

# Dist. 99 will sell Woodridge land

By Dave Fornell

Staff writer

Without a tangible need for its vacant 44-acre property in Woodridge, the Community High School District 99 Board of Education has decided to put the property up for auction to generate millions of dollars for repairs, maintenance and building upgrades.

The board made the decision to sell the property in an April 11 closed session meeting. The board also hired Chicago-based Newcastle Advisors LLC as its real estate advisor and to handle the bidding process.

The fate of the property, located at the intersection of Woodridge and Center drives, has been discussed in closed session meetings since December, when administrators started gathering information so the board could decide whether to sell.

In a press release about the sale, school officials said the proceeds will fund long-term capital improvement projects at both Downers Grove North and South high schools. Officials also said the decision to sell the property was based on a pressing need to address facility maintenance issues, and because of opinions expressed in the community. The district also held a community survey in June that showed most respondents believe the land should be sold.

"Property tax caps have caused all Illinois schools to consider alternative funding sources to meet organizational objectives," said District Controller Mark Staehlin. "District 99 is fortunate to have an asset that can provide such substantial benefit to us."

He said the proceeds will be placed in restricted funds primarily to be used for long-term capital projects.

District officials would not say what they think the property is worth. In the past, board member Craig Greenwood said the property is probably worth about \$18 million. Other board members agree the property is worth more than \$10 million.

"We don't know precisely what it is worth, so we will see what people are willing to pay for it," said board member Nick Mazzarella.

He said the consulting firm came up with an approximate property value, but the board does not want to disclose the estimate.

The village of Woodridge wants to purchase the land for open space and expansion of its government center.

"I'm very pleased District 99 is going ahead with the sale," Woodridge Mayor Bill Murphy said. "It's surplus property, and it needed to be sold. The village looks forward to working with the district on the sale of the property."