

## **Glenview puts up a fight for a wider Willow Road**

<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/winnetka/news/2728804,winnetka-willow-092310-s1.article>

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Glenview officials and residents hope to be more aggressive when it comes to determining the fate of Willow Road in Northfield, and they've launched a campaign to make their case for widening the road.

The initiative, "Move Willow Forward," is intended to encourage state officials to widen the road to four lanes and a turn lane.

Specifically, they are campaigning for the widening of Willow Road in Northfield. For years, Northfield leaders have argued the road should be no more than three lanes -- and a plan was in place a decade ago to widen it that way, until it was scrapped a few years later. Towns to the west, meanwhile, have lobbied for more lanes to alleviate traffic.

The 1.2-mile stretch of Willow Road in Northfield is under state jurisdiction and is currently two lanes. To the east and west of the town, Willow Road is four lanes, plus turn lanes. Towns such as Glenview have often complained about a Willow Road bottleneck in Northfield.

The "Move Willow Forward" initiative is in part sponsored by the village. Officials hope to stress that they consider the problem to be regional and that the road itself is funded by state taxpayers, Glenview Village President Kerry Cummings said.

The group's website, [www.movewillowforward.com](http://www.movewillowforward.com), includes Willow Road talking points and ways for residents to get involved in the debate.

The initiative so far has helped Glenview residents organize their side of the argument, Cummings said.

"It's been able to give them more focus and a clear message," she said.

The group has already had an impact on the debate, and the effects are becoming more apparent, Cummings said. In what seemed to be a show of force, residents and leaders from Glenview were more vocal than usual during a recent community meeting to discuss the issue.

Meetings of the Community Advisory Group, or CAG, are hosted by the Illinois Department of Transportation, with the mission of helping to determine how to

widen Willow Road in Northfield. The group comprises residents, business-owners and officials from Northfield, Northbrook, Winnetka and Glenview.

Most of the group's meetings have appeared more like battles between Northfield and state officials, with representatives from other towns remaining mostly quiet on the issue.

The usual arguments were still in play at Sept. 15 meeting -- a wider road would pose safety problems, and a narrow street cripples traffic flow -- but this time, Glenview residents appeared to push their side of the story more forcefully than in the past.

At the meeting, otherwise quiet Glenview village officials pushed back against suggestions that towns west of Northfield care more about traffic jams than child safety.

CAG member Don Owen, director of the Capital Projects department in Glenview, said his town takes child safety very seriously. But while it's a top priority, the issue is larger, he said.

"We also are concerned about (traffic) capacity issues," Owen said.

The issues, he said, are not mutually exclusive.

Jim Smirles, who represents Glenview businesses on the CAG, echoed Owens' point.

"We're as concerned about safety as anyone, especially the safety of the children," he said.

One Glenview resident said traffic jams in Northfield mean trouble for children in other towns, as cars funnel into neighboring towns' school zones to get around a Willow Road bottleneck.

Northfield CAG representatives argued the process was flawed for several reasons, and many members said that child safety should trump all other Willow Road concerns.

Members of Sunset Ridge District 29 -- including a PTA representative, School Board President Phoebe Raymond and Superintendent Linda Vieth -- made impassioned pleas with IDOT to keep Northfield school children in mind, since both of the district's schools border Willow Road.

Vieth said that any final solution should include designated school zones along the road, an argument that Northfielders have made for years without success.