

# Mediation is best path

## to peg parcel's worth

In a recent letter to the editor, Ken Lerner placed the value of the District 99 property at Woodridge and Center Drives at \$29 million. This was, according to his words, based on the fact that "lots around here go for at least \$200,000."

Well, Mr. Lerner, I live less than a mile away from the property in question and have a nice, well-kept, four-bedroom home that sits on top of my \$200,000 lot. I'll take a simple \$380,000 for my home. I would be a fool not to; homes around here (Winston Hills area) are currently selling for \$250,000 to \$267,000 (just check with local real estate agents).

Ken Lerner seems to be one of those people who must certainly side with P. T. Barnum, who is quoted as having said, "There's a sucker born every minute." And, I suspect, he is certainly not an appraiser (although there are many soon-to-be-relocating Woodridge residents who wish he were).

It's time to get real. From what I understand, Woodridge made an initial offer of \$8.5 million. I've been told two of the District 99 School Board members are actively involved in real estate; they must know, as I do, that this was an initial offer, and counter-offers are in order. Again, as I understand it, District 99 through its marketing agent, Newcastle, went about soliciting bids for the property based on multifamily housing (the most dense zoning level possible, and hence the most profitable -- and a zoning level contrary to that set on the property for the last 31 years). This, I suppose, was to peg a price for the property. Why didn't the board just seek a reasonable appraisal for the land instead of spending money on a hot-shot marketing organization?

People in surrounding communities (all that feed into District 99 in whole or in part) must certainly know that Woodridge has the highest level of multifamily housing units in the area -- and not one taxpaying citizen in Woodridge wants any more. What's that saying? "Put it in your own backyard!" You don't want it, and, we don't want any more. (By the way, Woodridge is proud of its ethnic diversity and annually celebrates it at the Woodridge Cultural Fest.

Back to getting real. Reality -- whether we like it or not -- is that the village of Woodridge has started eminent domain proceedings. I'm no attorney, and I preface my comments with that, but it is my understanding that the position of the court in such proceedings is less on the legality of the action than it is on determining the final selling price of the land. And here, somewhere between Lerner's ridiculous estimate and that initial bid by Woodridge, rests the actual value of the land. I and others have been asking both District 99 and Woodridge to enter into third-party, objective mediation that would help determine that price.

Woodridge has said they are willing to come to the table. I don't believe District 99 has made such a determination yet.

What will happen if they don't come to the table? Possibly 18 to 24 months of court hearings that will sap hundreds of thousands of dollars from the operating budgets of both District 99 and Woodridge. But I'm optimistic that the hearing judge will bring the two sides together in chambers and instruct them to seek such mediation, both to save us money and to free up his court calendar.

On Aug. 15, the District 99 School Board unanimously passed a resolution that reads more like a legal brief to be presented to the court in this matter to support a motion than it does a statement of decision made by the board on the property (and I suspect some of the \$38,000 that was spent by the board on legal fees in one recent month was for the legal review, if not the virtual drafting, of this resolution).

Mr. Lerner, would you support a third-party mediation to resolve this issue and save us both hard-earned tax dollars? I hope this is resolved quickly; I can't afford the taxes on a \$380,000 home.

**Ron Dilger**

*Woodridge*