

## Forest preserve advocates rip transfer of 11 acres

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The Cook County Forest Preserve District's plans to transfer control of more than 11 acres to two west suburbs is rankling environmentalists who see the move as opening the door to potential cannibalization of other parcels down the road.

A Forest Preserve District board committee on Monday gave approval to the villages of Westchester and River Grove to take responsibility for three parcels. Westchester plans to build a "Welcome to Westchester" sign on just a few dozen square feet at the northeast corner of Cermak and Mannheim roads, while River Grove plans to take responsibility for two parcels totaling 11.4 acres that already are part of baseball diamonds at River Front Park and Shelton Field. All the parcels would continue to be owned by the district, per the agreement.

But with no real revenue coming from the deals and no land being given back to the forest preserves by the villages, some criticized them as being small steps toward the disappearance of acres long-intended to be untouched.

"You're not seeing the whole picture," John Sheerin, president of Friends of the Forest Preserves, told county commissioners. "We're seeing our land nibbled away" by those with good intentions, he added.

But county Commissioner Tony Peraica said Westchester's welcome sign would be pinched into "isolated property at a busy intersection," to be beautified and maintained by the village. Commissioner Peter Silvestri said River Grove already has been using most of the district land in question. Under the agreement, the village would provide security, upkeep and would accept liability for the property if a problem arose.

Also Monday, the county commissioners' Finance Committee heard three hours of discussion on a 23-page ethics ordinance -- and seven pages of amendments.

Proposed major changes include applying a ban on certain gifts to elected officials to also include those officials' immediate families. Also proposed is a measure to eliminate taxpayer-funded mailings about

county office holders' accomplishments that could be perceived as election literature.

Other proposed changes include requiring elected officials and senior staff to attend ethics seminars once every four years.