

Woodridge's \$10M offer for land rejected by Dist. 99

Staff writer

45-acres of open land
not for sale: School Board president
By Don Grigas

Negotiations between Community High School District 99 and the village of Woodridge over a 45-acre parcel of school district-owned property in Woodridge remain at an impasse following a recent exchange of letters between the mayor of Woodridge and the president of the District 99 School Board.

In a letter dated Sept. 14, Mayor William Murphy presented to School Board President Julia Beckman an offer of \$10 million to acquire the 45-acre parcel adjacent to Woodridge Village Hall at Center Drive.

In her response letter, Beckman said District 99 "cannot accept an offer for something that is not for sale."

For more than a year Woodridge has attempted to purchase the property, owned since 1967 by the School District.

On May 23, 2005, the village filed an eminent domain lawsuit in an attempt to force the School District into selling the property to Woodridge.

At its Aug. 15, 2005, meeting the District 99 School Board adopted a resolution opposing the eminent domain suit, and stating the lawsuit -- if successful -- would deprive the School District from using the parcel for educational uses.

"The Board of Education passed the ... resolution at its Aug. 15, 2005, meeting affirming that the property is needed for school purposes," Beckman stated in the Sept. 19, 2006 letter.

Murphy, during remarks made at the Woodridge Town meeting on Oct. 3, said the \$10 million offer was \$800,000 more than what the property appraised at a few months ago.

Murphy said the village was prepared

to make a "lump sum" payment if the offer had been accepted. The offer also indicated the village could spread the payments out over several years if District 99 preferred those terms.

Murphy's letter also stated the village was willing to overspend for the property because "Woodridge sincerely wishes to resolve the pending legal action and avoid the expense of further litigation to both parties."

In her response letter Beckman wrote, "If the Village was truly interested in avoiding further legal costs, the Village should withdraw its lawsuit."

Beckman and Murphy both offered no further comment, citing the ongoing litigation.

The next status hearing is scheduled for Nov. 9 in DuPage County Circuit Court, according to Peg Halik, assistant village manager for Woodridge.

The property became an issue last year when village officials said the School District advertised the parcel in a trade publication as a suitable site for more than 200 multifamily housing units.

Woodridge officials also said the School District had reneged on an intergovernmental agreement inked in 1978 allowing Woodridge to bid on the land first if it ever was put on the market.

The School District's resolution also states the "District's future facilities needs are uncertain," and the district prefers to retain the property in the face of growing school enrollments.