

Long Grove, Hawthorn Woods urge Rauner to stop funding Route 53 extension study



In a joint letter recently sent to residents, the top two officials in Hawthorn Woods and Long Grove are urging Gov. Bruce Rauner to stop an environmental study of the proposed Route 53 extension. (Simon Brubaker / Pioneer Press)

By **Ronnie Wachter** · **Contact Reporter**
Pioneer Press

JUNE 30, 2016, 4:03 PM

Officials from two villages long against the idea of extending Route 53 into Lake County have lodged formal opposition, urging Gov. Bruce Rauner and the Illinois Tollway Authority to stop a planned \$40 to \$50 million environmental study.

In a joint letter recently sent to residents, the top two officials in Hawthorn Woods and Long Grove said they've made the request to Rauner and the Tollway because the proposed extension could threaten the character of their towns. Earlier this year, the Tollway planned to begin a study assessing what an extended Route 53 would do to the wetlands and other open spaces in its path.

Long Grove Village President Angie Underwood wrote to residents that the Tollway has yet to start the environmental study, following the recent opposition to the project mainly from once longtime supporter Aaron Lawlor, chairman of the Lake County Board.

"If built, this project will impact our environment, finances, quality of life, personal property values and the character of our village forever," she said.

A spokesman with the Tollway told Pioneer Press the agency is still planning to go through with the environmental study.

"That process is ongoing, with statements of interest from firms who want to conduct the [environmental impact study] due to the Tollway by August 1," spokesman Dan Rozek said. "Those statements will be reviewed by Tollway staff, who are expected this fall to recommend which firm is best qualified to conduct the [study]."

The Tollway board already has heard concerns about the project. Board members spent about an hour during their May 26 meeting listening to complaints from the plan's detractors [without giving a response](#).

Route 53 currently ends at Lake Cook Road in Buffalo Grove. But the Tollway since the 1960s has pushed at different times to extend it up to Route 120 in Grayslake.

The latest design for the proposed extension calls for a mostly straight road that would drive through marshes in Hawthorn Woods and Long Grove. Officials have estimated the project would cost around \$2.5 billion in 2020 dollars.

Lawlor surprised many involved with the project on May 16, announcing he had reversed his support and now opposed the extension idea.

Environmental groups, such as Openlands, the Sierra Club and the Liberty Prairie Foundation, initially supported early proposed designs that tried to minimize harm to sensitive natural areas along the proposed extension. But all three have rescinded support, saying they no longer believe the Tollway is committed to their environmental concerns.

Earlier in June, Vernon Hills Mayor Roger Byrne [blasted Lawlor](#) for withdrawing support, repeatedly saying how disappointed he was in the board chairman during a village board meeting with Lawlor.

The Vernon Hills board later unanimously approved a letter of support for the next phase of the Route 53 project. Mundelein voted against sending the support letter during a meeting June 13.

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