

## **Dominican's plans gain panel's nod :Foes dispute title on parcel**

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The village's Development Review Board gave unanimous approval Thursday to three Dominican University projects, including a Thatcher Avenue driveway that crosses a disputed triangle of restored woodland.

DRB members voted 5-0 in favor of the plans, which include a new campus parking garage and an academic building. It now moves to the village board for consideration.

Ten villagers who addressed the board Thursday said they support the university's garage driveway plan, which would keep traffic off of Park Avenue and Greenfield Street. Three others raised concerns about ownership of the woodland along Thatcher Avenue.

Rose Loiacono, of the 1300 block of Park Avenue., said university traffic on her street already has reached a crisis level. The Thatcher driveway will make life safer for children in the neighborhood, she said.

John Humbert, of the 1300 block of Park, said university neighbors formed a group called the Northwoods Coalition, in favor of Thatcher access. The group gathered 95 signatures from residents on Greenfield Street, Forest Avenue and Division Street supporting the plan.

Victor Guarino of Oak Park, head steward of the Thatcher Woods Savanna Restoration Project, submitted a petition of 450 signatures opposed to Thatcher Access. The signatures were gathered from among River Forest, Oak Park and Chicago residents.

Guarino has fought the plan, which will cut into a woodland that for decades was considered Cook County Forest Preserve property and managed by volunteers.

University officials presented the DRB with a title from Chicago Title and Trust stating that Dominican is owner of the triangular parcel.

Not settled

Forest Preserve Commissioner Larry Suffredin, who opposes encroachment on Forest Preserve land, said Friday that ownership

still isn't settled, despite the title. He has threatened to personally sue to block construction on the site.

"Cook County Board President John Stroger on Oct. 6 appointed special council, retired Judge George Leighton, to look at this," Suffredin said. "He has been asked to find out what land claims are involved and what our options are."

"At this point we still control the land," he added. "After this review we'll know what action we need to take."

Suffredin said Stroger made the appointment on Thursday, and Leighton's review could come as early as this week.

Benjamin Cox, director of Friends of the Forest Preserves, addressed the DRB about the land dispute.

"We're concerned that Forest Preserve land is being taken away," Cox said Friday, noting the group isn't opposed to Dominican's plans for a parking garage. "If the Forest Preserve won't stand up and protect their holdings, then we have to."

DRB member Dennis McMahon, filling in for Chairman Martin, noted the Forest Preserve hasn't attempted to clarify the ownership issue. "All the documentation we have is from the applicant," he said. "The Forest Preserve is aware of these proceedings and hasn't appeared or objected to these claims."

Village Attorney Jonathan Gilbert said documentation of Dominican's ownership is in order.

"It's not an issue," he said. "There's a mechanism for resolving this and the mechanism hasn't been invoked."

In response to a question, Gilbert said the Friends of the Forest Preserve do not have any authority in the dispute.

The university's \$45 million plan includes a 550-space Gothic style parking garage, and a 123,000-square-foot academic building.

Thatcher Avenue access, which would lead from Thatcher Avenue to the proposed parking garage is being treated as a separate project.

The DRB approved a 1.3 foot height allowance for the garage's elevator shaft. A height allowance of 15 feet was approved for the proposed academic building.

As part of its recommendation, the DRB suggested traffic along Thatcher Avenue should be monitored if the project is approved. The village could consider adding a stop sign, limiting turns or restriping Thatcher Avenue if the access road causes delays or vehicle crashes. The DRB recommended reevaluating the drive a year after it opens. Dominican University President Donna Carroll said she's pleased with the unanimous approval.

"I'm delighted by the positive vote and the strong support we heard from the neighbors," she said.