



STATEMENT ON HILLMOOR FOR THE LAKE GENEVA CITY COUNCIL

10/23/17

Members of the Council:

You have before you the first reading of an ordinance tonight that would allow White River Holdings LCC to amend the land uses on the Lake Geneva Comprehensive Plan for the 180-acre Hillmoor property.

Last week, we asked the Plan Commission to deny the developer's request to leave the 60 acres of floodplain on the Hillmoor property under PRIVATE RECREATION land use. We believe that the land use for that 60 acres should be PUBLIC PARK AND OPEN SPACE to guarantee public access. Leaving it under PRIVATE RECREATION would allow the developer to create a private conservancy for use only by the proposed residents of the development or ignore this 60 acres all together and leave it in its current degraded state.

The significant public benefits of a PUBLIC PARK AND OPEN SPACE land use include: 1) strong public support for a park here and recommendations in the Lake Geneva Parks and Open Space Plan 2015-2020 for this area to become a public natural area; 2) opportunities to protect White River habitat for endangered aquatic life; 3) flood control; 4) additional public hiking and biking trails; 5) the importance of this river corridor to the environmental health of the area as identified by the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission; and 6) the many public recreational opportunities that public access would provide.

Because of these important benefits, the Geneva Lake Conservancy began working with the city last year to discuss strategies for protecting this 60 acres as a public park and natural area. Working with City Administrator Blaine Osborne, we split the cost of appraising the 60 acres. The appraisal came back at \$140,000 because the land is unbuildable. The city already has a state DNR grant for \$90,000 to purchase the property and the Conservancy is reaching out to Ducks Unlimited and other private donors to try to raise the remaining \$50,000. The developer is aware of our interest. As many of you know, this is the last remaining open tract of land of this size in the City of Lake Geneva. It is one of the last opportunities for the City Council to create a park and natural area of this size to accommodate the growing numbers of residents and visitors to the city. And because we are proposing that this land be kept primarily in its natural state and restored over time with volunteers and grant funding, the cost to the city to maintain this park will be minimal while the recreational benefits for city residents will be many.

For these reasons, we are asking you to delay the vote on the proposed amendment to the Comprehensive Plan tonight to give the city, the developer and the Conservancy more time to determine how we can ensure that this property becomes a natural, open space area with guaranteed public access. We understand that the City Council can allocate the developer many of the required open space credits if he provides public access to this land. This is only the first reading of the ordinance and a decision of this magnitude deserves more time for the City Council to study and review its short- and long-term impacts on the city and its future.

The future quality of life in the City of Lake Geneva will be forever changed by this vote. Our lakefront parks and shore paths suffer from overuse. You have this one opportunity to change that by balancing the added density that develop will bring by creating a new public recreational and natural area. This new public natural area will add invaluable beauty, health and recreational opportunities for the city's residents, the White River, Geneva Lake and the all the Geneva Lake communities for many generations to come.