

## **New Willow Road committee has some wishing they were behind the wheel**

(<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/winnetka/news/1860571,winnetka-willow-110209-s1.article>)

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When it comes to steering the Willow Road debate, some communities feel like they've been shoved to the backseat.

The latest clash is over the make-up of a new advisory committee.

Northfield's neighbors to the west have said that the committee is too lopsided and that they won't get a fair say. But Northfield officials said the issue is local and that the other towns shouldn't have been included in the first place.

The "Community Advisory Group" was formed to determine if and how Willow Road in Northfield should be widened, and more than half of its membership is Northfielders.

Of 25 committee members, 13 are from Northfield. The rest of the spots are divided between Glenview, Northbrook and Winnetka.

The Illinois Department of Transportation launched its latest Willow Road initiative in August. At that time, officials said that previous studies -- including one finished a year ago -- were moot.

The committee --like previous ones -- is made up of residents and community leaders from Northfield and its neighbors.

At the heart of the issue is whether the 1.2-mile stretch of Willow Road in Northfield should be widened.

Northbrook Trustee Todd Heller, who is on the committee, said he sympathizes with Northfield's position, but he wasn't completely sold on the idea behind the Northfield-majority committee.

"I think with the numbers alone, this may be a predicament, but if I thought Northfield had veto power, I would not participate on the committee," he said. "I don't view the committee as a majority that is going to rule."

Other Northbrook representation includes the Chamber of Commerce president and two businesspeople.

Glenview Village President Kerry Cummings said that given what's at stake, IDOT should have given her town more representation on the committee.

"If it was going to be a regional approach, they could have struck a better balance," she said.

Cummings is not on the official committee.

Willow Road congestion directly impacts Glenview, Cummings said. Drivers seeking to avoid the Willow bottleneck wind up clogging Waukegan Road and Lake Avenue, both major roads in the village.

Bob Hayward -- advisory group member and chairman of Northfield's Traffic and Transportation Committee - - said outsiders have no business meddling in Northfield.

"It's 100 percent unfair that Northfield doesn't have 100 percent representation," he said.

Hayward refuted that the Willow Road issue was regional. If it were, IDOT would expand its study to consider the region as a whole -- perhaps examining alternate east-west routes to ease Willow congestion.

Village Manager Stacy Sigman agreed that Northfield has more to lose (or gain) from whatever the state ultimately decides to do. She, too, is on the new committee.

"I always assumed we would have the greatest number of people, relative to stakeholders," she said.

Northfield officials have made no bones about what they think of the new committee. They've long argued that the state should stick with a three-lane plan agreed upon years ago. Had it not been scratched, construction would have begun in 2005.

The state's decision to start over frustrated many in Northfield.

Hayward accused state officials of intentionally dragging out the process. In the meantime, Willow Road remains untouched.

"Why are we wasting our time?" Hayward said. "Enough is enough. Get it done."

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