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## Mayor Spesia has a target list for 2024

BY ANN GILL  
CORRESPONDENT

Coal City Mayor Dave Spesia is looking forward to all that 2024 has in store for the village as there are a number of projects to be completed in the next 11 months.

At the top of the list is an expansion of the town's water treatment plant.

The improvement, approved last year, will double the village's total treatment capacity.

D Construction was awarded the work and is expected to get started on construction once all of the necessary equipment has been received.

The list of projects also includes the remediation of lead service lines as the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency [IEPA] has selected to assist the village with the costs.

An item that has been on the village's project list for more than a decade is a railroad quiet zone, and although not everyone of the Village Board is in favor of silencing trains passing through town, it's on the mayor's list.

In the coming months, Spesia said the quiet zone concept will enter into its final design and town officials will begin gaining the necessary agreements from various agencies to stop the horns from sounding as they pass along the Burlington Northern Santa Fe lines.

This project is expected to result in some

crossing closures including the one at Lincoln and Division streets.

As reported last fall, Riverside Medical Center is expanding its Coal City site.

The health care company announced it will double the size of its current treatment space and expand its offerings.

Construction of the new Riverside addition will result in the facility connecting to the town's sanitary treatment plant.

Once the connection has been made, the village will complete improvements to Carbon Hill Road and that will include filling the gaps in the sidewalk that runs along the roadway.

In his comments, Spesia noted the addition of a new dining option as The Clubhouse is set

to open along West Division Street in the space that once housed LaPiazza.

After considerable discussion and review, the village is moving ahead with plans to replace the North Broadway bridge over the drainage ditch and it also has plans to reconstruct the Valerio Road bridge on the town's east side.

According to Spesia, 2024 will also be the year when the Park Board determines a refurbishment plan for North Park, and a series of homes will be updated with funds secured through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development's Housing

SEE LIST PAGE 2

## Ice jam causes highest flood in 137 years

BY ERIC FISHER  
Publisher

It will take weeks to estimate the cost of damage caused by the highest flood to hit Wilmington in 137 years.

The City of Wilmington is working with the Will County Emergency Management Agency to survey the damage caused by flooding that began shortly after 10 p.m. Thursday as ice piled up in the main channel, causing the water level to rise nearly three feet through the island parks and mill race.

Will County EMA issued a mass notification message to residents just before midnight, advising them of the rising water levels and the need to evacuate. Water rescue teams were deployed, and 14 individuals were successfully evacuated to a temporary shelter opened by Wilmington ESDA.

The flash flood closed Highway 53 from Water Street to First Street as water surrounded the Van Dwyne Motel, portions of Nelson's Furniture and nearby businesses. The river flowed across the highway for approximately 12 hours. By noon Friday the roadway was reopened. Police remained on standby since the island parks were still under water. Both islands remain closed to the public until damage can be assessed and roadways repaired.

"City staff worked around the clock to ensure the safety of residents during this flood event," said Wilmington Mayor Ben Dietz. "I appreciate everyone who stepped up to keep residents safe during this flooding event. Our work isn't finished yet. We are working to fully assess and repair the damage that occurred over the last few days."

The mayor praised first responders for their quick response in preventing loss of life and the city crew for working nonstop to keep the water plant operational even though its pump house flooded.

"For 14 hours I watched from the command center as our people operated with such professionalism," Dietz said. "Our first responders are top-notch. Foremost, they evacuated everyone safely, then had mutual aid and EMA from the county here within 30 minutes as the river continued to rise. The communication between agencies was tremendous. Even though we had been planning for two weeks for



Photo by David Quigley

THE NORTH ISLAND was under water Friday morning after an ice jam on the Kankakee River caused the water level to rise along the mill race. Highway 53 through Wilmington was closed late Thursday night until noon Friday while flooding impacted the island parks. The parks remain closed until city officials can assess the damage and repair the roadway.

possible flooding, you don't really know how things will go until it happens. And when it did, I was impressed with everyone's professionalism."

The Will County EMA and Wilmington ESDA had been monitoring the river for days as ice dams formed from the warm water discharge pumps near Bardwell Island upstream over eight miles to Custer Park. About 5 p.m. Thursday it began shifting downstream in the Lakewood Shores area causing pile ups in Wilmington. The ice jams between the city and the Des Plaines River confluence cleared out Saturday.

By 10:45 a.m. Saturday the U.S. Geological Survey Kankakee River gauge upstream of Interstate 55 recorded water levels at 6.89 feet. That was a drop of almost 9 feet from the recorded high of 15.62 feet on Friday evening due to a brief ice jam that formed near I-55. The peak level of water was the 3rd highest level recorded on the

Kankakee River in history and the highest since 1887.

The south island road suffered the most damage as ice piled up near the mill race bridge, damaging a new guard rail and lifting away sections of pavement. Dietz said Monday the city has yet to inspect the emergency water well and building on the South Island.

"We do not know the extent of damage for it. It was flooded and surrounded by ice. Fortunately it's just an emergency well we don't need right now."

Workers at the water treatment plant have been drying out and cleaning the pump house after water backed up into the low-lying area of Widow's Road. Clennon Electric is inspecting all the electronics that operate the pumps. Dietz said backup equipment, including spare pumps, are on site in case they fail to restart when everything is turned back on.

Dietz said that at no time

SEE FLOOD PAGE 2



Photo by Eric Fisher

ROAD DAMAGE—The tip of the South Island park suffered the brunt of an ice dam on Thursday as it piled up against a guard rail that was installed last year while lifting up sections of pavement. The parks remain closed to the public.



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