

Forest district financial plan endorsed

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A Lake County Forest Preserve District proposal to borrow up to \$85 million for future land purchases and improvement projects picked up some significant endorsements Friday.

Representatives from local environmental groups and other organizations voiced support for the plan during a public hearing in Waukegan.

Of the eight audience members who spoke during the hour-long hearing, only one - a local woman who had several concerns about the district - opposed the proposal.

The backers praised forest district officials for coming up with the plan and striving to safeguard the region's green space.

"The forest preserve district must continue to be proactive in order to protect the county's prairies, wetlands and savannas," said Lenore Byer-Clow, policy director for a Chicago group called the Openlands Project. "It is your responsibility to make Lake County a better place for current and future generations."

Support also came from groups including the Lake Forest Open Lands Association, Residential Homes of America, Friends of the Forest Preserves and Friends of Ryerson Woods.

The proposal would have the district borrow \$45 million in 2006 and \$40 million later, possibly in 2008. It's favored over an alternate plan that calls for the district to get the entire \$85 million next year.

If the board approves the proposal, the first bonds could be issued by June. A second vote would be required later to get the rest of the money.

Officials are considering the plan because the \$85 million loan voters approved in 2000 to pay for land purchases and restoration projects is all but spent. Board members opted against putting a funding request on the March ballot.

That decision drew out the only critic of the proposal Friday morning. Newport Township resident Avis Galgan said getting the loans without

first seeking voter approval bypasses the will of the people.

The board is expected to vote on the proposal at its Nov. 18 meeting. Many commissioners spoke in favor of the plan Friday.

"There are still a number of wonderful parcels I hope to acquire," said commissioner Ann Maine, a Lincolnshire Republican who leads the land preservation and acquisition committee.