

Dist. 99 says it needs land

By Sarah Stone

In an effort to keep the village of Woodridge from taking control of a 45-acre parcel of land from Community High School District 99, the School Board voted unanimously Aug. 15 to declare the site was needed for educational uses.

The board passed a resolution titled "Resolution reaffirming Community High School District 99's need for certain property located in the village of Woodridge."

According to the resolution, the property "is necessary, suitable and convenient for school facilities ... and for the lawful uses and purposes of the district." The resolution also stated that if Woodridge takes the property by eminent domain, it will "materially impair or interfere with the uses already existing."

The resolution said taking the property through eminent domain will also be detrimental to the public because the district will not be able to use the property in the future for school facilities, to the detriment of the schoolchildren of the district; the district will not be able to realize the full value of the property as compensation in an eminent domain lawsuit; the district will not be able to purchase similar land with the proceeds likely to be awarded in the lawsuit; and the future taxable value of the property will be lost.

The School Board passed the resolution a week before district and village officials are due in court to report on the progress of the eminent domain lawsuit.

School Board president Julia Beckman said the resolution was necessary to keep the land.

"We are forced to take this step," Beckman said. "We really have no choice. We did not seek this lawsuit. It was brought against us."

Most of the residents who addressed the board at the meeting spoke on the Woodridge land sale issue. Many urged the district to settle the land issue outside court because of compounding legal fees.

Woodridge Mayor William Murphy said prior to the meeting he was optimistic the district would begin working with his village to reach an agreement. Murphy said he was unhappy with by the board's latest action.

"I'm disappointed by the lack of interest in the attempt to talk and negotiate," he said. "It seems like they're hiding behind the litigation. It seems like they're taking political cover."

Murphy said Woodridge remains open to discussion. He said although Beckman has indicated the pending litigation prevents the two sides from negotiating, legally that is not true.

"Parties involved in a litigation can negotiate at any time," he said. "They should be doing that instead of spending taxpayers' funds."

In response to the district's resolution declaring the land needed, Murphy questioned the board's actions.

"In the April 15-17 edition of the Reporter-Progress, in one of (the district's) ads, they listed the top reasons to list property for sale," he said. "Was that not true in April versus the action last night? It's those kinds of messages that are mixed that causes me to draw the conclusion that they're hiding behind litigation."