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Hawthorn Woods Responds to Draft Route 53 Land Use Plan

The Village of Hawthorn Woods, along with hundreds of concerned citizens, submitted formal comments to the Illinois Tollway regarding the draft Illinois Route 53/120 Corridor Land Use Strategy (Plan), dated September 24, 2015. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, (CMAP), consultants for the Illinois Tollway Authority, conducted two open houses in Lake County and collected comments from area residents. In addition, the Village of Hawthorn Woods has received numerous comments and concerns regarding the proposed extension of Route 53 that would be built through neighborhoods and businesses in Hawthorn Woods and several Lake County communities.

Hawthorn Woods contends that the BRAC report is flawed for many reasons, including the proposed alignment, and the composition of the Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee that did not include a single community in the path of the proposed Route 53 as members of that committee, as statutorily mandated. Other comments regarding the land use plan include:

1. On Page 7-The conclusion that municipalities in the corridor should maximize economic development potential on remaining available land within the corridor to spur intensive development and help fund the tollway is not the vision of Hawthorn Woods or all municipalities in the corridor. Our municipal goal is contrary to CMAP's development goal. Hawthorn Woods desires to maintain the rural, open space, environmental lifestyle as clearly identified on the Village's website. Residents in this part of the county located their homes here to avoid maximum build-out of land, high density development, and commercialization of farms with industrial centers, shopping centers, and multi-story employment centers. The economic development priority statement should be removed, as it is not reflective of all communities.
2. On Page 13- The Plan states communities should consider adopting the Land Use Plan as an addendum to their comprehensive plan or as a separate planning guide by the end of 2016. The Plan also states communities should develop and enter in an IGA or similar corridor agreement. Hawthorn Woods has asked this adoption to be removed from the plan, as communities along the corridor have opposing development plans in the future and may not agree with the dense strategic growth plan as outlined in the document.

3. On Page 27- A model preservation ordinance for Prairies and Grasslands could require protection of landscapes and mitigation requirements and include buffer requirements. The required completion of a flora inventory prior to any development or preservation action would increase the cost of development in certain corridor towns and set corridor communities apart as more costly to build than in non-corridor communities. The Village objects to costly rules of development for corridor communities and not for the remaining communities in Lake County, creating an unfair balance for growth opportunities.
4. Page 29- The Plan states that while regulatory floodplains must meet the WDO, special consideration will be given to the construction of new bridges or culvert crossings and roadway approaches. This provision could give the Illinois Tollway special considerations to not follow the Watershed Development Ordinance regulatory rules through the Indian Creek Marsh. The Village objects to the Tollway's non-compliance of local regulations.
5. Page 41- The Plan calls for local ordinances to preserve agricultural lands for future food production within the corridor, but not with other communities outside of the corridor. Municipalities are being encouraged to restrict future development rights of private property owners. Are the farmers and property owners aware of these future development restrictions on their properties? This would have devastating financial repercussions on property owners near the corridor.
6. Page 50- The Plan states the corridor shall serve as a catalyst for economic development and attract corporate offices, modern business parks, and retail developments that were previously out of the development pattern for such uses. The Village objects to this statement as some municipalities desire to protect open space from high intensity development. High density development will add more cars to our local roads, not less as CMAP suggests.
7. Page 115- The Plan focuses on decentralizing stormwater management and addressing rain where it falls rather than downstream. It seems that the goal in Lake County, overall, is to centralize everything because it is more efficient and less costly, but stormwater management is now being proposed to be decentralized. This inconsistency will cost more, be less efficient and more difficult to maintain.
8. Page 125- Open Space Best Practices, OS-5, states ERSF funds will be finite and some strategies may include purchasing easements or development rights to protect lands instead of fee simple purchases or using the ERSF to provide matching funds for grants. The Village is concerned about taking of land without purchasing it from the property owners and objects to this practice without owner's consent.
9. Page 126- Transportation Best Practices, Adding additional employment centers, industry, and commercial and business centers along the tollway corridor will increase traffic, not decrease local traffic, as not every employee or consumer will use the toll road at 20 cents per mile or ride their bike to work. Employees will take the least expensive route to work, or could end up spending thousands of dollars annually to drive the tollway to work. The Village is concerned that the Land Use Plan for the Tollway will add additional traffic to our local roads.

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