

# ELK RAPIDS NEWS

## GOT WORK?

Whether it needs to be dug up, pruned, raked, or fixed, when something needs doing in Elk Rapids, you can be sure it will get done thanks to the Elk Rapids Department of Public Works. Led by Marcus Evans since 2016, DPW is responsible for all village buildings and grounds, streets, parks, drinking water, and wastewater. Born and raised in Leelanau County, Evans is an army veteran, a graduate of Alma College, and with wife Jamie, proud parents of a family of five children ages 22 to 8 years old. Evans also serves in a liaison/support role to the Village's Harbor Commission, Beautification, and Parks and Recreation Committees. These all generate plenty of projects and maintenance duties, but when added to a long list of annual and seasonal responsibilities, ER's DPW is always on the move.

The Department is responsible for providing safe and reliable drinking water to all who live in or visit Elk Rapids. That's easy enough to say, but it involves checking, repairing, and replacing aging pumps, hundreds of valves, and miles of pipeline. Chemical dosing pumps are used to inject a precisely measured amount of chemicals to further treat water for safety, taste, and smell. Like many other areas in the region, DPW's three wells deliver water that's high in iron content, much of which is removed by the village's relatively new iron removal plant. Then there's the storage and "delivery" of water to every business and residence in

Elk Rapids. That makes the Department of Public Works responsible for maintaining the water tower, all fire hydrants, and every water main and valve in the system. In recent years, DPW has undertaken the task to test, repair, and replace every valve in the system. Such a project takes a lot of planning and resources from the department. As a result, the village has approved spreading the work and cost involved over the years to ease the fiscal impact.

DPW is also responsible for maintaining all village-owned buildings, streets, and sidewalks in public areas. Whenever there's a special event or festival in town, you can be sure DPW has been working behind the scenes to set things up or close them down. The department is the second-largest annual expenditure for the village, commanding roughly 19%

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Caution cones around DPW road work.

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## The Elk Rapids Department of Public Works does it all

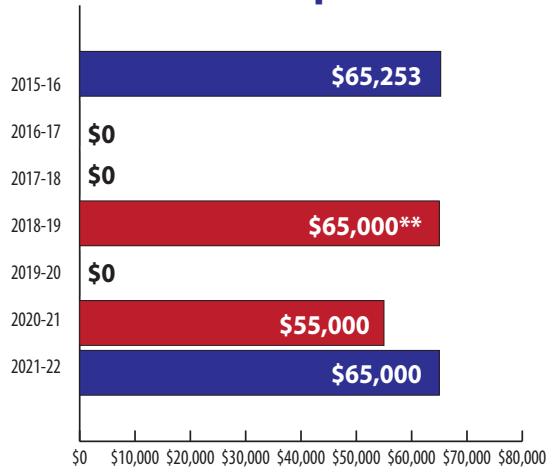
BY STEVE YENCICH, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



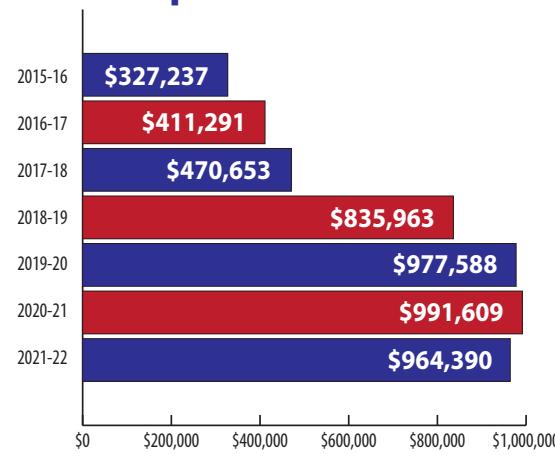
Marcus Evans, Mark Viglione, Jeremy Koski, Lane Peterson, Joe O'Halloran, Dale Hulbert, Alex Pray, Scott Riddle, Kevin Lane.

PHOTO BY *klw*

### Village of Elk Rapids Sidewalk Construction Repair Removal



### Village of Elk Rapids Water Operations Fund



total resources. The police department utilizes around 37% of ER's budget, with general services coming in third highest at approximately 18% of the total. DPW's annual budget of \$255,860 covers a lot of ground, and Evans says wastewater treatment is by far the most significant department expenditure each year. Those costs all start with the simple goal of treating wastewater so it will not affect the Elk River into which treated water is discharged. Evans says there are many moving parts, costs, and time involved in treating millions of gallons of wastewater each year. The department has responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the water treatment facility, which involves 13 pump stations, hundreds of valves, and many employee hours committed to the effort before treated water is sent to a state-certified lab for testing. Evans says the department is very proud of its water treatment facilities and would welcome the opportunity to host group tours. When you consider all the chemicals and cleaning agents that home and business owners use each year, it's a tour that will answer a lot of questions.

The busiest time for the department is summer when the population doubles and construction projects, both private and public abound. There are parks to be maintained, trash and brush to be picked up, *continued on page 8*

and numerous events to be held, all of which culminates with Harbor Days. Come fall, leaves must be picked up and composted, irrigation lines in village gardens winterized, and Christmas lights must be hung and displayed in early December. Like area farms and tourism businesses, the department also faces the challenges and frustrations caused by the unpredictability of Michigan weather. In the warmer months, high winds and heavy rain can drop trees, limbs and flood streets. In turn, cold-weather storms can drop a lot of trees, limbs, cause flooding or snow-clogged streets. All these chance occurrences get added to DPW's list of things that must be done immediately. Try budgeting for Michigan weather, and you'll have a headache in no time.

The village has secured grant funding necessary to construct several "rain gardens" to decrease stormwater runoff in recent months. A rain garden is a depressed area in the landscape that collects rainwater and allows it to soak into the ground. Planted with grasses and flowering perennials, the EPA says rain gardens can be an attractive and cost-effective way to reduce runoff, help filter out pollutants, and provide food and shelter for butterflies, songbirds, and other wildlife. DPW assumes responsibility for their maintenance as these gardens and other grant-funded improvements are made in the village. As for the beauty of the village's many floral gardens, credit the fantastic volunteers who comprise the Elk Rapids Garden Club, but DPW always stands ready to move dirt, provide irrigation, and in general, do whatever is needed. Village gardens and mega-events like Harbor Days are all



DPW work continues in Elk Rapids.

PHOTO BY *klw*

beautiful examples of the potential of public/private partnerships.

The village relies on property taxes and state and federal funding for all routine expenditures. However, with state/federal funding comes the duty to meet all sorts of state and federal mandates. Looking down the road, Evans points to a plan already in place to complete \$2 million in water/sewer improvements every five years. Over the next 80 years, these projects will replace all village water and sewer lines as the state requires. Evans says the Village Council decided it best to cash-fund the project instead of seeking approval of bonds or loans. As a result, water and sewer rates charged to residents will be adjusted annually to meet the target. Evan described the decision as a bold step that will save the village millions of dollars in interest while providing a safe and reliable system that does not saddle taxpayers with debt. "From my point of view, you pay for the system that you want to have, not kick the can down the road for someone else to fix," says Evans.

When asked what he would do with additional budget resources, Evans said he joins city leaders in believing the time has come for a large multi-use pavilion to be constructed sometime in the future. The venue would be used to host concerts, festivals, weddings, and other special events. On a grander scale, Evans says with sufficient funding, the project could evolve into an indoor sports and recreation facility and even provide room for a youth center. The department already has tentative designs for the Ames Street district. Still, the project is many years and millions of dollars in funding away from becoming a reality.

These are the people who do the work that needs doing in Elk Rapids, and you're likely to see them doing it all around the village on a year-round basis. When it comes to city facilities or services, the Elk Rapids Department of Public Works is where the rubber, or perhaps more appropriately, the "pothole-filling asphalt," hits the road.



Alex Pray and Kevin Lane flush hydrants.

PHOTO BY *klw*



Mark Viglione mows near the gazebo on River Street.

PHOTO BY *klw*