

Groups scramble to save Port preserve plan

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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<http://www.ozaukeeexpress.com/images/051613/mapSM.png> **Conservation organizations, city try to resolve preservation vs. development dispute over former VK land**

A coalition of conservation groups that want to protect hundreds of acres of Lake Michigan bluff land on Port Washington's far south side is scrambling this week to keep its dreams of a public nature preserve alive in the face of opposition from city officials.

The groups — the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy and Ozaukee County Planning and Parks Department — announced earlier this month their plan to purchase and protect about 210 acres, which includes a mile of shoreline, as a county-owned preserve on land that was once to be an upscale VK Development subdivision complete with lakefront mansions and a resort hotel.

The city responded almost immediately, making it clear at a meeting Monday with representatives of the conservation groups as well as other county officials that it would not sit quietly by while land it annexed in 2000 for the purpose of development and tax base growth was preserved in its entirety and taken off the tax rolls forever.

"I think it's fair to say the city certainly has reservations about this plan," County Administrator Tom Meaux said.

Meaux said the city's position will certainly affect the county's decision to become involved in the project, which is significant because the county is seen a potential player of note in the preservation effort.

The county's Natural Resources Board, which oversees the Planning and Parks Department, has recommended the county borrow \$600,000 to help pay for the property, which is expected to sell for millions of dollars. And as a nature preserve, the land is intended to be part of the

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