

Residents debate PARKS & RECREATION - D. TW raceway 'park' PARK DIST.

By Dave Gathman

CARPENTERSVILLE — "God isn't making any more land, and if Dundee Township wants to preserve its small-town character, Dundee Township Park District ought to save some by buying the 236-acre former Meadowdale Raceway and adjoining forests."

"The park district has no business spending an estimated \$4.7 million to buy that land when the district already is straining just to find \$150,000 to fix Haeger Pool. Besides, there already are plenty of forest preserves and open space within easy driving range."

Those two views were thrust at the park district board Wednesday by conflicting delegations of residents.

After hearing out both sides for about an hour, the park commissioners voted to tour the raceway on May 6 and, the same night, discuss the feasibility of such a purchase in depth.

"We sit here between a rock and a hard place," said Park District President Paul Buhrmann. "Citizens come to us wanting programs and property. But we do

not have an open checkbook."

BUHRMANN said he and Park District Director Rick Bemm toured the property a few weeks ago and "I personally got a new perspective on the racetrack. This definitely is a valuable property to the township."

But before the district could buy it, Buhrmann added, "We would have to have help and have a lot of help (financially)."

Bemm said the district does not have enough legal bonding authority to borrow \$4.7 million to buy such land. To sell that many bonds, the district would have to hold a referendum.

But he said he also will look into the possibility of grants from Washington, Springfield and private foundations.

Leading about a dozen people who favored the purchase, raceway neighbor June Keibler presented the board with petitions signed by 382 voters.

However, the petitions did not specifically call for the park district to buy the land and use public money. They state simply:

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"We support the preservation of the 236-acre area, or a portion of this area, as open space."

THE RACEWAY is owned by a corporation controlled by the family of the late Leonard Besinger Sr. Corporation members reportedly hope to develop the property industrially or commercially, though the Carpentersville Village Board is considering a proposal to involuntarily rezone the site for residential use only.

Steve Byers, a biologist employed by the McGraw Wildlife Foundation, suggested four ways the raceway could be used:

- A greenway trail system for cyclists and hikers. Byers said a branch of the Fox River Trail could be built from South End Park, through Sleepy Hollow, Randall Oaks Park and the raceway land, joining back up with the main trail near Lincoln Avenue.

- A nature center, similar to Red Oak Nature Center near Aurora. The emphasis would be on education, with field trips by local school children, guided tours and nature trails marked with informative notes.

- Prairie restoration. "Illinois is the prairie state. But there's not much real prairie left," said Byers.

- Outdoor recreation, including traditional park-like activities such as sports and picnicking.

With 236 acres, "There should be enough room for all of these activities," said the biologist.

"I HEAR arguments that you can't stop progress," said Don Smith of East Dundee. "But what is progress? If you live on Main Street in West Dundee, you can't even park in front of your home."

"We're trying to preserve a small town identity and we're losing it all the time to selfish developers—many of them people who ~~are not native to the area~~, but leave us with the confusion, congestion and bills," said Smith.

But Robert Gibson of Carpentersville and Ron Bruhl of rural Carpentersville spoke against the purchase.

Bruhl said he applauds the conservation group but added, "I would suggest they focus their efforts on convincing the McGraw Foundation to acquire the land or on finding their own resources to acquire the land."

"As a taxpayer living very close to the race track, I don't care to see our tax dollars used," said Bruhl.

Speaking for 20 minutes, Gibson presented an exhaustive list of open space areas already in the area, including over 1,000 acres of Kane County forest preserves and the 268 acres at Randall Oaks park and golf course.

"In this age, we don't need something in our back yard," said Gibson. "In less than 60 minutes, we can drive west halfway to the Mississippi River, east to Lake Michigan, north to Wisconsin or south to the Kane County border."

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