Written by MARK JAEGER
Wednesday, 30 November 2011 17:53

Official says problems with access from Fairway Drive could block state from buying 80-acre natural site

Town of Fredonia officials spent the better part of a decade focusing on abandoning an unpaved portion of Fairway Drive to avoid ongoing maintenance costs.

The road was formally dropped from the town's ledger of public thoroughfares in summer, although the town kept an easement and turnaround for public access.

Now, that same area has become the scene of a new controversy as neighbors object to a proposal by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to acquire an undeveloped 80-acre Dix property at the north end of the road.

The DNR reportedly has a purchase agreement in place for the parcel that is good for 90 days.

Before bringing the acquisition to the DNR Board and Gov. Scott Walker for final approval, the state asked the town to act on a resolution endorsing the purchase.

Town Chairman Richard Mueller said he didn't believe it would matter if the town doesn't back to purchase.

"They will pretty much do whatever they want anyway," Mueller said.

However, a handful of neighbors showed up at the town meeting to protest the acquisition and the DNR's plan to open the parcel to limited public use.

If the DNR does acquire the property, it would have to be open for hunting, hiking, cross-country skiing and nature watching, according to Dale Katsma, DNR area supervisor.

"The public access issue is a real concern," said neighbor Chris Hess.

"People are going to be coming and going, and I can see a problem with trespassing and vandalism. I don't have a problem with the DNR acquiring the land, but I have a problem with people walking on my property. I don't want to look out my window in fall and see it covered with (hunters wearing) orange, like a pumpkin patch."

An easement that allowed access to the property was granted by Hess before the DNR plans were known.

If those objections can't be resolved, they could derail the purchase, Katsma said.

"The purchase is not on the DNR Board's December agenda, and I am not sure if we will proceed if we can't resolve the access issue," he said.

The state has targeted the Dix property, which is adjacent to the 198-acre Huiras Lake State Natural Area, since 2005. It is within the boundary of the North Branch Milwaukee River Wildlife and Farming Heritage Area.

The DNR has characterized the Dix property as an “undeveloped parcel of rolling topography, containing a mixture of uplands and lowlands with small ponds and a bog relict lake.”

An inventory of land shows there are 28 acres of wetlands, 30 acres of old field and upland brush and 22 acres of upland forest that includes several large white pines.

If the DNR acquires the land, the town would receive a direct payment in lieu of taxes from the state.