

# NORTHWEST HERALD

## Huntley a friendly village with country smarts

May 24, 2012

These are heady times in Huntley.

Years of planning, strategizing, cajoling, compromising, advocating and lobbying appear to be paying off in a big way – pretty much all at once.

A full-access tollway interchange at Route 47 has been on the village's to-do list for as long as I can remember. And starting next month, it will be on the road to reality. The Illinois Route 47 Interchange Project will open up access between the tollway and regional north-south transportation route. The estimated \$69 million project – with the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority picking up half and the remainder coming from the village, Kane and McHenry counties and the Illinois Department of Transportation – is part of a \$12 billion capital program. It includes widening Route 47 between Oak Creek Parkway and Big Timber Road, a new seven-lane bridge and additional traffic signals ... up to a point.

"We want to minimize traffic lights. That was a big issue for us when we went through the design process," said Victor Narusis, business recruitment coordinator for Huntley. "We've studied Algonquin closely and in many ways they have a lot of good things to model after. But at the same time I think we can improve on some things."

Fortunately, Huntley's rebirth is likely to happen at a measured pace. Even if the interchange work wraps up as anticipated, by summer 2013, the economy should prompt manufacturing/retail developers to wade in slowly. Also, the village did a rare thing: It widened Route 47 in the anticipation of more traffic, not as a belated response to gridlock. It also wisely annexed all four corners of the interchange, avoiding a potential high-stakes bidding war with Hampshire.

"The interchange was not built in interim steps," Narusis said. "It is being built as part of a long-term 2040 solution."

That long-term economic plan for Huntley also includes downtown improvements, made possible through the creation of a tax increment financing district. It would encompass the area on Route 47, from Main Street north almost to Reed Road. The village also recently authorized applying for a \$1.5 million state grant that would add polish to its square.

The village board hired a Chicago-based consulting firm to complete a \$50,000 TIF study. If adopted, as expected, the downtown TIF district would be Huntley's second. In 1993, Huntley designated Primary Outlets Huntley as a special tax district. Details continue to be worked out, but expect something along the lines of Harvard's downtown improvement program to occur. And like its neighbor to the north, Huntley's downtown abuts a major state highway.

Design guidelines include the use of landscaping to minimize the visual impact of parking areas along Route 47 and ensuring a minimum 100-foot landscape buffer from the road. The village's long-range land plan also calls for train station – possibly off of Coyne Station Road.

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"I think Metra is favorably disposed to extending the line out here," Narusis said. "But I think they realize that their existing infrastructure is in financial need and that they need to dedicate resources there."

Legislative priorities identified by the village include supporting legislation creating the Northwest Metra Commuter Rail District, to assist with the planning and funding of a commuter rail extension to Huntley. It also favors supports legislation that would enable municipalities, rather than developers, to determine if a bond, letter of credit or cash bond is necessary; and legislation that would exempt small projects of less than \$50,000 from the Prevailing Wage Act.

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