIOA State Formula Grant program. Funding for workforce programs under the WWIOA ranges from approximately \$4.2 million to \$5.0 million yearly. These funds are used to provide workforce services and training to adults and youth with barriers to employment as well as dislocated workers. Services include, but are not limited to, occupational skill training, job search assistance, resume preparation, job search workshops, math and reading skill enhancement and work readiness training. Additionally, funds are used to assist Will County businesses with recruiting, retaining, and training their workforce ensuring local companies remain productive and competitive, and most importantly, that they stay in business.

WILL COUNTY SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING POLICY CHANGES TO WIOA:

- *Equity in operational cost sharing for one-stop center.* Require that a mandatory percentage contribution from each WIOA partner be paid to the local workforce board to support the operations of the one-stop center. Currently all partners are required to pay for the operations of the center, but the amount each pay is negotiated locally, which can result in WIOA Title I (Workforce Services Division) covering operational costs other partners do not pay.
- *Administrative relief.* Allow for the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to approve a continuation of service of the One-Stop-Operator (OSO) if the service is deemed satisfactory. Currently, the service must be bid regardless of if entities would like to continue the agreement.
- *Programmatic funding flexibility.* Having additional flexibility to transfer to different WIOA programs (adult, dislocated worker, and youth) is needed. Specifically, provide local workforce boards the flexibility to determine the percentage of youth funds allocated to work-based learning based on need. The mandate that requires 20% of all youth funds be spent on work-based learning which results in less youth funding available for short-term skills training, which has a greater impact on a youth's ability to get and keep a job.
- *Maintain the Workforce Board requirement of 20% labor participation.* Increases in labor participation on the board would result in more private sector participants.
- *Remove deterrents to employer participation.* Remove the requirement that employers provide Social Security Numbers for all employees when applying for employee grants, i.e., incumbent worker funds. This requirement creates a deterrent and barrier for applicants who do not wish to disclose such information about their employees.

- *Increased funding for upskilling training* and include staff time as a measure for direct training for resume building, interview skills, and other critical skills for job seekers. These changes could provide additional tools in addressing the teacher shortage.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

DUPAGE RIVER STUDY

Will County has continued its partnership with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in the implementation of the DuPage River Study.

The DuPage River and tributaries drain approximately 353 square miles in suburban Cook, DuPage and Will Counties in Metropolitan Chicago. The study area has experienced rapid development over the past two decades, and currently includes 40 communities affecting approximately 4,300,000 people. Major storm events are common, which result in significant overbank flooding in over 20 communities. The weather events cause significant damage to residential and non-residential structures, critical infrastructure has closed two major interstate highways (I-80 and I-55) for several days.

In August 2019, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District, approved the DuPage River, Illinois Feasibility Report and Integrated Environmental Assessment. The feasibility study investigated flood risks within the DuPage River watershed in northeastern Illinois and identified potential solutions to mitigate those risks. The study sought to address the impacts of flooding to structures, infrastructure, and the transportation system. In addition, there continues to be concern regarding the health and safety of residents due to impacts on water and sewage systems from high river and groundwater levels.

Will County supports increasing annual programmatic funding for USACE Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) to implement components of the DuPage River Study.

Current Project Status:

Will County secured language in the Fiscal Year 2020 Energy & Water Appropriations spending bill that directed the Army Corps to expedite the implementation of the feasibility study, “[t]he Corps is encouraged to expedite the implementation of feasibility studies approved in 2019 under section 206 of the Flood Control Act of 1958.” In May 2021, the County of Will entered into a Project Partnership Agreement with the Department of the Army for The DuPage River Nonstructural Flood Risk Management Project.

The County’s FY2024 budget includes \$694,226 in local match to pay for implementation of these projects. It is estimated that the total local match needed for all the construction projects under this study is roughly \$3 million. It is anticipated that the construction costs will be spread over the next four fiscal years, FY 2024-FY 2027. At the end of 2023 and early part of 2024, the County had purchased two (2) of the eight (8) homes in the buyout partnership agreements. In early 2024, the United States Army Corps of Engineers will continue with the flood proofing portion of the project.

RENEWABLE NATURAL GAS (RNG) PLANT

The County’s RNG Plant at the Prairie View Landfill opened October 2022. The Prairie View Landfill produces biogas that the County refines and converts into renewable natural gas (RNG) which is injected into a nearby natural gas pipeline grid for use as transportation fuel. This not only mitigates methane emissions but allows the County to generate additional revenue and reduce

vehicle emissions through replacement of diesel fuel with renewable compressed natural gas (RCNG).

Projections have shown that the County can expect, on an annual basis, to produce approximately 7.7 million diesel gallon equivalents (DGE) of renewable fuel and reduce CO2 emissions by approximately 60,000 metric tons. The RNG Plant is estimated to initially capture up to 4,500 standard cubic feet per minute (scfm) of landfill gas, with future estimates to capture up to 6,900 scfm as the landfill gas volumes increase over time.

The County supports and closely monitors federal legislation that is important to the success of the Prairie View Landfill gas upgrading project such as: (A) the Renewable Fuel Standard obligation levels; and (B) Complimentary Policies/Regulations, including the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

RENEWABLE FUEL STANDARD

The County depends on supportive federal policies designed to ensure stable and consistent RNG market demand and pricing. The fundamental policy driver helping to achieve this end has been the federal Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). The RFS was intended to promote investment, development, and use of four types of renewable fuels. The policy assured biofuel producers, developers, and investors that if RFS qualifying gallons of renewable fuel can be produced, there will be a buyer for them up to the annual statutory volume target in the law up to year 2022. Following the EPA release of the new Set Rule Summary on June 21, 2023, volume requirements have been established for future years, though the EPA has retained the authority to waive the volume requirements if necessary.

	c2021	2022	2023 Proposal	2024 Proposal	2025 Proposal	2023	2024	2025
Cellulosic biofuel	0.56	0.63	0.72	1.42	2.13	0.84	1.09	1.38
Biomass-based diesel*	2.43	2.76	2.82	2.89	2.95	2.82	3.04	3.35
Advanced biofuel	5.05	5.63	5.82	6.62	7.43	5.94	6.54	7.33
Renewable fuel	18.84	20.63	20.82	21.87	22.68	20.94	21.54	22.33
Supplemental Standard	n/a	0.25	0.25	n/a	n/a	0.25	n/a	n/a

*BBD volumes are given in billion gallons

The significance of the strength of the RFS policy and the federal market signal it sends creates demand for RNG and other biofuels. Going forward, it will be vital for the County to support the implementation of the Biogas Regulatory Reform Rule and encourage the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to continue issuing guidance in relation to the Rule.

Biogas Regulatory Reform Rule (BRRR): The EPA has established new definitions and regulations for RIN generation, RIN separation, RFS registration, and biointermediates in their Set Rule Summary released on June 21, 2023. As part of BRRR, D3 RINs received a 33% RVO increase over the 2022 mandate. The County must update their registration with EPA to prove the facility meets the new standards in place by BRRR by January 1, 2025.

It is expected that the new regulation will allow for the streamlining of registration and RIN generation. Though facilities will no longer be required to submit contracts or certificates of analysis at point of registration, this information is required in the three-year updates. The regulation also calls for specific measurement, record keeping, metering, and storage requirements. Details and specific requirements regarding BRRR can be found in the summary information provided to the County by EcoEngineers.

COMPLIMENTARY FEDERAL POLICIES AND INCENTIVES

Federal policies and programing continue to evolve to promote new and advanced technologies for biofuel production through tax breaks and subsidies.

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) created the Clean Fuel Production Credit (45Z). For clean fuels produced in the US and sold after December 31, 2024, and before January 1, 2028, the IRA established a new technology neutral ‘clean fuel production credit,’ referred to as 45Z. Clean fuels with less than 50 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalents per MMBtu qualify as clean fuels eligible for credits. Credit levels for each gallon or gallon equivalent of clean fuel production depend on the lifecycle carbon emissions associated with such fuel. The credit is equal to the applicable amount per gallon of fuel produced by the taxpayer at a qualified facility and then sold, multiplied by the emission factor for the fuel. The applicable amount for fuels produced at a qualified facility is 20 cents. A bonus rate of \$1.00 is available for taxpayers who meet prevailing wage requirements and satisfy apprenticeship requirements. Further guidance on 45Z is expected to come from EPA during the next 90 days.

WILL COUNTY SUPPORTS:

- *Continuation of Federal Renewable Fuel Standard.* The value proposition of the RNG plant to the County depends on supportive federal policies designed to ensure stable and consistent RNG market demand and pricing. The fundamental policy driver helping to achieve this end has been the federal Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). First passed in 2005 and then enhanced and passed again in 2007, the RFS was intended to promote investment, development, and use of four types of renewable fuels in increasing volume amounts up to a total of 36 billion gallons by 2022. The policy commits to biofuel producers, developers, and investors that, if RFS qualifying gallons of renewable fuel can be produced, there will be a buyer for the biofuel up to the annual statutory volume target in the law.

- *The EPA setting the Renewable Volume Obligations (RVOs) for the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) program for 2023.* Under the RFS statute, the following year's RVOs for the four categories of RFS fuels must be issued by November 30th of the previous year. Without prospective RVOs, the RFS does not function in the strong market driving capacity as intended, which negatively impacts demand and therefore RIN prices. The strength of the County's RNG plant and projected carbon emissions savings and additional revenue is dependent on strong market demand for RNG and RIN prices. The County supported the EPA releasing three years of RVOs in 2023 (2023-2025).
- *Extending the Investment Tax Credit (ITC) to biogas property that converts biomass into a gas which consists of not less than 52% methane or is concentrated by such system into a gas which consists of not less than 52% methane and captures such gas for productive use.* Electricity production is not a requirement.
- *Establishing a competitive grant program that prioritizes investments in waste reduction infrastructure, incentives and related activities located in, or directly serving, low-income and disadvantaged communities.*

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

WILL COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER

The Will County Health Department and Community Health Center relies on a variety of federal funding, including Title X family planning funding, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) funding, Maternal and Child Health Block Grant funding, Social Services Block Grant funding, SAMHSA funding, Emergency Preparedness and Response funding, and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

These resources enable the Health Department to focus on core public health programs such as food, water, sewage, communicable disease, as well as substance use and mental health treatment, and comprehensive primary care and dental care services through a public entity model Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). Will County supports increased funding for these programs to be able to maintain existing services and expand access for seniors, immigrants, and low-income communities.

The County utilized American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to hire needed staff and provide increased resources. As this funding expires at the end of 2024, the County is actively seeking opportunities to prevent this fiscal cliff so they can continue to provide the requisite resources to the community. To assist the County with applying for funds, an increase in data sharing with state and federal partners, including gathering data that increases accessibility for applying for funds, would be beneficial.

The Will County Health Department has an annual budget of roughly \$39 million. The FQHC receives roughly \$2.3 million in annual Community Health Center federal grant funding from HRSA. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) resulted in the uninsured population in Will County going from 50% to roughly 30%.

Will County supports expanded use of federal dollars for Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) for specialty services (e.g. optometry, school health, HIV, etc.). If allowed, the County would use a percentage of 330 funding for specialty care. The County currently operates a medical/dental vehicle that is dispatched approximately three times per week to provide vaccinations, physicals, checkups, and dental services throughout the County, where there is no hospital or urgent care center or where residents lack transportation. These services are critical, and maintenance costs for the van and medical/dental supplies are costly. Additional federal resources for a medical/dental vehicle maintenance cost would allow more funding to be used for health care services.

The Health Department is focused on addressing health equity and hired a health equity manager who coordinates with community-based organizations and local hospitals to identify ways to expand access to underserved communities. Additionally, the County employs several outreach specialist / health navigators to help the community access health care insurance coverage.

MEDICAID AND 340B PROGRAM

For several recent years, Medicaid was expanded to include care for seniors and new immigrants, however that funding ceased. The County supports reinstating this Medicaid coverage to increase access to care and limit the use of hospital and emergencies for these critical populations.

The County strongly supports allowing Medicaid payment for services furnished to individuals detained in local jails pretrial and during the 30-day period preceding to the individual's release from jail or prison to facilitate continuous access. Currently, when an individual is arrested, they automatically lose Medicaid coverage, even before conviction. The County supports continuing Medicaid coverage upon arrest. Further, reinstating coverage 30-days before release is critical to ensuring individuals have the behavioral health care and medical resources the moment they are released. To that end, the County supports the Due Process Continuity of Care Act (H.R. 3974 / S. 971) and Reentry Act of 2023 (H.R. 2400 / S. 1165) that supports providing these essential resources.

In addition to expanding Medicaid coverage, additional steps are needed to ensure equitable access to health coverage. One tool is the 340B Program, which is a drug discount program established by Congress in 1992. Under the program, drug manufacturers are required to offer significant discounts to covered entities – including community health centers (FQHCs) – on prescription medications. For uninsured patients, discounts are passed along to ensure medication is affordable and accessible. For insured patients, covered entities bill the payer and the difference between the discounted purchase price and the market rate reimbursement generates savings that are reinvested into care.

The National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) developed a comprehensive 340B strategy, which includes continuing to build support for the PROTECT 340B Act (H.R. 2534). The County supports the swift passage of this bill with added language to address manufacturer restrictions.

This program is a necessary tool in increasing access to health resources. The savings generated from the 340B Program are required to be reinvested into care. Health centers have a long track record of being a good steward of 340B and are subject to strict reporting requirements and auditing. There are concerns that pharmacy benefits managers (PBMs) have found creative ways to drain funds from the program – counter to the program's intent and harmful to patients. This legislation would enhance safeguards to ensure the 340B Program operates as Congress intended.

SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH

The County is expanding access to mental health and substance use services and supports expanding Medicare coverage for mental health and substance use treatments. 1 in 4 adults in the US experience a mental illness and more than half did not receive treatment in the past year. That leaves 122,803 Will County citizens over 18 may have a mental illness and 61,402 did not get treatment. 1 in 6 adults in the US experience a substance use disorder (SUD) and more than 90% did not receive treatment in the last year. In Will County 81,869 may have an SUD and 73,682 did not receive treatment. Current reimbursement rates should be more equitable and reflect market-appropriate rates for substance use and mental health care providers, which directly improve the quality of services individuals receive.

Medicare is always considered the primary provider and even if a client has a secondary insurance that covers substance use and mental health treatment, the client is denied access to services. There

are no providers in Will County who are able to treat substance use and mental health patients with Medicare. This is a huge stumbling block for access to care.

Will County supports the Parity Enforcement Act of 2023 (H.R. 3752) and Improving Mental Health and Drug Treatment Act of 2023 (H.R. 3892). Both bills would facilitate the ease of health access.

Ensuring there are high quality, well-trained staff continues to be a top issue for the County. Current credentialing barriers, including for clinical staffing, make it difficult to hire quickly and keep up with the staffing shortages resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

WILL COUNTY SUPPORTS:

- *Adequate funding to address substance use and mental health issues.* In addition to the critical federal funding specifically for the Community Health Center is the lack of adequate funding to address substance use and mental health issues. While supplemental funding to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and increased dollars for telehealth was beneficial, these funding streams are coming to a close, which will leave populations that still need critical support without access. The County is utilizing some funding from the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program on equity initiatives to identify how to promote access and support to all County residents. Increased federal resources for County workforce focused on public health is needed as resources tied to mitigating COVID-19 decrease.
- *Closely integrate substance use and mental health with primary care.* Substance use and mental health are as important as physical health, yet fee-for-service reimbursement rates are not equitable. Behavioral health has not been a priority in the medical community until very recently with the significant increase in opioid overdoses and the need for Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). The Will County Health Department supports substance use and mental health be more closely integrated with primary care.
 - In Will County there is a shortage of substance use and mental health providers, mostly due to low reimbursement rates from insurance companies and Medicaid. This shortage has been exacerbated throughout the pandemic. When hospital services are covered under insurance, the patient is discharged as soon as stabilized but not yet well. In most cases they are not yet linked to appropriate outpatient services for critical follow-up outpatient care.
 - The data on increased homelessness, opioid deaths, crime, drug, and alcohol use are all indicators of a stressed society. To combat this fact, additional mental health and substance use treatment resources are critically needed.
- *Policy responses and federal funding for expanding the workforce for mental health and substance use treatment.* The County has responded to multiple large-scale health emergencies (COVID-19, Monkey Pox, H1N1, etc.) that require well-trained, high-quality staff. Sufficient funding to enable the Health Department to hire professionals before an emergency occurs would allow accelerated care and keep the community safe. The federal government should prioritize recruitment programs and incentives for skilled health care providers, substance abuse treatment specialists, and other FQHC employees. These health care providers and facilities are often strained and overutilized by local populations that

turn to these resources first if they lack insurance or are unaware of how to access healthcare in their communities.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC – A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

Drug overdoses remain a public health crisis. We can no longer only categorize the problem as an “opioid epidemic” but rather an “overdose epidemic”. The deadly opioid fentanyl is being mixed with all drugs including stimulants like cocaine and methamphetamine and counterfeit pills (Xanax, Adderall, Vicodin) sold as prescription drugs. An increasing number of deaths are a combination of fentanyl and Xylazine. Xylazine is a non-opioid sedative and analgesic that can't be reversed by naloxone.

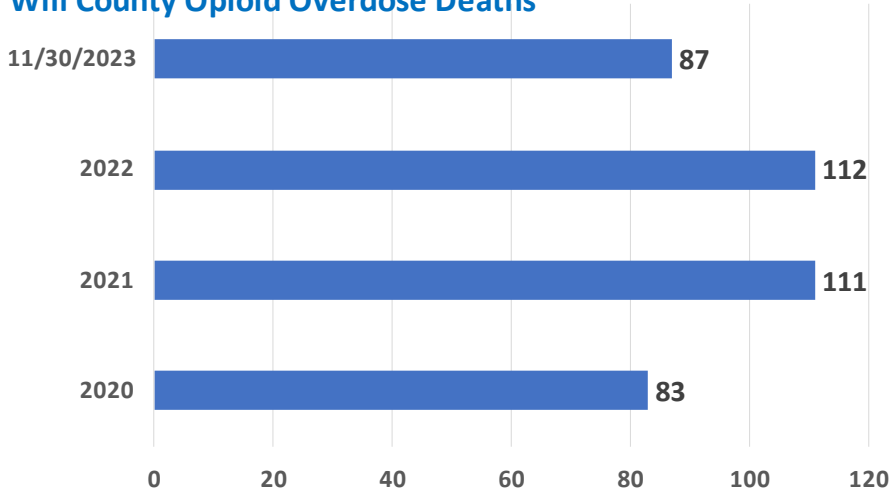
Overdose deaths from opioids, including prescription painkillers and synthetics like fentanyl, continue to rise. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 187 people in the U.S. die every day of opioid overdoses, most involving illicit and dangerous versions of fentanyl. Between 2019 and 2021, synthetic opioid fatalities led by fentanyl poisonings among US children under 14 years old increased faster than among any other age group. Overdose deaths among pregnant or postpartum people skyrocketed between 2018 and 2021 (JAMA Psychiatry). Fentanyl is involved in more deaths of Americans under 50 than any other cause of death, including heart disease, cancer, and all other accidents.

Opioid overdose deaths in Will County in 2023 saw a small decline (8% to date). The County has made a concerted effort to saturate Will County with naloxone, the antidote to an opioid overdose. Between January 2022 and December 2023 over 15,954 boxes of Narcan and 3,221 fentanyl and xylazine test strips have been distributed across the County. Narcan is available free of charge through an Illinois Department of Human Services Substance Use Prevention and Recovery (SUPR) grant. Since September 2016, Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Substance Use Prevention and Recovery (IDHS/SUPR) has been awarded over \$110 million across four federal grants to address the opioid crisis from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Continuation of this funding and inclusion of fentanyl test strips is critical to maintain in order to reduce overdose deaths. The County strongly supports HALT Fentanyl Act (H.R. 467 and S. 1141) and urges swift passage in the Senate.

Federal funding and grant guidelines for Naloxone distribution and harm reduction should allow purchasing of fentanyl test strips. Fentanyl test strips are a low-cost method of helping prevent drug overdoses and reducing harm. Fentanyl test strips are small strips of paper that can detect the presence of fentanyl in all different kinds of drugs (cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, etc.) and drug forms (pills, powder, and injectables).

There are still residual impacts from the pandemic—such as prolonged social isolation and stress, people using drugs alone, an overall increase in rates of alcohol and drug use, and decreased access to substance use treatment, harm reduction services, and emergency services—that exacerbated these trends. Access to follow-up care for substance use treatment and recovery was also curtailed during the pandemic, leaving many who had completed treatment without adequate peer support or a care team to support their ongoing recovery.

Will County Opioid Overdose Deaths



Data from Will County Coroner

WILL COUNTY PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST PROGRAM

Through shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment, peer support workers help people become and stay engaged in the recovery process and reduce the likelihood of relapse. Will County supports continued funding for the Department of Labor Disaster Recovery National Dislocated Worker Grant Program (IOCDWG). In FY 2022, Will County received Congressionally Directed Spending to hire temporary disaster relief employees (Recovery Coaches/Peer Support Specialists) to alleviate the effects of the opioid crisis across the County. These funds established a partnership with nine (9) behavioral health agencies and nineteen (19) recovery coach/peer support specialist trainees. The Recovery Coach team is comprised of dislocated workers and incumbent workers (currently underemployed or unemployed) who support individuals struggling with a substance use disorder. Additional funding is needed to grow and expand this type of workforce development program to maximize its impact.

There are barriers to the expansion of this resource. Reimbursement is only provided to mental health peer support specialists and not substance use specialists. All insurers including Medicaid and Medicare should provide this funding. Additionally, the County supports federal initiatives that complement the work being done at the state level to address workforce shortages. State laws like the Health Care Worker Background Check Act (225 ILCS 46), which applies to all unlicensed individuals employed or retained by a health care employer, could be enhanced with corresponding federal legislation. Individuals with disqualifying convictions are prohibited from working in any of the above positions unless a waiver has been granted by the Department of Public Health. However, the Department of Public Health only provides waivers for licensed individuals. There is currently no mechanism to receive a waiver for unlicensed individuals.

WILL COUNTY SUPPORTS:

- *Continued federal funding, via SAMHSA, of the state-administered Drug Overdose Prevention Program (DOPP).* The grants provided by the program have been used by Will

County to distribute and provide education on the use of naloxone and other overdose prevention methods.

- *Removal of the Medicaid IMD exclusion in federal mental health – substance use disorder legislation to improve access to care for people with a mental health/substance use disorder.* The Federal IMD Exclusion prohibits states from using Medicaid to pay for care provided in “institutions for mental disease” (IMDs), which are psychiatric hospitals or other residential treatment facilities that have more than 16 beds. This is the only part of the federal Medicaid law that prohibits payment for the cost of providing medically necessary care because of the type of illness being treated. The IMD exclusion is discriminatory and has a real-life impact on people’s ability to access needed treatment. Will County has a shortage of treatment options for individuals with a mental health and/or substance use problem, especially those who are covered by Medicaid or uninsured. Approximately one in seven County residents are enrolled in Medicaid.
- *Expanding resources to provide treatment options.* The Better Mental Health Care, Lower-Cost Drugs, and Extenders Act of 2023 (S. 3430) would waive the IMD restrictions for adults with serious mental illness, children with serious emotional disturbance, and short-term residential stays for the treatment of substance use disorder.
- *Medicaid reimbursement for recovery support services.* Allowing reimbursement would reduce pressure on inpatient care for a substance use disorder. Recovery coaches, certified recovery specialists are essential and are not reimbursed by insurance, including Medicaid. These services are less expensive than clinical services and support long term recovery.
- *Medicaid reimbursement for recovery home stays.* Housing becomes the next barrier to long term recovery once a patient is released from inpatient care. Recovery homes provide a safe, supportive environment for an individual to continue outpatient services and recovery support.
- *Codifying temporary SAMHSA and DEA regulation changes for Opioid Treatment Programs (OTPs) to enable increased telehealth and take-home medication.* The regulation changes made were temporary and done in response to COVID -19 mitigation efforts. Positive outcomes are being realized due to the availability of telehealth and take-home medication.
- *Repeal of the “inmate exclusion” that prohibits the use of federal Medicaid matching funds from covering healthcare services in jails and prisons and remove the inmate limitation on benefits under Medicare.* Continuation of healthcare coverage during detention and incarceration would improve treatment continuity and retention, possibly with the same addiction treatment provider, which increases the probability of long-term recovery.
- *The passage of H.R. 3892 – Improving Mental Health and Drug Treatment Act of 2023* which would amend the Social Security Act to make permanent the State plan amendment option to provide medical assistance for patients in mental health institutions.
- *Additional resources for local crisis response systems.* Legislation like the Local 9-8-8 Response Act of 2023 (H.R. 4974 / S. 3444); Mental Health Infrastructure Improvement Act (H.R. 5804); and Ensuring Excellence in Mental Health Act (S. 2993) would enhance resources for evidence-based crisis response models, and for the development of critical infrastructure.
- *Linking housing to social services programs.* Many individuals with a substance use disorder struggle with life skills - stable employment, housing, and food insecurity, which can lead to a downward spiral that increases relapse risk and damage to recovery. These

efforts require assistance with supporting emergency pathways, including through Medicaid waivers, to connect housing and social services.

- *Scholarship or workforce training grants for psychiatrists, psychologists, and advanced nurse practitioners specializing in behavioral health.* One of the biggest challenges to increase access to services is the huge workforce shortage.
- *Expansion of funding for capital projects in order to respond to the growing demand and need for access.* Will County is geographically very large and most behavioral health services are centralized. Will County has branch offices in Bolingbrook and Monee. The Bolingbrook office also includes primary care services and is out of space. We would like to expand satellite offices.

COTTAGE FOOD LAW

The State's Cottage Food Law allows home-based food businesses to sell food directly to consumers. While the County supports these small businesses, we remain concerned about the health and safety standards and protocols these businesses follow. As the Cottage Food Law evolves, cottage food operators are allowed to prepare more complex food items that are Time & Temperature Control for Safety (TCS) as long as they are prepackaged.

The preparation, storage and transportation of TCS food items can be complex and require sound food safety practices and principles. The Cottage Food Law does not mandate inspection/oversight via the local health department unless there is a complaint. The public may be exposed to a higher risk of foodborne illness without adequate oversight of complex food preparation that is permitted in a "home kitchen". Therefore, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), local health departments (LHDs), and federal partners need to be involved in the decision making regarding what food products should be allowed by the Cottage Food Law.

EXPAND ACCESS TO VACCINES FOR UNINSURED ADULTS

The United States made enormous investments in vaccine development and distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without access to vaccines, including long-term access to vaccines for uninsured adults, we will neglect an important opportunity for advancing health and economic benefits in this population, which includes many essential workers, caregivers, and others. Building on the success of the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program and associated discretionary funding supporting immunization infrastructure, the Vaccines for Adults (VFA) program has the potential to be a low-cost, high-reward initiative that could help achieve the essential goal of ensuring vaccine availability throughout the life span.

PROVIDE FUNDING, THROUGH WIC, FOR BREASTFEEDING ASSISTANCE

Will County Health Department supports funding through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) for breastfeeding assistance and hiring lactation consultants. Lactation Consultants provide assistance to new breastfeeding mothers and infants that provide the skills, training, and resources essential for success. Breastfeeding for at least the first six (6) months of life provides infants with healthy nutrients for growth and development, increases the ability to fight infections, and lowers the risk of serious health issues like asthma and digestive issues.

EXPAND THE PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE AND PREVENT CLIFF IN ARPA-FUNDED SERVICES

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that our public health workforce was severely depleted. The government recognized that need and allotted generous funding to temporarily build the workforce, but that funding is set to expire at the end of this year. However, the need is still there and greater than ever. The ARPA funds have allowed for the hiring of additional registered nurses, 1 assistant in our case management program to support our current team of 4 RNs and the over 1,100 clients on our ever-increasing caseload each month. Additionally, the ARPA funds have provided us with the ability to hire two additional Communicable Disease Investigators and a much-needed nurse, manager, and clerk for our Immunizations Program along with a safety and risk reduction officer, our health equity staff, assistance for Human Resources, and additional YESS Behavioral Health counseling staff placed within local schools. The Health Department will need to at least maintain the current workforce in order to continue to provide the level of services we deliver to the residents of Will County.

The County supports the Bipartisan Primary Care and Health Workforce Act (S. 2840) and the PEER Support Act (S. 2733), both pieces of legislation would expand training and hiring opportunities for community health centers and behavioral workforce groups. These bills would enhance workforce training and opportunities to expand the public health workforce.

INFRASTRUCTURE & LAND USE

TRANSPORTATION

Will County is home to the largest inland port in North America, which requires robust investment in our highways, bridges, and roads. The Will County Division of Transportation is responsible for the planning, design, construction, and maintenance of these 252 miles (621 lane miles) of roadway. Outside of the jurisdiction of the county system, Will County has five major interstates, intercity and commuter rail service, multiple regional and Class I railroads, inland waterways, aviation facilities, and major intermodal freight yards. Combined, these transportation systems make Will County an innovative and economic hub in multimodal freight and transportation systems.

The County is concerned about three bills in the 118th Congress that, if enacted, would significantly impede the County's infrastructure safety and control over roadways: the CARS Act (H.R. 2948), Legislation to Authorize a Pilot program for 6-Axle Vehicles (H.R. 3372), and Safe Routes Act of 2023 (H.R. 2493 / S. 1818). Permitting larger, heavier, trucks on our roads could damage local infrastructure and strain local resources. The County is opposed to these bills.

COMPETING FOR FEDERAL GRANTS

Laraway Road Corridor Project

The entire Laraway Corridor is 12.5 miles and a major east-west connector within Will County, of which 4.5 miles is the Laraway Road Corridor Project. The typical cross section of Laraway Road is a rural two-lane cross section with intermittent intersection improvements and signals. The improvement of this corridor has been split into separate projects for study and ultimately construction. Breaking this large corridor into smaller segments allows for project completion over multiple years.

The improvements, when completed, will widen West Laraway Road from west of Cherry Hill Road to Cedar Road by realigning the right-of-way and adding an additional through lane in each direction matching the expanded cross section to the east. The intersection at Cedar and Laraway was recently upgraded and modernized. The existing temporary signals were converted to a permanent traffic signal with pedestrian crossings and dual left turn lanes. The next segment to the west is under construction with the subsequent segment well into design. The Route 52 intersection is ready for letting pending right-of-way acquisition. The County has also received Design Approval and started construction documents for the 4 miles east of Cedar Road with initial construction to begin in 2025. These projects will enhance safety, decrease idling times, and improve vehicle movements.

Gougar Road Corridor Project

The Gougar Road corridor is approximately 3.25 miles spanning from Laraway Road on the south to Francis Road on the north. The project has received Design Approval with the development of construction documents now underway. This segment of Gougar Road is currently a rural two-lane cross section with intermittent intersection improvements and signals. Gougar road has a unique mix of land uses, residential at the north and south ends, two high schools, numerous houses of worship, Cherry Hill Business Park, and Joliet Park District and Forest Preserve lands. There are also crossings of the CN Railroad near the south end, and Metra's Rock Island District at US

30. The project is planned to have a future cross section with two lanes in each direction with a barrier median, a grade separation at Gougar Road over the CN Railroad, and the widening and replacement of the I-80 grade separation with IDOT funding contributions.

A successful Will County Gougar Road CRISI grant application would provide funding that would allow for the grade separation over the CN Railroad to be completed in a faster timeframe. The proposed improvements would separate the existing at-grade crossing by means of a roadway bridge over the railroad tracks. This improvement is necessary to reduce traffic delays, enhance safety at the railroad crossing, increase pedestrian connectivity, improve vehicular movements, and allow for an uninterrupted north-south route for emergency vehicles through the area.

Safe Streets for All Grant

Roadway safety remains a top priority for Will County. The County partnered with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and five other regional counties on a northeastern Illinois Safe Streets and Road for All federal planning grant. This comprehensive regional program is called Safe Travel for All Roadmap (STAR), and was awarded \$5 million in the FY22 funding cycle for planning. STAR will allow Will County to develop a county-wide safety action plan, which will help prioritize County projects to increase road user and pedestrian safety. Once the Action Plan is completed, Will County will be positioned to apply for an implementation grant.

WILL COUNTY SUPPORTS:

- ❖ Additional incentives for areas that work across jurisdictional borders to address shared infrastructure challenges.
- ❖ The County is working closely with its municipal and township partners and the State of Illinois in planning projects and addressing common issues. Public-to-Public Partnerships can play a larger role in solving our nation's infrastructure challenges and USDOT should reward that type of collaboration in their review and scoring for competitive grants.
- ❖ Streamline roadway project completion while ensuring the safety of the environment.
- ❖ The County requests the opportunity to provide feedback on streamlining provisions included in the BIL or future federal legislation related to permitting reform. Flexibility given to states working with local jurisdictions on the environmental processes would expedite project completion.

INFRASTRUCTURE PLANS AND STUDIES

Will County continues to invest in studies to better understand the region's current and future infrastructure needs, as well as assist with future planning decisions.

COMPLETED STUDIES

Over the past five years, the County has conducted three major studies related to transportation infrastructure and land use which build upon the 2017 Community Friendly Freight Mobility Plan.

The Will County – Joliet Intermodal Transportation Master Plan, which builds on findings and recommendations in the 2017 Freight Plan. The County partnered with the City of Joliet, IDOT and private industrial interests in the intermodal area to develop a transportation improvement program that will identify and prioritize projects that will ease congestion and improve safety. The

Plan was completed January 2022 and identifies projects that support both the Freight Plan and the County's long-range transportation plan, Will Connects 2040.

The Western Will County Truck Routing and Communities Study (Truck Routing Strategy). Completed in December 2021, the study aids in developing east/west truck routes to help move freight from warehouses / intermodal developments in Will County to interstate highways. CMAP has identified Will County as one of the fastest growing freight land use clusters and a critical component to the regions' freight hub. The study provides guidance and considerations for the implementation of truck routes listed by jurisdiction to create a mutually agreed upon and comprehensive truck route network.

The Will County Freight Transportation and Land Use Strategy (Land Use Strategy) Study. Also completed in December 2021, the study examines how to best support corridors in areas with high truck traffic, rail, and/or industrial and commercial land uses. The intent is to maximize compatibility and avoid conflicts in freight-supportive areas when planning for potential land uses and community facilities.

STUDIES IN PROGRESS

Wilmington-Peotone PEL Study

The Will County Division of Transportation (WCDOT) is performing a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study over approximately 22 miles along Wilmington-Peotone Road between Interstate 55 and Drecksler Road. In response to the rapid growth and development across Will County, several new freight clusters have appeared along the Wilmington-Peotone corridor that have placed challenges along the roadway infrastructure. The purpose of this PEL study is to understand efficient east-west mobility for all users and multimodal options throughout the corridor. Will County is taking a systematic approach to understand current and future travel demand and develop a corridor that can handle demand in a safe manner to support the economic vitality of the County.

Our Way Forward 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan

Will County is undergoing a comprehensive long-term planning effort to inform the next 25 years of transportation projects. The plan includes four phases that look at existing and future conditions, draft recommendations, transform those recommendations into a draft plan, and finalize a draft plan by the end of 2025. The County is currently utilizing broad community engagement and comprehensive data analysis to examine all modes of transportation including walking, biking, driving transit, and freight. Once completed, the plan will be used to identify transportation investments that align with the public's goals for the county, such as improved safety and quality of life, reduced congestion, and enhanced economic development.

Access Will County - Paratransit Integration and Efficiency Study

Will County is embarking on a Paratransit Integration and Efficiency Study, called Access Will County, to develop a mobility management structure to better coordinate Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Paratransit and on-demand dial-a-ride services for the entire county. The study will help determine service gaps related to geographic regions, destinations, rider eligibility, and hours of operation, all while making the system more efficient.

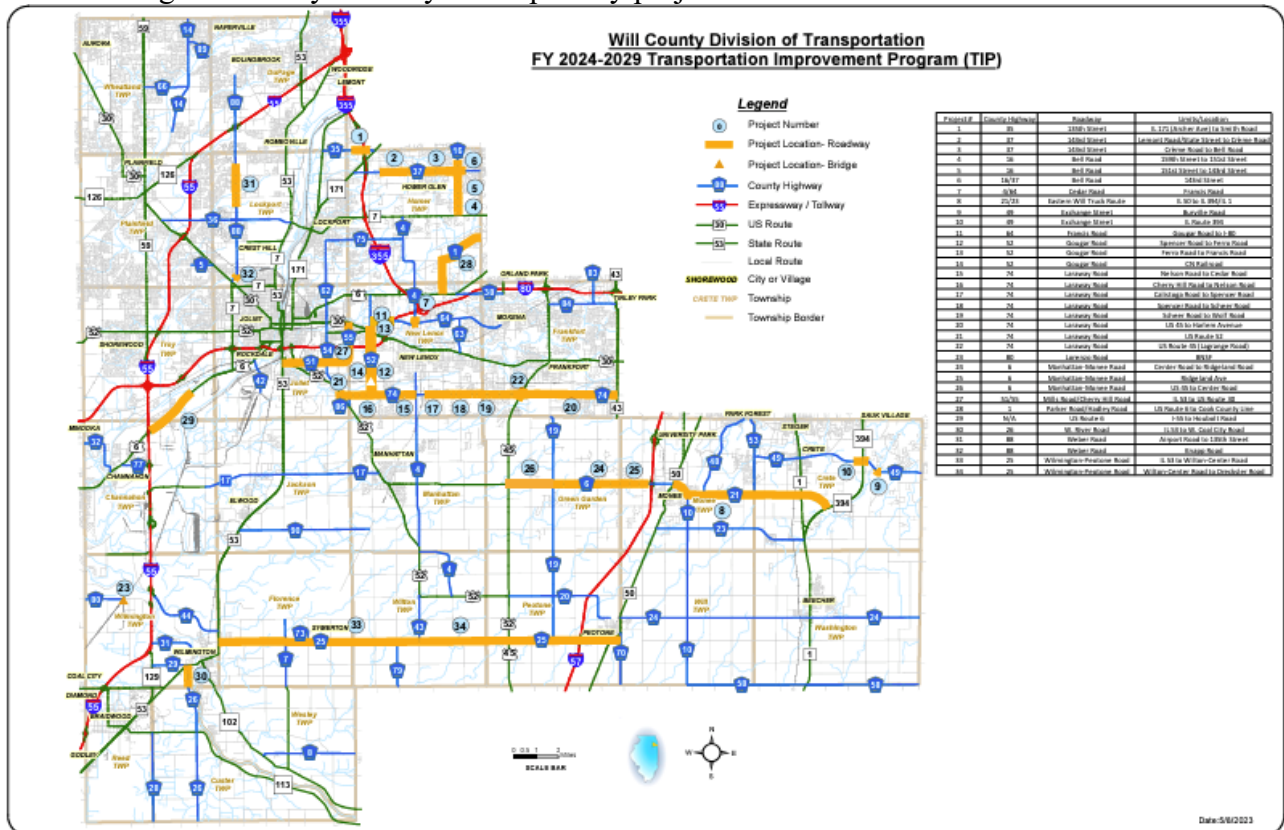
The study began in March 2022 and is scheduled to be completed in Spring 2023. Throughout the study there was community involvement and stakeholder engagement, with a final plan available for adoption in May 2023. The outcomes will provide key recommendations for implementation that will allow for a cohesive countywide service. The County will examine options to secure federal funding to implement the study's recommendations.

Electric Vehicle Readiness Plan

Will County received funding from the Illinois Department of Transportation Statewide Planning and Research (SPR) funds to complete a countywide Electronic Vehicle (EV) Readiness Plan. As EV's are deployed more widely, the County recognized the need to be prepared for the growing demand for charging infrastructure for personal, commercial and freight vehicles. Will County's EV Readiness Plan will be developed with robust public engagement and will include identification of public locations for electric vehicle charging locations as well as technical analysis and data driven assessments with a key focus on equity. The Will County EV Readiness planning efforts are expected to begin in early 2023 and last approximately 14 months.

TRANSPORTATION PROJECT PRIORITIES

The below Will County Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) map is helpful for understanding the locality of many of the priority projects noted above.



Will County remains one of the fastest growing counties in Illinois by total population numbers and remains a major hub in the national transportation system with five major interstates, multiple regional and Class I railroads, inland waterways, aviation facilities, and intermodal freight yards. As a result, Will County is one of the largest Inland Ports in the world and a vital part of the global supply chain.

The County's inland ports are an agricultural export hub for the entire Midwestern United States. Over 90 million bushels of grain were shipped to foreign markets through two local intermodal facilities last year (the Joliet UP intermodal yard and the Elwood BNSF intermodal yard). The continued growth in agricultural exports in the region has made developing freight goods movement networks critically important.

Will County supports ongoing federal infrastructure investments vital to relieving traffic congestion due to the increasing amount of freight traffic and exports going through the County. These investments are also critical to keeping motorists and pedestrians safe navigating both the highway and local road systems.

SEWER AND WATER PROJECTS

Will County supports federal programs which provide needed funding to transition orphaned water and sanitary districts to municipal water systems. Many unincorporated areas are served by local water and sanitary districts that are not funded adequately to ensure needed capital improvements. Years of disinvestment has led to aging systems and infrastructure. Often located in low-income areas, the local tax base is insufficient to fund improvements and there is limited ability for residents to absorb any increases in monthly payments.

A substantial amount of the county's annual CDBG funds are directed towards sewer and water infrastructure projects. Most often, these types of projects impact between 150 and 350 homes per project.

A multiyear project currently funded by CDBG is the transfer of water and sewer service from Township services to City of Joliet services, which includes 890 homes. This is a multijurisdictional project and is necessary to ensure safe water and sewer service to residents of unincorporated Fairmont. We expect the demand for this type of relief to increase in the years to come in unincorporated areas of Will County.

Will County is seeking clarification on the definition of "ditches" under Waters of the United States (WOTUS). Clarity is necessary for conducting environmental review and expedite infrastructure project completion. The County requests EPA and USACE to provide clarification as soon as possible.

WILL COUNTY SUPPORTS:

- *Efforts to reduce the cost for local governments to borrow money to fund capital projects, either through tax-exempt municipal bonds or through other financing tools, such as private activity bonds or advanced refunding.*
 - Will County is intentional and competitive when leveraging bonds for necessary municipal facilities. The County most recently utilized nearly \$300 million to finance

a public safety complex (opened November 2017), new courthouse (opened October 2020), and a health department facility (opened 2020).

- *Continued access to tax-exempt municipal bonds*, which allows local governments to make key capital investments at the lowest possible cost to taxpayers. The County supports efforts by the federal lawmakers to preserve and improve the incentives related to municipal bonds as tax legislation conversations continue into 2024.

PUBLIC SAFETY

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE GRANT PROGRAM (EMPG)

The EMPG program provides funding on a matching basis via the states to help support local emergency management programs. The program has existed for over 40 years. Will County supports increasing funding for EMPG in FY 2025.

Will County supports:

- *Ensuring that EMPG remains distinct from other funding programs so it may continue to be directed specifically to emergency management programs.* There have been efforts in recent years to “bundle” EMPG with other homeland security-related grant programs.
- *Increasing EMPG funding.* The program is intended to fund up to 50% of eligible administrative costs for a local emergency management program. However, typical funding levels provided to the County only amount to approximately 15% of its eligible costs.
- *Additional requirements for states to provide a greater portion of funding to local programs.* This policy change will ensure federal dollars are being adequately directed to local governments.

PORT SECURITY GRANT PROGRAM (PSG)

Will County supports increased for of the PSG Program. The PSG program provides funding for various initiatives intended to prevent, detect, deter, and respond to threats to the nation’s ports and waterways. Will County has successfully obtained grant funding for various projects over the years. These projects have benefitted Will County and improved our readiness posture in several key areas. PSG is one of the few Homeland Security-related grant programs to which Will County may directly apply without going through the State. Over the last several years, federal funding for the PSG program has remained stagnant, which is insufficient to protect against threats.

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS GRANT PROGRAM (HMEP)

Will County Supports increased funding of the HMEP program. HMEP provides funding for planning and related preparedness activities for hazardous materials fixed facilities and transportation risks. HMEP funding is administered through the State. Program changes at the federal and state levels have caused this funding to fluctuate from year to year. Funding is also allocated based on subjective criteria. Will County supports changes in the program to allocate funding to counties based upon the degrees of fixed facility and transportation risk.

FEMA’S NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM (NFIP)

Will County supports expansion of the NFIP qualifications and efforts to keep rates low to ensure households are protected in the event of a flood. FEMA requires homeowners located in flood zones to obtain flood insurance, or their property is uninsurable.

Flood insurance is expensive and can cost as much as \$11,000 annually. Many residents are faced with either paying high premiums or high rates for policy riders. Additionally, most homeowners’ insurance does not cover losses due to flooding, which can be some of the most severe losses generated by severe weather events.

Flood maps were recently updated and many low-income residences in the City of Joliet were determined to be in flood zones. The City of Joliet is working on mitigation strategies to remove homeowners out of flood zones.