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Open space fight in Dundee

*Renewed push made for
Meadowdale Raceway,
Galvin properties*

By Mick Zawislak
STAFF WRITER

CARPENTERSVILLE — The self-described “racing capital of the world” has been closed for 30 years, with only crumbling asphalt and memories left as reminders of its former significance.

But as times have changed, the Meadowdale Raceway again has become popular and controversial — an oasis of open space being squeezed by a vice of growth.

Meadowdale isn’t the only spot that has pitted local activists against elected officials when it comes to deciding which properties can or should be purchased for use as open space.

Inside

New legal strategy would have Dundee Township exercise its ‘contractual rights’ on the Galvin property. **A6**

And while no one among the open-space advocates argues about the sense of urgency to proceed, the question more often becomes whose priority takes precedence.

The battle lines may be defined further on Monday night, as activists are expected to pack the Dundee

Township Board meeting. They will present proposals involving Meadowdale and the Galvin property that will escalate the fight, even as the township proceeds with other plans it thinks best.

Both issues involve potential residential developments on land advocates believe should be spared from the nonstop flow of new rooftops.

A group led by Sue Harney, a former Sleepy Hollow trustee and pioneer of the area’s open-space movement, will ask the township to use its legal authority to snatch the Galvin property away from Pulte Home Corp.

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Group to ask Dundee Township to take new tack on Galvin property

By Mick Zawislak
STAFF WRITER

DUNDEE TOWNSHIP — Open-space supporters will push another strategy to stop a proposed housing development on the Galvin property.

Despite more than six months of intense debate and the support of West Dundee and the courts, opponents of a plan by Pulte Home Corp., to annex the Galvin property

for residential and commercial uses will try one more time.

Dundee Township trustees will be asked Monday to "exercise their contractual rights," to overturn the contract between Pulte and Galvin Family Partners, according to Sue Harney, an open-space advocate and member of the Kane County Regional Planning Commission.

Harney said she has been told by an attorney that, as the back-up buyer, the township also has con-

tractual rights to the property which could be invoked if the provisions of the contract with Pulte were not met.

Those provisions include the approval of a change in the facilities planning area from Sleepy Hollow to West Dundee; a contract with the Fox River Water Reclamation District to treat wastewater; and having required permits in place.

The 239-acre Galvin property is on the south side of Illinois 72, just

north of Sleepy Hollow Road. It has been a subject of controversy for more than six months after Pulte proposed its Carrington Reserve housing development.

Pulte, which promised to keep 100 acres of the site as open space, envisions as many as 314-single family homes on the site. Opponents argued the property was environmentally sensitive and should be preserved. They also argued the school-age children who would

move into the development would burden Community Unit School District 300.

Dundee Township offered to buy the majority of the property from the owners, if West Dundee rejected Pulte's annexation and zoning requests. The township would have used a portion of the \$9 million remaining in its Open Space Act fund.

Village trustees earlier this month approved an annexation agreement by a 5-2 vote. That action

followed a decision by 16th Circuit Court Judge Patrick Dixon that the village did not violate any local or state zoning laws and could legally proceed. That ruling was upheld in the 2nd District Appellate Court.

The annexation agreement approved by West Dundee prevents the home builder from beginning construction until it has gained village approval of a specific plan of how the entire acreage will be developed.

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Voters' instructions by wayside

But the real sparks are expected to focus on the remaining portion of the former Meadowdale Raceway, north of Huntley Road and west of Illinois 31 — an opportunity for a recreational attraction advocates say the township has ignored.

"There's no question this has been a prime piece of property," said Harney, a member of the Kane County Regional Planning Commission.

"The issue is that they had instruction from the voters that were very explicit and they're not following them. We want that piece of land — we've been after them for years and years to get it and the price has only gone up."

Deciding which properties can or should be purchased is not often clear-cut, with different interest groups pushing their own choices.

"You either get the NIMBY or the YIMBY," says Dundee Township Supervisor Jim Peterson. "Everybody is for it if you're going to do green space in their own back yards."

Harney and others say the former racetrack property was on the top of a

list of desired acquisitions the township used in successfully pushing a referendum in 1996 that raised \$15 million to acquire open space.

Since that time, Kane County purchased 42 acres of the original racetrack and the Dundee Township Park District owns about 50 acres. But what of the remaining 144 acres?

"Centex (Corp.) has a contract on it," says Frank Scarpelli, one of the 33 owners. "My position is much like Mr. Galvin — the property is for sale. We don't care who buys it, but we have a contract and we have to follow through."

With an appraised value of \$7.2 million, some involved in the process said the cost was too high. The township offered about \$4 million, according to Scarpelli.

Township eyes another site

Peterson said the Centex contract, as well as another unnamed interested party, puts the township third in line, with other priorities to pursue.

Peterson said he will introduce a resolution Monday to pursue two new pieces of desirable open space, neither of which is the Meadowdale Raceway. The properties total 176 acres west of Randall Road and abutting Illinois 72.

The properties are contiguous with the Randall Oaks area and combined would

result in an open-space center of more than 500 acres, according to Peterson.

But those acquisitions have "very little to do with the open-space mission," Harney contends.

Centrally located and adjacent to already-acquired open space, the raceway would provide many chances for recreation and nature study, supporters argue.

It acquisition also would prevent Centex from buying the property, electors said, easing the strain on the already burdened Community Unit School District 300.

Harney and others also argue the township should not expect to find bargains and should have been leveraging its available cash by applying for grants as a means of "fulfilling their obligations to the community."

Scarpelli said he also assumed the raceway would be purchased by the township after seeing the list of properties circulated during the referendum.

"I assumed they were going to be buying those pieces in that order," he said. "Had they come to us right after the referendum passed with the money they listed, they would own it today," he said.

Other avenues pursued

Open-space advocates have continued to make their case to buy the

remaining raceway property. In April, the 100 or so electors on hand for the annual township meeting, unanimously passed a multipoint resolution pushing for the purchase.

But electors are not board members.

"The end result is a board with a clear public mandate to purchase that piece of land and they're not doing it," according to Harney.

She says she will ask the township board Monday to draft a letter to the Open Lands Project.

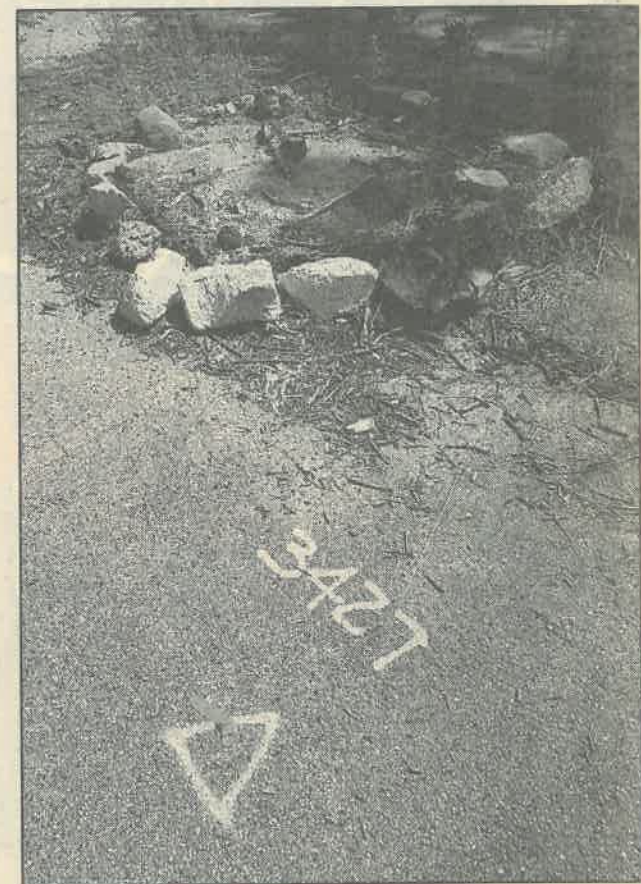
"They buy parcels for public bodies when there is a problem with timing," she said.

Harney also will suggest the township open discussions with Kane County Forest Preserve Commission, which in about a week will have \$70 million available for open-space purchases throughout the county.

"With grants, forest preserve help and Open Lands, there is no reason for them not to purchase this as recreational property," she said.

Another overlooked factor regarding the property is that it is zoned for heavy industry, Scarpelli said.

"If someone like Ford Motor Co. wanted to go there today and put up a manufacturing center for cars ... the village couldn't stop them. No one could," he said.



CHRISTOPHER T. ASSAF / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The remnants of a bonfire and surveyor's markings are some of the more recent additions to the former Meadowdale Raceway in Carpentersville.