

District 99 to appeal land valuation

By Don Grigas, dgrigas@mysuburbanlife.com
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Woodridge, IL -

The fight between Community High School District 99 and the village of Woodridge over a 45-acre parcel of land in Woodridge is not over. After a closed-session meeting Monday night, the School Board is directing its attorneys to appeal both the condemnation lawsuit and the recent valuation trial, which set the parcel's fair market value at \$14.2 million.

Last May, a DuPage County Circuit Court ruled the land — west of the Town Center complex at the intersection of Woodridge Drive and Center Drive, in Woodridge — could be taken by the village using eminent domain.

District 99 controller Mark Staehlin said the first appeal will challenge whether the village has the authority to condemn the property of another public body. The second appeal stems from evidence from a second district appraiser and a private developer's bid for the property, which the judge excluded from the trial.

In June 2005, a private developer submitted a \$24 million bid for the land to the District 99, along with a \$100,000 check in escro. To determine "highest and best use," Staehlin said the jury should have been allowed to see a "real world" offer.

"The jury only got to see half of our case," Staehlin said.

District spokeswoman Faith Behr said in a release the School Board is appealing based on "expert advice" that it has grounds for appeal, the \$7 million discrepancy between the jury's fair market valuation verdict and a District 99 appraiser's and the fact the property is a "significant irreplaceable asset."

"For our taxpayers and our students now and (in) the future, we were very disappointed in the rulings," said District 99 Board President Julia Beckman. "We have had expert advice that shows there are substantial grounds for appeal and believe that an appeal is in the best interest of the communities we serve."

Woodridge Mayor Bill Murphy said the village is "very disappointed" with the appeal, calling it "frivolous."

"It just delays the inevitable," Murphy said.

"We were prepared to move forward (after the recent court decision) and develop a positive relationship with the district. This action, makes it no longer appropriate," Murphy said.

Staehlin said the process of filing the appeal is expected to take three to six months.

District 99 purchased the parcel in 1966 as a location for a possible third school. The village offered to purchase it for \$10 million in September 2006.