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## EPA to test St. Luke's for contamination

*U.S. EPA looking at Lake and Lathrop cleanup*

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By **BILL DWYER**

The River Forest village board slogged through a series of decisions Monday night, related to extending the life of the Lake Street tax increment financing district. The meeting also featured the first public discussion of environmental contamination of several properties near Lake and Lathrop. According to experts, that cleanup may well require the demolition of the two properties that extend from 7601 Lake to 7621 Lake.

An environmental remediation expert and environmental attorney retained by the village of River Forest also told the village board Monday that property owner Edward Ditchfield is working with the Illinois EPA and an environmental trust fund to clean up contamination at the River Forest Cleaners site and adjacent properties. Experts aren't yet sure how serious the problem is, but there's an indication that it's dire. Vapors may also be contaminating the building west of 7617-21 Lake.

Trustee Susan Conti asked if it was possible to clean up the site without taking down the buildings. Environmental engineer Tom Hahn replied, "I don't think so. Well, it's possible."

Meanwhile, officials from the U.S. EPA confirmed they conducted a preliminary site visit to St. Luke's School, across Lake Street from the Ditchfield property, and will be conducting testing soon for what's called vapor intrusion - the entry of chemical vapors through the floor. That development may place increased pressure on Ditchfield to expand the scope of his testing.

Hahn, of Tetra Tech Inc., said the buildings directly above the contamination - from 7605 Lake to at least 7621 Lake - would likely have to be torn down, though he acknowledged there was the possibility of cleaning up the land below the buildings with chemicals injected into the ground.

Hahn and attorney Dennis Walsh told the board the cleanup would remediate the site to standards allowable under state and federal law for commercial and industrial use, but not solely residential use.

### **EPA scheduling testing at St. Luke's**

St. Luke's principal Barbara Rasinski confirmed the U.S. EPA was on site last week.

Rasinski said the school decided to ask in the EPA because "we want to reassure our (student's) parents that we're safe," she said. Rasinski also said she was aware that test borings had been done on the parkway in front of the school's Lake Street side.

Brad Benning is the U.S. EPA's On-Site Coordinator for the St. Luke's testing process. He said his office responded to concerns expressed by several area residents, including a formal complaint by a St. Luke's



Marking the spot: Village environmental consultant Tetra Tech has drilled 15 soil borings to test for chemical contamination around Lake and Lathrop including in front St. Luke's school and church.

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teacher. The EPA toured the building to assess locations for testing, and is currently working with an independent contractor to schedule testing "to look at possible vapor intrusion."

"We went out to meet with the principal and look at the school," said Benning. He said his office is also reviewing documents provided by the Illinois EPA as part of its assesement.

Benning said the U.S. EPA will also be contacting Ditchfield if contamination is found on any adjacent properties. Should contamination be found, Benning said, the EPA would work to get Ditchfield to assume responsibility for further testing and remediation, as a PRP, or "probable responsible party." Failing obtaining Ditchfield's consent, Benning said, the EPA might seek an enforcement order requiring his compliance.

## Comprehensive public discussion urged

Hoke reiterated his contention, made previously outside board meetings, that any public health threat was most likely low. But he expressed concern that he still did not have all the facts needed to make that conclusion.

"Until we can rule that out one hundred percent, I personally feel we need to figure this out."

Walsh said the Illinois EPA is requiring additional sampling on properties adjacent to River Forest Cleaners, and that Ditchfield is planning to do additional testing. Missing in any testing focus is an assessment of any contamination to the building directly west of the ElSaffar 7617-21 Lake building. Hahn said he talked with the owner of the 7623-29 property and that he was told he had an environmental test results for that property.

"He's not concerned about his property," said Hahn.

"He does have an environmental report," said Hahn. In fact, the owner of the 7623-29 property has a review of test results conducted on the ElSaffar property.

"What he has said is he hired a consultant to assess the risk to his property, and he generated a report, based on the data that was collected on Mr. ElSaffar's property, and he concluded that on the property that he owned, there was not a risk. That's what his consultant said," Hahn told trustees.

"I just want to be clear," said Hoke. "We have not tested and no one is testing. That there are no test results for the 762(3)-29 building."

## Discussion will continue

Much of the discussion related to the remediation of and possible purchase of by the village will likely remain behind closed doors. President John Rigas said he was "uncomfortable" with any public discussion of cost estimates for the environmental cleanup in the 7600 block of Lake.

Hoke and Rigas were at odds later over the issue of further discussion of details of any development on Lake and Lathrop. Referring to architect Jerry Johnson being scheduled to discuss possible development plans for the Lake Street properties in closed session next Monday, Nov. 16, Hoke said "Nothing he'd say needs to be said in executive session."

"The lawyer said it wasn't subject to non-disclosure," Hoke said Tuesday. "The assumption has been we'd pay fair market value and subtract the cost of clean up."

Hoke said the continued lack of details regarding development plans at Lake and Lathrop are "breeding suspicion."

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