



**Village of River Hills**  
7650 N Pheasant Ln  
River Hills, WI 53217

Village Hall: 352-8213  
Public Works: 352-0080  
Police: 352-8211

May 10, 2021

Dear Residents,

As President of River Hills, I write to you with an update about the 53.4 acres on Brown Deer Road that is now owned by the Village.

First, you should know that the anonymous and unsigned letter sent out last week by Save River Hills is both inaccurate and misleading. The letter falsely claims the Plan Commission has "decided" that the Village is committed to development with "little or no interest in green space". The Plan Commission has not made any decision regarding what it will recommend to the Village Board.

Furthermore, enhancing the natural potential for the property has been important in all the plans considered. In the most recent proposal (see attached), more than 50% of the acreage could be devoted to green space. Knowing the people who are involved, I am confident enhancing natural aspects of the entire property will always be a priority.

Now let me review why the Trustees decided to acquire this property. After the Mandel proposal was debated and withdrawn, the owners sued the Village in Federal Court. Although our case was strong, legal experts wisely recommended seeking a settlement since there are always risks with litigation. The Village Board retained a highly-regarded real estate attorney who negotiated a settlement of the lawsuit and purchase of the property for \$2.5 million. The Village then issued \$2.88M in notes to pay for the property, settle the lawsuit and related expenses.

The Village Board now must decide what to do with the property, and that process is underway.

At the April Plan Commission meeting, Dr. Peter Thornquist, Chair of our Committee on the Environment, described how the property (or most of it) could be made into a permanent conservancy. While this idea has merit, it has failed to gain traction and/or preliminary support from the Trustees for two key reasons: 1) a conservancy wouldn't pay taxes, and 2) our taxes would increase to pay for it.

As most of you realize, the Village budget is very tight. The only alternative to higher taxes would be a significant reduction in spending, e.g., on the fine Department of Public Works and Police services our residents so highly value. In fairness to Dr. Thornquist's concept, there may be some potential for grants and local philanthropy, but as Village President, I am not convinced that enough outside funding would materialize to make this direction viable.

*Letter to the residents – May 10, 2021*

In January, I created a working group to study a “hybrid” of roughly half-development and half-conservation. This group produced a well-designed concept with 1) sixty owner-occupied single-family homes on 25 acres, and 2) a 28-acre natural area. A depiction of what a hybrid could look like is attached.

Corvias, a contractor of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD), has expressed serious interest in financing the design and construction of green infrastructure amenities for retaining rainwater on the 28 acres. This would reduce flooding on Fish Creek that flows out of the property. The MMSD program team could work with the Village on designs this year and be ready for construction in 2022. For further details, please look into MMSD’s Fresh Coast Protection Program.

Very importantly, the housing being considered should have minimal to zero impact on neighbors along Greenbrook and Spruce Roads, as those properties would abut only the natural area. The sole access to the new housing would be via Brown Deer Road, i.e., there would be no additional traffic through the existing neighborhoods.

As envisioned, the high-quality new homes would be single-story, possibly in the range of 2,000-2,500 square feet, and depending on size and custom features, sell in the \$500,000 - \$700,000 range. I believe this type of housing would be attractive to buyers wanting to downsize and live in River Hills (where many of us have lived for decades). Importantly, the associated tax base, assuming an average value of \$600,000, could be in the range of \$36 million. As a datapoint, the total equalized value of the entire Village is \$487,792,400, so this effort could add approximately 7.4% to our tax base.

Expanding our tax base would provide additional funding to support Village services, such as our Police, Public Works and others. The State controls how much we can increase taxes, and by failing to expand our tax base, levy limits will ultimately lead to Village services being reduced below the outstanding levels our residents currently enjoy.

Some have expressed concern about the density of a housing component. Please note that 60 units is far less dense than the Mandel proposal (which started at 500 units and was eventually reduced to 154). Personally, I find an estimated 60 single-family homes on 53.4 acres to be a low number and reasonable.

Municipal water for the project could be accessed at County Line Road and supplied by the City of Mequon. As an added benefit, water could be made available to current residents who request it and live along the new water-supply route to the farm property.

The Village has spent approximately \$2.8 million to date (the \$2.5 million purchase price plus approximately \$300,000 in transaction and other costs). Major categories with respect to the \$300,000 include legal, financial services, engineering, planning, communications, etc. These expenditures have been financed with the sale of \$2.88 million of promissory notes.

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Without residential development to increase the tax base and repay the notes, our property taxes would eventually bear the burden of buying the farm and resolving the lawsuit. As a rough estimate, if you have a \$650,000 home, your taxes would increase >\$300/year and eventually contribute an extra +/- \$5,000. Higher and lower valued homes would of course pay proportionately.

In summary, some well-meaning residents sincerely believe the property should be preserved as a natural area. Others support reasonable development and the need to increase our tax base (while still preserving more than half the acreage as green space). As Village President, I unequivocally favor the hybrid approach.

River Hills can be a model for communities wanting to do the right thing and strike a fair balance among similar competing priorities. It's an opportunity for us to demonstrate how best practices can successfully achieve the entirely compatible goals of environmental stewardship and economic development.

In the coming weeks, detailed discussions will be scheduled before the Plan Commission and, eventually, the Village Board. Each step in the process will be transparent and include the opportunity for significant community involvement and public comment.

As of my writing this letter, nothing has been decided. Please be assured that the process will carefully follow state laws and our local ordinances as we move toward resolution.

Thank you for taking the time to understand this opportunity for River Hills.

Please send comments to [project@vil.river-hills.wi.us](mailto:project@vil.river-hills.wi.us), or drop me a note at Village Hall.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steve Anderson".

Steve Anderson  
Village President





**VILLAGE PROPERTY**  
 VILLAGE OF RIVER HILLS  
 MARCH 2021



The total site area is 53.4 acres. This plan has 25 acres allocated for development, and the remaining 28.4 acres dedicated for conservation. This plan shows 60 single family homes on the 25 acres of developed land:

- 10 Homes are 2,500 SF with a two car garage
- 50 Homes are 2,000 SF with a two car garage

The plan includes a community building and tennis courts

**LEGEND**

- Wetland Setback (75')
- Property Setback (50')
- Welland Area
- Existing Vegetation
- New Vegetation

