

Over the past few weeks, several flyers, many from a homeowners' association adjacent to Blackwell Forest Preserve, have presented false, inaccurate and misleading statements regarding the proposed Blackwell Fleet Services building on Mack Road in unincorporated DuPage County. The Forest Preserve District of DuPage County would like to clarify a few of these statements and respond to a few of the questions.

"The DuPage County Forest Preserve Board of Commissioner is proposing to ... build a 28,000-square foot fleet services maintenance complex ... in Blackwell Forest Preserve."

FACT

This statement may lead some to believe that the District is proposing to construct a "complex" on undisturbed, pristine land. However, the site at Blackwell Forest Preserve has been the District's primary maintenance facility for **more than 40 years**.

- **The proposed site already houses Grounds Maintenance, Fleet Services and Natural Resource Management.**
 - There are currently six buildings on the site, including an office and guard residence.
 - 58 permanent and 23 seasonal full-time employees already start their work day at this location.
 - There are 404 pieces of District equipment and 53 vehicles currently stored at the site, and there are a total of 140 parking spaces for employees and District trucks, semitrailers, tractors and other vehicles. **All of the District's heavy equipment already operates from this site.**
 - A variety of equipment, a warehouse, and a refueling center have been located here since 1968.
 - Storage bins and sheds have been at the site since 1997.
 - In 2008, the District constructed a new compressed-natural-gas station at this location to support its commitment to using clean, alternative fuels.
 - The north portion of the site has been used to stockpile soil materials.
 - The southern area of the proposed site is covered with a mixture of gravel and pavement.
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The District's mission "does not include building an unnecessary industrial complex."

FACT

The District is building neither something "unnecessary" nor an "industrial complex." The project in question involves the construction of one building that will replace its outdated Fleet Services operations facility. As noted earlier, the location for the new building is a site that has served as the District's primary facility for over 40 years.

The new maintenance building is essential to the District's overall operation and its ability to carry out its statutory mandate on behalf of the residents of DuPage County as set forth in the Downstate Forest Preserve District Act, 70 ILCS 805/0.001 *et seq.*

“This means that we, the tax-paying public, do not know what other plans are being made for forest preserve lands in DuPage County. You never know when your favorite forest preserve land will be scheduled for development ...”

FACT

The Forest Preserve District is a public agency and is subject to the provisions of the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act. Decisions to approve projects like this are **never** approved in secret.

- Items related to the Blackwell Fleet Services building have been on **35 commission, planning session and operations committee agendas since March 2001.**
- These agendas — like all Forest Preserve District agendas — were made available prior to the meetings to the media and the public and were posted on the District’s Web site and at District headquarters.
- Local papers, as well as the District’s publication, The DuPage Conservationist, printed several stories about the proposed building.
- The Board of Commissioners has heard public comments at numerous meetings, and staff has responded timely to numerous Freedom of Information requests. In this regard, one individual alone has filed more than 60 Freedom of Information requests since May of this year.
- District staff and Knight Architects and Engineers hosted open houses presenting exhibits, offering information, answering detailed questions and addressing concerns regarding the proposed Fleet Services building on April 28 and May 5, 2009

“No independent environmental studies were done: the impact of this project on the fauna or the Blackwell Forest Preserve and the McKee Marsh has not been adequately assessed.”

FACT

This project, **as with all District projects**, relies on the expertise of District ecologists — many with advanced scientific degrees and all with strong commitments to conservation. These are the professionals who know the forest preserves’ habitats, resident flora and fauna (including those threatened and endangered), and environmental concerns the best.

As these ecologists have stated, there has not been any documented impact to the wildlife that inhabits McKee Marsh as a result of any construction or daily Forest Preserve District operational activities at the Blackwell site. For 40 years, the site has been a “disturbed” site; several buildings on this site even predate the 1977 construction of McKee Marsh and many nearby homes.

As time passes, the life list of identified species in the area is actually *increasing*. Since 2000, American coots, pied-billed grebes, Virginia rails, and wood ducks have all successfully bred at McKee Marsh. Additionally, 18 kinds of waterfowl have used the marsh to rest and refuel along their migratory journey. **Even sandhill cranes have used McKee Marsh, despite the fact that daily District operations have occurred only 200 yards away for decades.**

“Why has the Forest Preserve District not investigated contracting out all or some of the maintenance requirement of its fleet?”

FACT

The District’s Fleet Services division, as well as an independent consultant, has looked into the feasibility of contracting out special and routine maintenance. In fact, the District uses outside contractors for several specialty services.

But as the District’s independent consultant stated just this year, finding an outside source that would be able to accommodate the District’s wide range of equipment and timelines — and budget — would be “next to impossible.” In fact, a look at governmental agencies of similar size and needs as the District in DuPage County shows that not one relies exclusively on an outside contractor for the bulk of its fleet maintenance operations.

“The building will be 32 feet high.”

FACT

Only part of the west side of building will be 32 feet high. The building will actually range from 22 to 32 feet tall. These measurements are the **minimum needed** to accommodate the maintenance of the tallest vehicles. The proposed height is consistent with several homes in the neighborhood. Moreover, the closest home will be approximately 750 feet or two and one half football fields from the new building.

“Why is a centralized location being considered that is not near the center of the District?”

FACT

This question is based on the meaning of “centralized.” When the Forest Preserve District talks about “centralization,” it refers to a single location that is central to the District’s overall operations and maintenance, not a location at the geographical center of the county. The location at Blackwell is, in fact, central to District’s overall operation.

Actually, some have suggested that the District consider *decentralizing* operations. However, a 200-page report compiled by a nationally recognized consulting firm — one that studies central-management problems and analyses public-policy issues for governments and other public-service institutions — states, “Performing forestry, road maintenance, and maintenance of streams and trails **on a centralized basis makes sense** because of the specialized skills and equipment used. ... For the same reasons, it makes sense to provide specialized building maintenance and construction services on a centralized basis.” The report adds, “It goes without saying that vehicular maintenance can **best be performed in a properly equipped central garage** with skilled mechanics and other specialists,” (“Phase II Organization and Management Study Forest Preserve District of DuPage County,” November 1990, Public Administration Service).

“Why at a time when property values are plummeting and the state of Illinois is running out of money is the Forest Preserve District spending \$7.5 million of taxpayer money?”

FACT

The funding for this building —\$5.2 million from O’Hare mitigation fees and \$2.5 million from investment earnings on landfill environmental funds and none from real estate tax dollars— is in place. With respect to the O’Hare mitigation fees, the city of Chicago was required by the FAA to remove large wetland areas from O’Hare airport. This requirement was not related to the O’Hare expansion project. The County of DuPage is responsible for constructing the mitigation wetlands on District property with other funds the County received from the City. Thus, this is not a situation where the District is diverting funds—the \$5.2 million—that were supposed to be used for wetland construction to construct the new fleet services building. Rather, the \$5.2 million represents the land value that the District received from the City in exchange for allowing the District’s property to be used as a mitigation site. As noted, the County is actually constructing the wetlands on District property with separate funds the County received from the City.

As for the cost of the new building, considering the state and federal environmental and occupational safety standards and county building and fire codes that must be met for this kind of specialized structure, the cost per square foot is well within the range for this type of facility.

The state, like many governmental institutions, is having financial troubles. However, the Forest Preserve District prides itself with outlining and maintaining a five-year financial plan and with approving a balanced budget every year and on time.

Looking for more of the facts? Then follow this link to the [Blackwell Fleet Services Building Project](#).