



## **Central Avenue intersection reopens: Cook County widens street near St. Gerald School in Oak Lawn**

By Joe Boyle | January 2, 2015

The intersection of Central Avenue and Southwest Highway in Oak Lawn has been returned to full use as improvements underwritten by Cook County largely wrapped up last week.

The heavily traveled intersection, which had seen more than 100 crashes over the past decade, now has a five-lane configuration and includes new left turn lanes on Central.

Temporary traffic signals remain for the time being but will be replaced as electrical work on permanent fixtures is completed, weather permitting.

Work on the intersection, which is adjacent to St. Gerald Parish, 9320 S. 55th Court, and its school and is used by hundreds of schoolchildren and their parents daily, started in early October and was funded with \$1.6 million in County funds.

The Rev. Lawrence Malcom, pastor of St. Gerald Parish, said he was pleased that the intersection was mostly completed before Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and County Commissioner John Daley, (D-11th), were joined by Oak Lawn Mayor Sandra Bury and other village officials, as well as state legislators and parish leaders, for a groundbreaking ceremony.

“This is an excellent example of a public safety project that grew from multiple levels of government working together,” Preckwinkle said.

Trustee Alex Olejniczak (2nd) played an active role in getting the Central Avenue project off the ground. Olejniczak, whose district includes the Central Avenue intersection, had been persistent in trying to get the safety improvements made at the intersection.

“Don’t give up on something that is important,” said Olejniczak. “I put in a call to Commissioner Daley and he said, ‘how can I help you.’ It’s been seven years in the making. It’s a great day for Oak Lawn.”

Olejniczak mentioned at the Dec. 9 Oak Lawn Village Board meeting that the project was near completion. Landscaping and tree planting will be delayed until the spring as the cold weather lightens up.

According to data collected by the Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways, the number of accidents at the intersection supported adding left turn lanes on Central, which are expected to reduce the number of sideswipes and turning crashes. Having the turn lanes will also result in better flow along the roadway for through traffic, said CCDoTH Supt. John Yonan.

The project includes curb and gutter removal and replacement, drainage improvements and adjustments, sidewalk repairs and landscaping. Modern LED signals and pedestrian countdown timers are being installed as part of the project as well.

“I want to thank President Preckwinkle, Superintendent Yonan and the entire staff at the Department of Transportation and Highways,” said Daley. “Without their hard work and dedication this project would have never gotten off the ground. Now residents will see a much safer and technologically advanced intersection.”