

## More debate for new Willow Road advisory group

(<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/winnetka/news/1874037.winnetka-willow-110909-s1.article>)

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A new group is meeting to look at the potential widening of Willow Road, and debate already is heating up.

The Illinois Department of Transportation kicked off the first of the latest Willow Road study Nov. 5 in Northfield. The meeting -- with representatives from Northfield, Northbrook, Glenview and Winnetka -- was intended to provide an overview of the planned two-year study.

Although the intent was not to touch on actual Willow Road design concepts, it was a tough topic to avoid.

The 25-member committee is called the "Community Advisory Group," or CAG.

For some committee members, the first of the latest Willow Road study meeting had less to do with the road than it did with unease about the study itself.

Committee members grilled IDOT officials about everything from the two-year study schedule, to the choice of visual aids, to the definitions of "consensus" and "stakeholder." And at times, committee members turned their fire on each other.

Bob Hayward, a Northfield representative and chairman of Northfield's Traffic and Transportation Committee, argued that some "stakeholders" should keep out of the argument as it relates to local issues. For example, a business in Glenview might not have the insight to weigh in on Northfield bike paths.

But residents of Glenview and Northbrook said most of the issues are related and should be considered as a whole.

"The traffic is not just Northfield's traffic," one resident said. "That traffic is causing us problems, too."

Jim Smirles -- representing residents and businesses in Glenview -- acknowledged on Friday that the first committee meeting was tense.

"I just hope everybody keeps their cool," the former Glenview village president said.

The bulk of IDOT's opening presentation defined "context-sensitive solutions," or CSS -- a concept hammered into Northfield brains during the last CSS study just over a year ago.

In short, IDOT and the committee will talk to "stakeholders," jot down their concerns, brainstorm Willow Road solutions and alternatives, and perhaps in the end, come up with a plan.

Among issues the committee hopes to address are safety, drainage and traffic.

Pete Harmet, of IDOT, said he was aware that many area residents have strong feelings about the road. In fact, many have argued that IDOT has already wasted time and money by disregarding previous studies.

"We're working with a clean slate, but we'll certainly bring in ideas, such as the Lakota Group work (a previous study)," he said.

He added that coming to a absolute consensus was unlikely, but he hoped the group could agree on basic principles.

"We know we're not going to get an agreement with everybody, with 25 people," Harmet said.

The IDOT committee is the latest effort to resolve years of conflict regarding the 1.2-mile stretch of Willow Road in Northfield. Proponents on various sides have argued for the road to be widened to three or four lanes. The most recent study -- the IDOT-sponsored Willow Road Enhancement Steering Committee -- did not reach a consensus. And an earlier IDOT plan would have widened the road to three lanes beginning in 2005, but that plan was scratched.

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