



Separate Board Membership for the Forest Preserve District of Cook County

Support SB 176 (Harmon) and HB 5128 (Nekritz)

The Problem:

The current board structure is failing the District because it creates an inherent conflict of interest. Certain actions taken by Commissioners clearly illustrate how they are placed in irreconcilable positions by simultaneously representing interests of Cook County and the Forest Preserve District, including:

- **Transfer of \$13.3 million from the District (nearly 1/3 of its budget) to Cook County in 2007;**
- **Sale of District land, for the first time in its history, to the Village of Rosemont in 1999;**
- **Consideration of the Mittal Steel Land Swap Proposal in 2005; and**
- **Granting the Village of Morton Grove a permanent easement over District lands in 2000.**

The current board structure is failing the District because it inhibits proper oversight.

Commissioners must spend great amounts of time dealing with issues pertinent to their Cook County duties. This leaves little time for Commissioners to focus on the needs of the District. With the creation of a separate board to oversee the District, County Commissioners would have more time to spend on County issues. At the same time, the District would benefit from having Commissioners who are able to solely focus on the interest in the District and be held accountable only to the interests of the District.

The District suffers from numerous problems because of the conflict and lack of proper oversight.

Due to current structural deficiencies which create an inherent conflict of interest and inhibit proper oversight, the District has experienced numerous problems, including:

- **Numerous considerations of land sales, swaps, and easements that erode holdings;**
- **Inadequate reporting and adherence to transparent financial procedures;**
- **Failure to develop a Capital Improvement Plan until after approving a \$100m bond issue;**
- **Questionable land management practices;**
- **Slow rate of land acquisition; and**
- **Allowance of private use of public lands.**

The Solution:

SB 176 and HB 4559 will ensure the creation of a separately elected board of commissioners for the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Nine unpaid Commissioners will be elected in a non-partisan election, with three commissioners elected from each Board of Review district (currently the 17 county board commissioners and the county board president serve as the board). The president will be selected by the members of the board.

Coalition Members:

- Friends of the Forest Preserves
- The Civic Federation
- Audubon-Chicago Region
- Bird Conservation Network
- The Better Government Association
- Environmental Law and Policy Center
- Citizens for Conservation
- Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin
- Cook County Farm Bureau
- Faith in Place
- Friends of the Chicago River
- Friends of the Parks
- Openlands
- Riding Club of Barrington Hills
- Sierra Club Illinois Chapter
- The Illinois Environmental Council

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