

Village worried about wetland

Rt. 53 extension report shows potential breach, Hawthorn Woods says

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Discussion among stakeholders of how a proposed Route 53/120 extension into central Lake County could affect surrounding areas resumes today, but one community already is applying pressure for changes.

Officials in Hawthorn Woods say they don't oppose the road but contend the alignment represented in a report that serves as the foundation of recent interest to extend Route 53 is flawed because it goes through instead of around a sensitive wetland area.

In a letter to directors of the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority, Gov. Bruce Rauner and others, the village asks the tollway board not to proceed with additional planning until the Blue Ribbon Advisory Council report is amended to include a preferred alignment around the Indian Creek Wetland Complex.

That area between Old McHenry Road and Midlothian/Gilmer roads is the most environmentally sensitive in Hawthorn Woods, according to the village, which is asking for an opportunity "to change the conversation" of the report before moving into the next phase of planning.

The village says it was not represented on the advisory council, but that several state and federal agencies through the years have suggested a preferred alignment away from the Indian Creek wetland.

"A record had been created, and we believe the (blue ribbon report) is flawed," Mayor Joe

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Route 53: Extension has been envisioned for more than 50 years

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Mancino said. "We are asking them (tollway board) to stop the process and convene with the communities in the corridor."

Lake County Board Chairman Aaron Lawlor, who chairs the advisory council, stressed the alignment has not been determined and communities will have the opportunity to weigh in if the study progresses.

"There's no reason to

do detailed engineering to address concerns that communities like Hawthorn Woods have raised until they (tollway staff) get direction from their board," Lawlor said.

The issue for Hawthorn Woods, according to Chief Operating Officer Pam Newton, is a road through the wetland would have to be elevated and "that completely changes the story for Hawthorn Woods."

"Half of our town would hear it or see it. Certainly going

through that wetland is not something that was anticipated," she said.

A Route 53 extension has been envisioned in various forms for more than 50 years. The most recent thrust is based on the advisory council's finding calling for a 45 mph, limited access boulevard intended to minimize environmental impacts while sparking economic development. The estimated cost is \$2.35 billion to \$2.65 billion.

As a result of the report,

finance and land use committees composed of community representatives were created to make recommendations to the tollway board. After months of extensive discussion, the finance committee last month recommended a series of measures to close the funding gap, including a 4 cent-per-gallon gasoline tax, toll increases and other measures.

Tollway officials have not scheduled a date to consider next steps, spokesman Wendy Abrams said.

The advisory council's work was meant to achieve a broad consensus, and many issues were not fully evaluated in recognition that all aspects of the project would be examined as part of a required environmental impact statement, Abrams said. The roadway path depicted in the council's report reflects a centerline recorded in 1963, she added.

New federal environmental laws would require a different process for moving the project forward, according to

Abrams. Many details would be subject to comprehensive study, she said. If the project advances, there will be opportunities for "significant public and stakeholder engagement," she added.

The Illinois Route 53/120 Corridor Land Use committee meeting is from 2 to 4 p.m. today at the Lake County Division of Transportation, 600 W. Winchester Road, Libertyville. Visit www.lakecorridorplan.org for materials and information from previous meetings.