


Jury sets value of school property in Woodridge at \$14.2 million

By Annie Reed, areed@mysuburbanlife.com
Downers Grove Reporter
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Downers Grove, IL -

A jury determined Community High School District 99's 45-acre property in Woodridge is valued at \$14.2 million.

During the one-week trial that concluded Monday, the jury heard testimony by appraisers and land planners to determine the land's fair market value after a court ruled last year the village could take the property, near Center Drive and 71st Street, via eminent domain.

The parties varied greatly on the land's possible value during the trial, with village appraisers estimating its worth between \$10.25 million and \$11.2 million, and the district's appraiser citing \$21.5 million.

"It's disappointing, but honestly we knew going in to the trial that the jury wouldn't be able to see all the information," said District Controller Mark Staehlin, who added that the district received a fair market independent bid of \$24 million for the property.

Woodridge assistant village administrator Peggy Halik said that figure is moot since it was not presented in the trial. Halik said the village is eager to finalize the land purchase, which it plans to use for an undetermined public purpose.

"This has been the No.1 issue for the (Village) Board for three years," Halik said. "We have positioned ourselves financially, and the board is ready to move forward."

However, Staehlin said District 99 may not be ready to concede. School Board President Julia Beckman said the board will convene Monday to consider appealing either the condemnation lawsuit or the valuation trial.

"It's an ethical and a financial issue for our taxpayers and our students. We received a fair market independent bid of \$24 million. That's a big gap to ask from our taxpayers," Staehlin said.

Staehlin said the district has spent several hundred thousand dollars thus far to fight the condemnation lawsuit, but he noted the first offer the village made for the land was \$8.5 million.

"The difference between \$8.5 and \$14.2 million more than covers the attorney fees," he said.

District 99 bought the 45 acres in 1966 as a possible site for a third school, but in 1996 voters shot down a referendum to build a new school. In the midst of choppy financial waters and failed tax hike attempt in 2004, Staehlin said the district began advertising the land for public bids. Woodridge, which had signed an agreement for right-for-first refusal in the 1970s if the land were ever to be sold, then filed a lawsuit against the district.

Property value

May 2005 Woodridge offers \$8.5 million for 45-acre parcel owned by District 99.

June 2005 District 99 said it received sealed bid offer for

\$24 million from a developer.

September 2006 Woodridge offers \$10 million for land

March 2008 Jury sets value at \$14.2 million

Jury puts price tag on land: \$14.2 million

March 27, 2008

By Eva McKendrick emckendrick@scn1.com

The village of Woodridge will pay \$14.2 million to buy a 45-acre piece of land from Downers Grove Community High School District 99, a DuPage County jury decided March 24.

Woodridge took the land by eminent domain last May. In a trial that started March 17, jurors were faced with deciding how much the village would pay the district for the land.

Woodridge has valued the site, at Center and Woodridge drives, at \$10.25 million to \$11.22 million. District 99 was asking for \$21.5 million. These values are what both parties appraised the land at as of May 2005, when the village filed suit against the school district.

"We're a bit disappointed," District 99 Controller Mark Staehlin said.

He said information the district was not allowed to present in court, including testimony from an additional appraiser and a bid the district received from a developer for \$24 million, could have changed the outcome of the trial.

The District 99 Board of Education next week will look into appealing both the eminent domain issue and the value of the land, Staehlin said.

Peggy Halik, assistant village administrator for the village of Woodridge, said the village plans to keep the site as open space for soccer practice, festivals and other public uses.

"We're glad to see this come to a close and move on," she said.

She added that Woodridge has 60 days to deposit the \$14.2 million with the county treasurer and that District 99 will get the money sometime after that. Halik said this purchase, which the village is making in conjunction with the Woodridge Park District, will not affect Woodridge taxpayers.

In 1966, District 99 bought the land, thinking a third high school was in the future. The district asked taxpayers three times whether they wanted a third high school and were turned down three times. However, the district decided to hang onto the land for unforeseen future needs.

In 1978, the district signed a contract with the village of Woodridge stating that if the district ever decided to sell the land, Woodridge would have the right of first refusal. Because of a contractual technicality, the district later found the contract invalid but said it would still honor its intent.

District 99 officials said that in 2005 they had not decided what to do with the land but sought fair market value by opening bids from private developers in an effort to make a decision.

Woodridge offered to buy the land for \$8.5 million in May 2005 and for \$10 million in September 2006, but the district declined both offers.