

Commissioners seek shake-up at the top: Call for dismissal of superintendent, upper-level salary cuts

Daily Southtown, January 16, 2003, by Stephanie Gehring

Three Cook County Forest Preserve District commissioners are calling for the firing of General Supt. Joseph Nevius as well as slashing upper-management salaries in an effort to reinstate 46 lower-level positions.

Commissioner Forrest Claypool is leading the charge to dump Nevius in the wake of the firestorm of controversy surrounding the district.

A resolution asking President John Stroger to fire Nevius, which will be considered by the board Jan. 22, is co-sponsored by Tony Peraica and Earlean Collins.

The three commissioners also drafted an ordinance directing the district's finance committee to reduce upper-management payroll by \$1.4 million through salary cuts or layoffs to free up money to reinstate 46 lower-level jobs.

Steve Mayberry, a spokesman for the forest preserve district, declined comment on both resolutions.

On Wednesday, Claypool, co-chairman of the land management and maintenance committee, and other commissioners listened to testimony about the district's operations from more than three dozen people.

The complaints ranged from the district's poor maintenance of its ecosystems to the condition of bathrooms.

Claypool said the testimony provided "very specific factual evidence on the mismanagement of forest preserve system by current administration."

John Sheerin, an Oak Lawn environmental attorney representing the Friends of the Forest Preserves, said, "We are not satisfied with the maintenance and management of the preserve. The infrastructure is very aged."

While Sheerin said accountability is needed, he also called for a study to ensure proper placement of personnel.

"Can the existing team - the one that brought it to its lowest level - bring it back up?" Sheerin asked.

Written testimony submitted by individuals was to be passed on to all the commissioners for their review, Claypool said.

The ordinances will be considered at a meeting Jan. 22 of the forest preserve commissioners.