

Daily Herald

Another approval in Klein fen case

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Over the objections of many north-side West Chicago residents, the city's development committee Monday unanimously approved the annexation and rezoning of 200 acres that sit next to a rare wetland.

The decision was the last step before final approval is considered by the West Chicago city council Oct 1.

The property, now a cornfield, lies in unincorporated territory at the western end of Klein Road. It is owned by the Jemsek-Hinckley family, who operate the adjacent St. Andrews Golf and Country Club.

The family's bid to have the property annexed is progressing despite months of lobbying against the move by groups formed from residents of adjoining neighborhoods. They argue the tract shouldn't be developed because it feeds needed water into a nearby fen, or wetland.

The protected area, informally called the Klein Fen, is part of the West Branch Forest Preserve.

"This is a unique geological and botanical feature you need to preserve," said resident Andrewy Skypor, who attended Monday's meeting along with about 50 others.

The DuPage County Forest Preserve District has been negotiating since March to purchase some portion of the tract.

All the while, Jemsek-Hinckley family representatives have maintained the family doesn't have a developer lined up and doesn't want to sell. Instead, they have said they want to keep the land for an eventual expansion of the golf course.

But that hasn't calmed many nearby residents.

On Sept. 5, more than 100 people opposed to the rezoning packed the West Chicago plan commission/zoning board of appeals meeting to no avail. Board members voted unanimously to zone the land R3, which allows for houses on 9,000-square-foot lots.

City officials made the move despite pleas from county forest preserve leaders who say that paving the land could hurt the fen by reducing the water it receives.

On Monday, resident Marlene Wall argued that new development on the annexed tract would decrease the property values of neighboring homes because it would be more dense.

"It's not fair to the existing neighbors," she said, calling the decision to approve the annexation an "embarrassment of judgment."

Community Development Director Joanne Kalchbrenner said Mayor Mike Kwasman had talked with Jemsek-Hinckley representatives and come to an agreement that if the family did decide to develop the tract, any lots

adjoining existing residential development would have a size minimum of 12,000 square feet -- the same as an R2 lot.

Nicholas Dzierzanowski, 7th Ward alderman, said that as District 6 representative on the DuPage County stormwater commission, he had seen no soil samples that show the fen's water comes from the St. Andrews tract.

"Through countless meetings, I've learned that if today you went to certify that fen, you couldn't, because it's dry," he said.

Fourth Ward Alderman Alan Murphy emphasized that if the family did decide to develop the land, any plans would have to go before the community again.