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Correcting resolution on abandoned road opens door to additional objections to DNR acquisition plan

A simple clerical correction made at the last Fredonia Town Board meeting reopened a flood of complaints about the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources propsoal to acquire an undeveloped 80-acre parcel at the north end of Fairway Drive.

Discussion about the plans by the state to acquire the wooded Dix property and open it to public access drew protests at November's Town Board meeting.

The objections were renewed last month, as town supervisors voted to correct an earlier resolution that abandoned Fairway Drive as a public road. The new vote was needed because an incorrect property description was used in the resolution adopted earlier in the year, a mistake for which Town Chairman Richard Mueller took the blame.

"The description wasn't correct. The resolution says the road is in Section 22 and it should have been Section 18, and it wasn't caught by me," Mueller said.

The board abandoned the dead-end road because the town hasn't maintained it for years. The board needed adopt a resolution in place to ensure access to landlocked parcels without the public road.

"We could not abandon Fairway Drive without granting easements to the affected properties, but it wasn't the town's intention that it be public access," Mueller said.

The corrective action gave neighbors another opportunity to speak out against the DNR's acquisition of the Dix land, especially to opening the remote parcel to the public.

Neighboring property owners said opening the Dix land to public use would invite trespassers onto their land, increase vandalism in the area and remove the parcel from the town's tax rolls.

The prospect of gun-toting hunters wandering the Dix property was especially concerning to Lenny Kass, who manages the adjacent Rainbow Day Camp, which is operated by the Jewish Community Center.

The 90-acre camp, which has dormitory facilities, has been in operation for three decades and is used throughout the year by children and families for a variety of organized activities.

"We are vehemently opposed to having public hunting allowed next to a children's camp. I'll admit there is hunting on the neighboring property now, but there is a big difference between being a public hunting grounds and private land that has hunting on it," Kass said.

Mueller was careful to keep the town out of the dispute.

“The DNR was looking for something from us saying the town is in favor of them acquiring the land, but we refused to pass anything,” he said. “If you want to stop the sale, you should contact your legislators.”

There were no DNR representatives at last month’s board meeting, but DNR area supervisor Dale Katsma previously said access problems could derail the acquisition.

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

The DNR has cataloged the Dix property as 28 acres of wetlands including a cedar-tamarack swamp, 30 acres of old field and upland brush and 22 acres of upland forest including several specimens of large white pine.

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

On a far less contested issue, the Town Board accepted the certified survey map presented by the caretakers of the historic Waubeka Union Cemetery for an expansion of the graveyard on Highway I onto a portion of the adjacent 2.5 acres.

The addition will create eight new sections of the cemetery, offering 480 burial plots.

Cemetery officials said the added graves will be sufficient to handle their burial needs for more than a century.