



LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVES
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Preservation, Restoration, Education and Recreation

DATE: January 29, 2015
TO: S. Michael Rummel, Chair
Finance and Administrative Committee
FROM: Rebekah Snyder, Chief Development Officer
SUBJECT: For Information Only – Bill to Amend Downstate Forest Preserve Act

RECOMMENDATION: For Information Only – Bill to Amend Downstate Forest Preserve Act

BACKGROUND: In 2010 the Lake County Forest Preserve District purchased the General Offices with a goal of consolidating operations and reducing annual operating and maintenance costs. More than 100 staff and all department heads now operate out of the General Offices, resulting in significant operational savings and more effective communication and management. Approximately 54,000 square feet of the facility is currently in use.

Following the purchase, staff investigated how the remaining 66,000 square feet could be transformed to serve as the new home of the District's Lake County Discovery Museum. The study revealed that significant structural and systems changes, at considerable cost, would be required to transform the upper levels of the General Offices into a new museum. However the lower level, on-grade basement was determined to be an ideal location to house the museum's archives and object collections.

In 2014, staff successfully applied to the 2014 Illinois Department of Natural Resources Public Museum Capital Grant program to renovate the lower level of the General Offices to serve as the new home of the museum's archives and collections. The \$750,000 grant is supporting construction of collections storage in the lower level of the General Offices, with a public reading room and galleries located on a portion of the first floor, as well. The project will be completed in June 2016. When this project is complete, an estimated 40,000 square feet of the General Offices will still be available for other uses.

It is the District's goal to fully utilize the General Offices to maximize efficiency and offset operating costs. The key strategy toward this goal is to lease the remaining estimated 40,000 square feet to an outside organization or business, which is not allowed by current law. The Forest Preserves is seeking an amendment to the Downstate Forest Preserve Act to allow this change.

The bill would empower the board of any forest preserve district in a county with a population over 600,000, owning a building used for office or administrative uses, which the board deems as not required for the district's purposes, to lease all or part of that building and to collect rent from that lease. Leases may not exceed 40 years. The change would be effective immediately.

The bill will start in the Senate, where Senator Melinda Bush has agreed to be lead sponsor. Representative Ed Sullivan, Jr. has agreed to be the lead sponsor in the House.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: For Information Only

FINANCIAL DATA: If the bill is passed and the General Offices is rented to full capacity, the Forest Preserves could increase revenue by approximately \$469,000 annually. Over a 20-year period, this legislation could save the District an estimated \$2 million in avoided operating costs and \$10 million in avoided maintenance costs at the Lakewood facilities.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Executive Director

PRESENTER: Rebekah Snyder