

NEWS HERALD

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Public to hear about project

■ Regulators to get input
on 300-acre plan involving
Painesville, Mentor

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Staff Writer

State regulators will meet Jan. 16 to get community input on the environmental impact of a 300-acre development as Painesville and Mentor officials continue to argue over it.

Forest City Land Group plans to develop residential, commercial and industrial parcels on the land.

But the Cleveland-based company and the city of Painesville first must get approval from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The 300 acres are near the intersection of Routes 2 and 44 on the border of Painesville and Mentor.

According to the OEPA, about 26 acres of wetlands and 9,042 linear feet of streams will be affected by the project.

The OEPA will hold a public hearing at 7 p.m. Jan. 16 at Harvey High School in Painesville to get input and take testimony from those involved with the project.

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It will take about three months for the state to make a ruling on the permit requests, according to an OEPA spokeswoman. The Army Corps also is reviewing requests for federal permits.

If those permits are approved, Painesville can begin construction of an access road to the property.

Mentor officials are concerned the access road project is not moving forward quickly enough.

Mentor City Council President Robert M. Shiner said he was told by Forest City and the city of Painesville the road was going to be completed a year ago.

The access road requires building an overpass over a CSX Corp. railroad.

Painesville has CSX's permission to build.

But the city needs the environmental permits before construction can begin.

Painesville City Manager Rita McMahan said it will take about six months to get approval.

"We don't see the access road project starting until mid- to late-2003," she said. "And it will take up to 18 months for the bridge to be built."

This means that construction vehicles working on other parts of the project could access the property only through Mentor.

Shiner said construction vehicles are permitted to go through Mentor to build roads for the project.

However, he said, "They've never had egress from Mentor to

do construction or commercial, industrial or residential buildings."

That statement is backed up by Mentor Law Director I. James Hackenberg.

McMahan said Mentor officials set the planning of the development back about nine months by complaining about help Painesville received from the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency.

"(Mentor officials) ... were questioning (NOACA's) authority to do some of the work," McMahan said.

Mentor City Manager Julian Suso did not wish to comment. But he referred to a September 2000 letter he wrote to NOACA's executive director.

In the letter, Suso does not refer to Painesville receiving money.

But Suso did say he was advising NOACA that it got erroneous information presented on access to the project from Mentor.

McMahan said Forest City would like to begin working on other parts of the project before the access road in Painesville is completed.

The access road issue is the latest conflict between Mentor and Painesville over the project.

Painesville and Forest City have filed a \$1 million lawsuit and are seeking a court injunction to force Mentor officials to approve the project.

A hearing in Lake County Common Pleas Court on that case is scheduled for Jan. 17.

Staff writer Jennifer Matta-Seward contributed to this story.