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# W. Chicago panel goes against fans of fen

## Plan/zoning board recommends rezoning farmland to allow homes

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There was little applause Wednesday as West Chicago officials approved a controversial proposal to rezone 200 acres of farmland near a rare wetland for residential use.

The unincorporated property on Klein Road is owned by the Jemsek-Hinckley family, who operate the adjacent St. Andrew's Golf Course.

It's also being eyed by DuPage County Forest Preserve District commissioners.

A forest preserve purchase would protect a rare wetland known as a fen in the West Branch Forest Preserve just east of the site.

Neighbors have banded together in opposition to any development, forming a group called the Friends of the Klein Fen.

More than 100 people, mostly opposed to the rezoning, attended the West Chicago plan commission/zoning board of appeals meeting. Board members voted unanimously to zone the land R3, which allows for houses on 9,000-square-foot lots.

Their recommendation goes to the development committee Monday and ultimately to the city council, where final authority for rezoning and annexation rests.

The forest preserve has told West Chicago leaders paving over the land, which is now a cornfield, could hurt the fen, which relies on water flow from the west to hydrate it.

Those arguments were echoed by residents at the hearing. West Chicago homeowner Andrew Skipor said DuPage County attracted people because of its open space.

"That's why we moved to West Chicago," Skipor said. The fen "is a very unique botanic feature. If West Chicago wants to make a name for itself, it should not develop it."

St. Andrew's club President Jerry Hinckley said his family was surprised and dismayed when it received a letter from the forest preserve offering to buy the land.

"We've had contact with developers over the years and said the land is not for sale. Since this became public, we've received a dozen or so calls from developers," Hinckley said.

The golf club has no grand scheme to develop the site. Instead, it's moving forward on an annexation plan that originated in the 1990s.

"We don't have a plan. We don't have a developer. We don't have a contract," Hinckley said.

But that lack of a plan or developer bothered some.

Christopher Stull of Warrenville, an attorney for Friends of Klein Fen, cautioned against the unknown.

"When you don't know or cannot clearly articulate what the final product will be, don't take that first step," he said.

Stull noted that rezoning will likely drive up the cost for the forest preserve.

"Who will pay the higher price? You do. We all do. It harms our own economic interest," he said.

But a minority in the crowd thanked the golf club owners for being "good neighbors" and resident James Burns said he feared putting too much land into forest preserves or park districts cuts into tax dollars.

"I see too much forest preserve -- I don't know if we need more," he said. "My kids never went to a forest preserve and I didn't, either."