



Plum Street Protest Group Calls To Save Greenspace

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - A group named Plum Creek Greenspace has been protesting the upcoming bid for development along Plum Street in Edwardsville. After launching petitions and protests, the group hopes to make their voices heard by the county - and whoever wins the bid.

“We just want to be cautious with what kind of development we do there,” Jay Myers, a group spokesperson said. “I do enjoy the amenities of Edwardsville and would like to see that mix between greenspace and development maintained. I appreciate them both and I don’t want to see the assets that we have sold to the highest bidder.”

Myers said she personally thought the space could be useful to connect greenspace like the SIUE Gardens to the already-developed shopping centers, while making the area more pedestrian-friendly in the process.

“I can tell you - at least, from our experience crossing the road for the protest - it’s not easy. It’s not really built right now to be conducive to people who are on the trails to get to the businesses and restaurants and stuff that is over there,” Myers said. “I think there’s a real opportunity to take a look at that space and see, ‘How do we bridge the two elements that we really appreciate?’”

Madison County Board Chairman Kurt Prenzler said the county has owned this land for several years and always had the intent to sell it, they just hadn’t been successful thus far. This particular piece of land is the last remaining “leftover” piece of a much larger plot of land owned by the county which now houses Dierberg’s and surrounding shopping centers.

“This is land we don’t use, we don’t need and it’s very valuable,” Prenzler said.

Prenzler continued by saying Madison County has plenty of greenspace and habitat /wildlife conservation areas, such as along the bike trails and the north end of Sand Road - but he doesn't think Plum Creek is one of these areas.

"Some of these areas protect endangered species, and I'm aware of a number of them. This one does not. This is in the middle of the city, it's very valuable," Prenzler said. "If we're looking to protect habitat, I don't think this is number one on the list."

Prenzler said all bids have to be in by February 14, the day they will be revealed to the public. He also said regardless of who wins the bid, it will be up to them to work with the City of Edwardsville, and the city is responsible for enforcing their own zoning rules - the county's role is merely to sell the property.

Myers said in addition to a protest the group held on January 29 and a letter-writing campaign to the County Board, they also launched an [online petition](#) which reached over 1,100 signatures over the course of a few weeks.

Plum Creek Greenspace's future plans include attending the Madison County Finance and Government Operations Committee meeting tomorrow to present the petition's signatures, and they plan to have members attend committee meetings going forward to comment publicly when able. The group also plans to have a presence at the public reveal of the bids on the 14th.

"I don't think that we are naive to the fact that the property's going to be sold, and something's going to happen to the property. We're just hoping to help raise and elevate the voices of the community, because this is county property. We see it as taxpayer property, as our public property," Myers said.

Rachel Tompkins is also a member of the Plum Creek Greenspace group. She said the group is very concerned about the development going on in Edwardsville/Glen Carbon.

"Community sentiment is pretty high not wanting to develop this area we are talking about," she said of the Plum Street area. "We have had a lot of support from the community, it was apparent when people were beeping during our demonstration. It is public property and owned by the county and we would like for the public to be able to have something to say about the sale in what kind of development will possibly take place."

"Much of Edwardsville is being flattened and paved," she continued. "Traffic is constantly coming in and out and we have so much big-box development. Would like it to be saved as greenspace or lightly settled."

Tompkins stressed the traffic concerns are a major issue for the group, along with additional pavement.

"We are worried about it being a heat island when the whole downtown is paved and this is next to the bike trail. We prefer to be green or have a small amount of development. Now that the city of Edwardsville is a bicycle-friendly city this will, unfortunately, make the area much hotter, it could create water problems and traffic will be difficult. Even people who don't regard themselves as tree huggers do not think this is not a good idea. It has almost gotten to point of being preposterous how much of Edwardsville and Glen Carbon is paved. I know there is a lot of sentiment behind us," Tompkins said.

As someone on the receiving end of the group's letter-writing campaign, Prenzler said he agreed with the group's desire to protect habitats and wildlife, he just doesn't agree on Plum Creek being an ideal area for that purpose.

"I agree that it's important that we protect habitat for endangered species ... in terms of their premise, in terms of wanting to protect property, I agree with them, I think that's important," Prenzler said. "This property is already pretty much in the middle of town ... and it's something we always considered we would be selling at some point."

Myers said despite having no prior experience with community organizing, she's been impressed with the community's responsiveness to Plum Creek Greenspace's cause. Those who want to learn more about the group or get involved can visit their [Facebook page](#).