

Woodridge mayor, District 99 talking — at least on paper

Residents gather for protests against open bids on land in village

By Mike Mitchell
STAFF WRITER

The good news: District 99 and the village of Woodridge have communicated for the first time in months.

The not-so-good news: They only did so after District 99 President Julia Kennedy Beckman wrote a letter to Woodridge Mayor William Murphy. That correspondence asked the village to withdraw from an organized protest that would occur the same night and at the same location as Downers Grove South High School's graduation ceremony. Students turned their tassels Friday at the school.

When Murphy heard that District 99 was trying to contact him, he said he was "delighted," until he read the letter.

Beckman explained in the letter that there was a "personal appearance at a board member's home, and irrational and threatening phone calls have been received as well."

Lt. Lee Hahn of the Downers Grove Police Department said police were aware of the incident, but there were no formal arrests.

The board member's name hasn't been released. District 99 did not return repeated phone calls before press time.

Murphy, however, said the incident was "a misrepresentation of the facts."

"Our citizens have acted in the best and most upright manner," he said. "They have been civil and care strongly about what happens to the property."

And those citizens did gather Friday evening. But they did decide not to march near any of the high schools. Instead, they gathered at Center and Woodridge drives, near the parcel, to voice their displeasure with the district. It was the second protest of the week, after a march on June 8.

Resident Kathy Walther, who helped organize the march, said she had no idea the planned protest fell on the same day as the graduation, and it was changed out of respect for the students.

Still, she said the marches have been a success.

"If this is what we have to do, then we'll do it," Walther said.

Meanwhile the district is continuing to seek fair market value for the 45-acre property in Woodridge at 71st Street and Woodridge Drive. The village of Woodridge, which was expecting to acquire the property some time before the summer, was disappointed when the district decided in April to open bids on the land to private developers, as well.

District 99 comptroller Mark Staehlin said more than a week ago that opening the bidding to private developers "is the only way to obtain fair market value."

The district's marketing plan projected layouts of the property that included high-density townhouse units, angering many Woodridge residents.

"I think the whole thing is insane," resident Walther said, referring to the projected townhouses. "It is despicable — it's all for money."

Last month, the Woodridge Village Board decided to file a lawsuit in DuPage County Circuit Court to obtain the property through eminent domain.

A special meeting is scheduled for Thursday night to review the appraisals for the parcel. The meeting is closed to the public.

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