



DATE: June 1, 2026

MEMO TO: Paul Frank, Chair
Planning Committee

FROM: Alex Ty Kovach
Executive Director

Agenda Item # 11-1

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a Resolution finding that use of property at Waukegan Savanna Forest Preserve for airport runway purposes will have de minimis impact on Waukegan Savanna.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS SUPPORTED: Leadership, Public Access and Connections

FINANCIAL DATA: There is no financial impact at this time.

BACKGROUND: The Waukegan Port District (“WPD”) has been working for nearly two decades on the proposed replacement of its Runway 5/23 with a new runway. According to WPD, the existing runway no longer complies with Federal Aviation Administration (“FAA”) design guidelines and must be replaced. WPD proposes to construct the new runway parallel to and northwest of the existing runway. WPD has stated that, by relocating the runway, current airport operations can continue, while replacement of the runway in its current location would require the airport to close for approximately three years. The existing runway will be converted into a taxiway for the new runway.

Construction of the new runway in this new location would require WPD to first acquire from the District, within Waukegan Savanna Forest Preserve (“Waukegan Savanna”), a fee simple interest in 0.25 acres (the “Fee Simple Property”) and an avigation easement (the “Avigation Easement”) across 18.3 acres (the “Avigation Easement Property”; the Fee Simple Property and the Avigation Easement Property are, collectively, the “Conveyance Parcels”). A map depicting a portion of Waukegan Savanna, a portion of the current runway, a portion of the proposed new runway, and the Conveyance Parcels is included in Exhibit A to the attached resolution.

WPD previously planned a new, longer runway (7,000 feet rather than the currently proposed 6,000 feet). However, WPD has told the District that the FAA determined the 6,000-foot length is sufficient. Also, the Avigation Easement would replace an existing avigation easement on District property that was granted in 1962 and already encumbers 76.6 acres of District property (the “1962 Avigation Easement”).

Federal regulations limit the ability to use certain public land for airport uses, specifically “publicly owned land of a public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge of national, State, or local significance” (“Section 4(f) Property”). The FAA will not approve the use of Section 4(f) Property, unless it determines that either (i) “there is no feasible and prudent avoidance alternative” and the proposed use includes “all possible planning” to minimize harm to the Section 4(f) Property or (ii) the use of the Section 4(f) Property will have a de minimis impact. A “de minimis” impact is one that will not adversely affect the features, attributes, or activities that qualify the Section 4(f) Property for protection.

WPD has sent President Vealitzek a letter (i) stating that, in WPD's view, its acquisition and use of the Conveyance Parcels for the new runway will have a de minimis impact, and (ii) asking the District to concur in this determination. A copy of the letter from the WPD to President Vealitzek is attached to this memorandum. WPD has stated to District staff that the FAA will not make its determination on whether an impact on Section 4(f) Property is de minimis unless the officials with jurisdiction over the Section 4(f) Property concur in writing that the proposed use will have de minimis impact.

On May 20, 2026, the WPD Board held a meeting at the Waukegan National Airport Administration Office in Waukegan, which included an informational presentation by an airport consultant from Crawford, Murphy & Tilly, followed by public comment. (See May 21, 2026, Lake County News-Sun article attached to this memorandum.)

After a thorough review of the Conveyance Parcels, including the Avigation Easement's specific limitations on tree heights in the Avigation Easement Property, and in consultation with the District's Corporate Counsel, staff recommends finding that the WPD's acquisition and use of the Conveyance Parcels for the new runway will not adversely affect the features, attributes, or activities on Waukegan Savanna that make it a public property of local significance. The Fee Simple Property is approximately 0.25 acres in size, which is a very small component of the total acreage of Waukegan Savanna (774 acres). The Avigation Easement would affect only 18.3 acres of Waukegan Savanna's total 774 acres, and the scope of the Avigation Easement is narrow. The WPD's use and control of the Avigation Easement Property would primarily be limited to regulating the heights of structures and trees, as described in the WPD's letter to President Vealitzek. In staff's view, WPD's proposed use of the Conveyance Parcels will not materially change the character, ecological function, or recreational value of the larger preserve for the following reasons:

- Of the 18.3 acres in the Avigation Easement Property, 12.9 acres are already subject to height limitations imposed by the 1962 Avigation Easement covering 76.6 acres. The portions of the Avigation Easement Property not subject to height restrictions by the 1962 easement are primarily former road rights-of-way.
- The District has no past, current, or future plans for any active recreational improvements within the Conveyance Parcels.
- The WPD has consistently assured District officials and staff that it will comply with the tree preservation and replacement requirements of the District's License and Easement Ordinance, with respect to any trees removed within the Avigation Easement, including as recently as May 27, 2026 (see attached letter from WPD Chairman Jack Dye to President Vealitzek).
- The District's approval of the attached resolution does not approve the transfer of the Conveyance Parcels to the WPD. It merely supports a de minimis impact finding as contemplated under Federal regulations. The District will be authorized to convey the Conveyance Parcels to the WPD only if the Board approves such conveyance in a separate resolution, approved by a two-thirds vote of the Board of Commissioners.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Executive Director, Chief Operations Officer, Director of Finance, Manager of Board Operations and Corporate Counsel.

WAUKEGAN PORT DISTRICT

AIRPORT • MARINA • PORT

December 10, 2025

Ms. Jessica Vealitzek, President
Lake County Forest Preserve District Board of Commissioners
1899 West Winchester Road
Libertyville, IL 60048-5367
Re: Waukegan National Airport (UGN)

Replacement Runway 5/23 Program
Section 4(f) Official with Jurisdiction (OWJ) Concurrence

Dear Ms. Vealitzek:

The Waukegan National Airport (UGN or Airport) is located in Waukegan, Lake County, Illinois. Property owned by the Lake County Forest Preserve District (LCFPD) is located adjacent to UGN beyond the southwest end of the Airport's existing Runway 5/23. As Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) safety and design standards changes have evolved over time, UGN's existing Runway 5/23 is no longer fully compliant with FAA design guidelines. In order to provide a runway that is fully compliant with FAA criteria, the Waukegan Port District (WPD), which owns UGN, proposes a new runway that enhances safety, brings the airport into compliance, and protects both airport users and the surrounding community.

Replacement Runway 5/23 is proposed parallel to and northwest of existing Runway 5/23. The proposed replacement runway will extend further southwest toward LCFPD lands than existing Runway 5/23, as shown on the attached Sponsor's Proposed Action figure. To comply with FAA requirements, WPD will need to acquire additional lands from LCFPD to establish the Runway Object Free Area and aviation easement for Replacement Runway 5/23.

Due to the use of federal funds, the proposed transportation project is subject to the requirements of 49 U.S.C., Section 303c, formerly Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation (DOT) Act of 1966 (Section 4(f)), which affords protection to publicly-owned parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges. The purpose of this correspondence is to document that the LCFPD Official with Jurisdiction concurs with the listed measures to minimize harm and the assessment of impacts related to WPD's acquisition of additional lands from LCFPD.

As you know, in 2023 the President of the LCFPD Board of Commissioners signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) among FAA, WPD, and LCFPD pertaining to the proposed

changes to the airport. The MOA addressed the impacts of the changes under Section 4(f). The MOA was based on 7,000 feet of proposed runway length.

WPD and UGN have always followed the required FAA procedure for determining runway length. Where previously this procedure resulted in 7,000 feet of proposed runway length, FAA's procedure has continued to evolve over time. The new FAA runway length determination procedure, revised in 2024, now yields a 6,000-foot-long proposed runway, resulting in reduced impacts to LCFPD lands compared to what was proposed at the time of the 2023 MOA. WPD now proposes acquiring 18.3 acres of avigation easements and 0.25 acre in fee simple acquisition from LCFPD lands, as shown on the attached LCFPD Acquisition Detail figure.

The land to be acquired from LCFPD is part of the Waukegan Savanna Forest Preserve. The portion of the Preserve to be acquired in fee simple is forested. The portions on which avigation easements are to be established include forested, wetland, and agricultural land uses. A stream also flows through this portion of the Preserve. No portion of the property that would be acquired currently includes any existing or planned recreational improvements such as hiking trails, the Waukegan Savanna Dog Sled Area, or the Waukegan Savanna Dog Park.

After purchase, the land acquired in fee simple would be cleared and graded, and obstructions and hazards to air navigation, as defined by FAA, would be removed. This land will be brought inside the fenced area of the Airport.

The land covered by avigation easements will be evaluated and only trees that are determined to be obstructions to navigation would be removed. The avigation easement area would be subject to use limitations prohibiting construction of structures, permitting of public assembly or gathering spaces, and planting of new trees, as well as prohibiting certain additional items that could interfere with the safe passage of aircraft over the easement area.

The following measures to minimize harm will be incorporated into the plans as plan notes and as environmental commitments in the environmental document:

- Within the avigation easement, only trees identified as obstructions to navigation will be removed. Identification of such trees will be accomplished by a method to be agreed upon between UGN, LCFPD, and FAA.
- The conveyance amount will be determined by the procedures documented in the 2023 MOA:

WPD would pay to LCFPD for the Conveyance an amount equal to the fair market value of the Subject Property. The fair market value would be based upon one or more MAI appraisals of the highest and best use of the Subject Property. LCFPD and WPD may agree that, in lieu of WPD paying some or all of the fair market value of the Subject Property, the LCFPD would accept other property in lieu of compensation, such as fee simple ownership in other real property that is (i) suitable for LCFPD purposes and (ii) of comparable value, as determined by the LCFPD in its sole discretion. With respect to elements of the Conveyance, other than consideration, the Conveyance would be made in accordance with Federal Public Law 91- 646, the Uniform

Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, (Uniform Act), and FAA Order 5100.38D Airport Improvement Handbook (Federal Conveyance Requirements).

LCFPD represented to WPD that, when LCFPD acquires real property, it values the real property at its highest and best use, without regard to its future status as restricted open space, restricted conservation land, or other similar use. The parties acknowledge that an MAI Appraisal prepared in accordance with the Federal Conveyance Requirements may consider the highest and best use of the Subject Property to be restricted open space, restricted conservation land, or other similar use and, as a result, the fair market value of the Subject Property, as stated in the MAI Appraisal, may be less than the fair market value of the Subject Property, as viewed by LCFPD (such difference referred to herein as the "FMV Gap").

WPD would cause the MAI Appraisal, in compliance with the Uniform Act, to be completed and would deliver the completed MAI Appraisal to LCFPD. LCFPD would have its own appraisal prepared by an appraiser, selected at the LCFPD's sole discretion, to determine the fair market value for the Subject Property. WPD and LCFPD would then negotiate in good faith for:

- a. a sales price for the Subject Property that is consistent with Federal Conveyance Requirements as prescribed by the Uniform Act, and
- b. if there is a FMV Gap (resulting from the negotiated sales price being less than the fair market value determined in the LCFPD's appraisal), additional consideration may be paid or provided by WPD to compensate LCFPD for the FMV Gap.

If WPD does not commence construction of the Project within 5 years after the effective date of the MOA, or the Subject Property acquired by WPD ever ceases to be used as part of the Airport, then, at the LCFPD's election and subject to FAA approval, any fee simple property rights conveyed to WPD by LCFPD would revert back to LCFPD, so long as no Federal funds or WPD funds deemed to be airport revenue, per FAA's Airport Revenue Policy and Grant Assurance #25, have been expended for acquisition of the Subject Property. In the event of such a termination, LCFPD would not be required to refund or return any consideration to WPD so long as no Federal funds or WPD funds deemed to be airport revenue, per FAA's Airport Revenue Policy and Grant Assurance #25, have been expended for the acquisition of the LCFPD property.

In accordance with 23 CFR 774, the proposed project will have a de minimis impact upon the Lake County Forest Preserves, based upon the following assessment:

- All possible planning to minimize harm has been incorporated into project development
- The nature and magnitude of changes will not adversely affect the recreational activities, features, or attributes that qualified the property for Section 4(f) protection
- Proposed measures to minimize harm and resulting mitigation, in regard to protecting the Section 4(f) property and maintaining access and safety, are considered to be reasonable and acceptable

Based on the scope of the proposed project and type of work, there will be no adverse effects to the protected recreational activities, features, or attributes associated with LCFPD.

If you concur with the measures to minimize harm and the assessment of impacts in regard to the proposed project, please indicate as such by responding to this letter with your concurrence no later than January 9, 2026. Thank you for your time and cooperation on this matter. If you have questions and/or concerns, please feel free to contact me at jdye@waukeganport.com or via phone: cell number 312-285-8125

Sincerely,



Jack Dye
Chairman of the Board
Waukegan Port District



Searches continue for the nation's MIAs



Charles Selle

On Memorial Day, we honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the nation. Those included warfighters who are still declared missing in action. Many of us will pass May 25 along Lake Michigan beaches or on the waters of the Chain O'Lakes, giving little thought to those who died in wars defending democracy from enemies who

would do our nation harm. Others will visit area cemeteries, planting mini-American flags on veterans' gravesites as a mark of respect, attend parades or community observances. Grieving families of missing U.S. soldiers, sailors and Marines who died in battle or as prisoners of war wonder what became of their loved ones who never came home from conflict. So do veterans organizations and the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, tasked since 2015 with searching for the missing. They continue the military's promise that those left behind will not be forgotten. Glenview lawyer William Coulson is also curious about those

who were lost during World War II in actions on Pacific islands. Coulson's father, Robert Coulson, was Waukegan mayor from 1949 to 1957. The elder Coulson was a state representative and senator until 1973. He served in the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner to the CIA, during World War II. Over the Memorial Day weekend, William Coulson, who is also a member of the Regional Transportation Authority board of directors, will be on a ship sailing the central Pacific. He is visiting WWII sites in Tuvahu, Tarawa and Makin islands, the Gilbert Islands,



American and POW/MIA flags are displayed in a file photo. AMY LAVALLEY/POST-TRIBUNE

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The Waukegan Port Authority hopes to build a new runway at Waukegan National Airport. WAUKEGAN PORT AUTHORITY

Revised Waukegan runway proposal gets mixed reviews

By Steve Sadin
FOR LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN

An initial public presentation on a proposed 6,000-foot runway at Waukegan National Airport was met with more than an hour of both praise and criticism from area residents. Scaled back from a controversial proposal three years ago to build a 7,000-foot runway requiring the acquisition of 52 acres of Lake County Forest Preserves District land, the current plan will need just a quarter-acre of forest preserve land. Susan Zingle, an opponent of the project, said the environmen-

tal impact of the construction of the new runway goes beyond the size of forest preserve land being sold, which is part of the Waukegan Savanna. "The impacts affect the entire savanna, not just those narrow pieces," Zingle said. "This is an issue of maintaining the integrity of the Waukegan Savanna for all who enjoy it — people, birds, critters — and maintaining trust with the citizens." Brian Palka, one of the people speaking in favor of the project, said the airport is an important part of the community and the new runway will help the economic growth of not only

Waukegan, but Lake County overall. "It's an economic engine," Palka said. "It will bring jobs to the area, good jobs." Zingle and Palka were among 21 members of the public who gave their views of the new runway during a presentation detailing the project on Wednesday at a meeting of the Waukegan Port District at the Waukegan National Airport, giving the public its first close look at the proposal. Craig Loudon, the project engineer with engineering firm CMT, said the current runway no longer meets Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) guidelines and has

outlived its useful life. Replacing it would take three construction seasons, requiring a three-year closure. Building a new runway roughly parallel to the current one allows the airport to remain open, he said. Loudon said that because of its new location, a tunnel under it will be built on Green Bay Road to avoid the creation of potential traffic congestion. With a preliminary draft environmental assessment prepared, Loudon said the Port District seeks a de minimis request from the FAA since it wants only a quar-

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Lawmakers consider board for drug prices

Prescriptions could be capped statewide

By Jeremy Gorne
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

SPRINGFIELD — With 11 days remaining in their spring legislative session, Illinois lawmakers are considering legislation that would create a state panel empowered to review the costs of prescription drug prices and whether medicine is inaccessible to those who need it the most. The bill to establish a Prescription Drug Affordability Board is part of a broader push by Democrats to address an affordability crisis that has rocked Illinois and the rest of the country. But opponents argue the panel would do little to actually lower prices while creating new layers of bureaucracy in state government. The bill passed 8-4 along party lines Wednesday in the House Executive Committee and now awaits a vote by the full House. Supporters see the board as a vehicle to rein in runaway drug costs, a politically charged issue that the federal government has also begun to address through Biden era provisions taking effect this year. Democratic state Rep. Nabeela Syed of Palatine, a main sponsor of the bill, called it "a heavily, heavily negotiated bill" during a committee hearing Wednesday. The bill was filed last week after an earlier version didn't move forward on the House floor last month. If created, the five-member board — appointed by the governor — would have authority to evaluate the cost of most prescription drugs, determine whether prices are unreasonably high and set upper payment limits, essentially capping what consumers pay. Pharmaceutical companies would

State voids plan to close North Chicago charter schools



Parents and children arrive at an open house at LEARN 6 Charter School in North Chicago. Currently, there are questions about the school's future. CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

'Now we have some certainty on what we need to do'

By Steve Sadin
FOR LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN

A month-long impasse between North Chicago School District 187 and the LEARN Charter School Network of Chicago, which operates two schools in North Chicago, may be nearing an end as long as LEARN meets conditions imposed by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). After voting to renew LEARN's charter for both schools for five years, in March of 2025, the District 187 Independent Authority, which operates as a board of education,

reversed its position and informed LEARN it must close the two schools by June 30, 2027. LEARN appealed to the ISBE. The ISBE voted to set aside District 187's decision not to renew the charters on May 13 in Springfield, establishing a path for the two schools — LEARN 6 and LEARN 10 — to come under state authorization by meeting specific conditions. Greg White, LEARN's president and CEO, said last week he was pleased with the vote approving the recommendations of the ISBE hearing officer, and he is starting to work toward satisfying those requirements. "Now we have some certainty on what we need to do," White said. "We can now focus on helping the academic achievement of our students and giving them the social

and emotional support they need." District 187 Superintendent John Price, who is leaving his post June 30 to become the superintendent of Indian Prairie School District 204 in Aurora, said in September he was willing to negotiate a renewal with LEARN and remains ready to talk. He said the ISBE decision worries him. "I am concerned about the precedent this sets for the state," Price said. "If charter schools are able to walk away from local authority, this tips the scales too far in favor of the charter school." Both LEARN 6, which opened in 2012, and LEARN 10, which started four years later, educate kindergartners through eighth graders. LEARN 6 is located in a leased

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BEARS STADIUM

Pritzker told NFL Chicago was no-go

By Olivia Olander and Dan Petrella
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

With days left until a deadline to pass legislation this spring, Gov. JB Pritzker acknowledged he had recently spoken with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell and maintained that the Bears and NFL are not considering a new stadium in Arlington Heights or Indiana — not Chicago.

"It was good. It was short. I wanted to be in and know and keep him up to date on what was happening," Pritzker said of his conversation with the commissioner. "I will say that it's clear from the statements by the Bears and that they're not with the NFL that there really are only two places that the Bears are considering having their stadium going forward, and that's either in the state of Indiana or in Arlington Heights."

The comments came amid a public back-and-forth between Pritzker and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, with Johnson as the first-term mayor has made a last-minute effort to keep the team in the city.

Johnson on Tuesday attributed the "disconnect" with the governor on the stadium issue to the two coming from "different upbringings," pointing to the governor's billionaire status. "I'm not a billionaire. I'm not the heir of billions of dollars. I'm a working-class brother that was teaching



Fans wait in line to enter the Chicago Bears Draft Party at Soldier Field on April 23 in Chicago. JOHN KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

middle school a handful of years ago," Johnson said Tuesday on The Matt McCall Show on WVON-AM 1690. "My motivation to make sure that a corporation keeps jobs in Chicago is so that families don't have to struggle like my family did. And so, yes, that's going to come across as a little more provocative, because what's at stake for him is — it's not the same as what's at stake for me."

Pritzker shot back Wednesday that the disagreement was "about our values" and that he had "focused on the working class, the middle class and people most vulnerable throughout my career."

"Do we want to spend \$2.5 billion of taxpayer dollars on the Chicago Bears, or do we want to spend a lot less than that in order to keep the Chicago Bears in Illinois?"

On Feb. 20, a day after Pritzker said he was "surprised, dismayed, very disappointed" by the Bears putting out a statement praising Indiana's proposal to lure the team across state lines, the governor responded to a text message from Goodell with a proposed statement on the stadium drama, according to text messages obtained through an open records request.

"The simplest statement would be: 'We continue to work with Illinois leadership and appreciate the progress that is being made,'" Pritzker wrote, wording that Bears President and CEO Kevin Warren matched in a statement of his own nearly word for word.

"Hope fully you have seen the statement that Kevin made. Word for word. Hope this helps," the commissioner wrote.

Pritzker replied: "Helps a lot. We are pencils up and working (with) Bears. Have not yet spoken with legislative leaders but send them the article. But we are glad to see the statement."

Earlier this week, Pritzker expressed optimism that both chambers would pass a so-called megaprojects bill before the legislative session closes, while also knocking Johnson for having "no plan" to keep the team in Chicago. The Johnson administration has disputed that characterization. The governor on Wednesday

said he hadn't spoken with Johnson since the mayor made those remarks, but maintained the two remain friends.

The Bears have for years focused on the former Arlington International Racecourse site in Arlington Heights, which the team purchased in early 2021. More recently, the team has said it is also considering a site in Hammond, Indiana, after Hoosier lawmakers and the governor of Indiana passed legislation earlier this year to build a stadium across the border, though more work remains to be done before that site could become a reality.

Two years ago, the Bears and Johnson laid out elaborate plans for a new publicly owned domed stadium near Soldier Field, where the team currently plays. Those plans fell flat in Springfield, and the prospect of the Bears staying in Chicago quickly dimmed as no new widely supported proposals have emerged publicly since.

In the ongoing Illinois legislative efforts, the Bears are seeking some \$855 million in infrastructure funding, as well as certainty over the branch and were later thrilled to learn there were actually two chicks.

The birth of Chicago's first bald eagles in a century has drawn excitement across Cook County and the world. The Park District said submissions came from a wide range of participants, from students in local Chicago classrooms to international participants from Argentina, France and Australia.

franchise. Pritzker at an earlier event on Tuesday said "much of the infrastructure that's being talked about, that people are calling infrastructure for the Bears, is actually infrastructure for the region around Arlington Heights."

"I know people are trying to say, oh, it's some giveaway to the Bears. Certainly, some of this is an incentive for the Bears, and is relevant only to a stadium, but also much of it is relevant to just having good traffic flow like we need everywhere, building bridges, making sure we have roads that make sense for people, so they can get to the grocery store, get to the doctor's office, get home, at night safely," he said.

The state House passed a so-called megaprojects bill last month that would allow the Bears to make special payments to local governments in lieu of higher property taxes, an effort to keep the team in Illinois rather than losing it to Indiana. But the legislation has sat in the Senate for several weeks amid concerns over whether its property tax relief provisions would be workable.

Lawmakers are expected to continue working on the megaprojects legislation in the coming days.

"I'm hopeful that the people who want to tank the bill are not successful," Pritzker said Wednesday.

Tribune reporter Jeremy Gerner contributed.

PRICES

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have the opportunity to justify their prices before a cap is set. The board would also be charged with improving access to medication, particularly in rural and low-income communities.

A central focus of the legislation is tying Illinois drug prices to Medicare's new negotiating power under the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. Beginning this year, Medicare — which covers people 65 and older and those with disabilities — negotiated lower prices for 10 high-cost drugs. The results for Januvia, a diabetes medication, meant a drop from \$527 to \$113 for a 30-day supply, while Enbrel, used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, fell from \$7106 to \$2,155, according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

Under Syed's bill, those Medicare-negotiated rates would automatically become the upper payment limits for Illinois consumers across all healthcare plans.

Medicaid and certain state employee health insurance programs would, for technical reasons, need to opt in separately.

The board would not be permitted to further cut prices on drugs already negotiated through Medicare but could work to ensure those drugs reach patients who need them.

Anusha Thotakura, executive director of Citizen Action Illinois, a progressive policy group championing Syed's legislation, cited an April study from her organization showing the difference in costs between the 10 drugs affected by the negotiated Medicare rate and said that the state of Illinois overpays for those drugs by more than \$190 million. Opponents have disputed that figure, but Thotakura said it still illustrates a significant problem.

"We're in a very tight budget year here. People are talking about all kinds of cuts to important services," she said after Wednesday's hearing. "We're looking for revenue, but look at where we're overpaying in this regard."

Under the legislation, the board members must show an expertise in the healthcare, pharmacy and clinical medicine spaces, but they can't be an employee of, a board member of, or a consultant to a manufacturer or trade association for manufacturers.

The members would serve five-year terms, except that the initial members' terms would be staggered. They would be assisted by a 15-member council, of which five members would be appointed by the governor, by James Thompson, Illinois Senate president, and four by

the minority leaders in each chamber.

Board decisions could be appealed and even subject to judicial review. The bill also says the Illinois attorney general's office "may" enforce the measure governing the board, but Syed said any shortcomings in the law can be addressed by the Illinois General Assembly, including the Legislative Audit Commission.

About a dozen states have active PDABs, though some states have more comprehensive boards than others. States like Colorado, Minnesota and Maryland, which in 2019 became the first state to enact legislation establishing PDABs, authorized their boards to set so-called caper payment limits for a drug.

The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, which opposes the Illinois bill, has argued that none of the roughly dozen active prescription drug affordability boards operating in other states have produced measurable savings for patients.

Peter Fotos, PHRMA's deputy vice president for state advocacy, told the Illinois House committee Wednesday that the Medicare drug pricing framework "was never intended to be applied at the state level and its structure does not align with how state Medicaid programs, commercial markets or pharmacy networks operate."

Deputy Republican leader Ryan Spain of Peoria, who also opposes the bill, repeated bureaucratic and operational concerns, including the lack of a state agency to oversee the board.

"If this bill passes... we're going to inherit this mess that you've created with this legislation and have to deal with it because... if you want to characterize this board as sort of a minor operating body then it needs to be aligned with a parent organization in state government that can help it," Spain said in committee.

Syed testified that she didn't see the need for the board to fall under a specific state agency.

She also said the board would only need \$750,000 in operational expenses.

"This board does operate independently. It's free of conflict of interest," she said. "Truthfully, I just don't see the need for it to be housed in a department."

A spokesperson for Democratic Gov. JB Pritzker would not say whether the governor supports creating a prescription drug board, other than to say his office is reviewing the proposal.

Meanwhile, the legislature passed another affordability-themed bill on Wednesday by James Thompson, Illinois Senate president, and four by

Chicagoans vote to name bald eagles

By Christiana Freitag
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Perched high in the trees above South Deering, two bald eagles spotted last month represent a major ecological milestone: the first bald eagles born in Chicago in more than 100 years.

Now, it's time to name them.

To celebrate the historic births, the Chicago Park District has launched a "Name the Eagles" competition, inviting Chicagoans and beyond to vote for their favorite names for the two hatchlings.

After receiving more than 3,000 submissions, a Park District committee narrowed the choices to five finalists: Migiz, Marian and Clawmet. Migiz means "bald eagle" in Ojibwe (Anishinaabe), one of the Indigenous languages historically spoken in the Chicago region. Marian honors the South Side's Marian R. Byrnes Natural Area and its namesake, a lifelong Chicago environmentalist and civil rights activist. Clawmet is a play on "Calu-



Two eaglets are seen in their nest, right, in Chicago's South Deering neighborhood while an eagle stands watch on May 7. CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

met," the Southeast Side region where the eaglets nest is located.

Other runners-up were Billy Soaragin, Phoenix and Hope.

Hyde Park binders Pat and Steve Pearson were the first to photograph the nest on April 28 at Park No. 597 and have already cast their votes in the naming contest.

"When they first spotted the nest, the couple could

only see one eagle peeking above the branches and were later thrilled to learn there were actually two chicks.

The Pearsons had monitored the area for more than a year, watching adult eagles bring large sticks into the tree-tops. Pat Pearson said finally seeing an eagle in April was an emotional moment.

"I got choked up and tears were running down my face,"

Pat Pearson said she voted for Marian because the couple frequently bird-watches at the South Side natural area, while Steve voted for Migiz — the name he originally hoped to submit himself.

The Park District said the successful nesting is a promising sign that habitat restoration and conservation efforts are improving conditions for wildlife in the city. The Park District has temporarily closed the woodland path near the nesting site at Park No. 597.

AIRPORT

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ter-acre of forest preserve land, The Forest Preserves District must agree to the request.

"It allows a condensed environmental assessment," Loudon said. "The local FAA wants Lake County Forest Preserves District concurrence. It's important because it's public land."

Along with the quarter-acre, Loudon said the Port District is asking the Forest Preserves District for an 18.3-acre easement, of which 15.5 acres are wooded, and 2.8 acres contain trees. It will require the removal of trees, which will be replaced according to Forest Preserves requirements.

Loudon said the easement provides the necessary safe area for planes to land and take off with clear vision.

Doug Ower, the chair of the Sierra Club's local chapter, took issue with the de minimis designation. He said at the meeting that the Forest Preserves District should not concur. Though the sale is only about a quarter-acre, the 18.3-acre easement makes it more serious.

"It's the Forest Preserves' formal statement that the runway project 'will not adversely affect' the preserves' protected features and activities," Ower said. "Got here we are talking



More than 120 people packed into a room on Wednesday at the Waukegan National Airport to give their opinions both for and against a new runway. STEVE SADIN/FORTHE

about roughly 18 acres that would involve the removal or topping of 800 trees."

Before the FAA makes a final decision there will be a public hearing where anyone is able to look at the plans and make comments. Loudon said that will likely take place in November. People can also submit written comments to the FAA.

Of the 21 people who spoke at the meeting, 10 voiced support, seven spoke against it and the others were neutral on the issue.

Marcus Jordan said the growth coming with the new

runway will help the local economy and create jobs.

"These jobs are opportunities for the next generation," Jordan said. "These are not just jobs, but a pipeline for the growth of the airport and Waukegan."

"This is good for the entire economy of Lake County," added Jim Marabella.

For the Waukegan mayor and state Sen. Bill Morris said the project violates a "decades-old promise of never extending the runway across Green Bay Road." He suggests not going west of

Green Bay Road to avoid removing the trees.

"Saving 550 or more mature carbon-dioxide-absorbing trees, grandfathers as the native people called them, improves air quality," Morris said. "Those trees capture 12 to 20 tons or more of carbon dioxide annually."

A joint meeting of the Lake County Forest Preserves District's finance, operations and planning committees will discuss the runway issue at 8:30 a.m. June 1, with the full Board of Commissioners scheduled to vote at 9 a.m. on June 10.



May 27, 2026

Dear Mr. Ty Kovach, Executive Director, Lake County Forest Preserve District

On behalf of the Waukegan Port District and Waukegan National Airport, I would like to reaffirm the Port District's commitment to fully comply with the applicable tree preservation and replacement requirements of the Lake County Forest Preserve District and all related permitting obligations associated with work occurring on or adjacent to Forest Preserve property.

The Waukegan Port District recognizes the ecological, aesthetic, and community value of the Forest Preserve lands and understands the importance of responsible stewardship of natural resources. We appreciate the cooperative working relationship that has developed between our organizations as we continue discussions regarding airport safety and infrastructure initiatives.


To that end, the Port District is committed to coordinating closely with Forest Preserve staff regarding any tree removal activities that may be necessary and to ensuring such activities are conducted in accordance with applicable ordinances, policies, and best management practices. The District also desires to work collaboratively with the Forest Preserve to identify appropriate opportunities for restoration, mitigation, and replanting efforts in areas affected by tree removal activities.

Our intent is not only to satisfy regulatory requirements, but also to contribute positively to the long-term environmental health and sustainability of the surrounding area. We welcome continued dialogue with your staff to develop mutually agreeable restoration approaches that balance environmental stewardship with the Airport's FAA-mandated safety obligations and operational requirements.

We appreciate the continued cooperation and professionalism of the Forest Preserve District and look forward to working together in a constructive and collaborative manner.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Please call me if you have any questions.


Jack Dye
Chairman, Waukegan Port District



STATE OF ILLINOIS)
) SS
COUNTY OF LAKE)

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT
REGULAR JUNE MEETING
JUNE 10, 2026**

MADAM PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS:

Your **PLANNING COMMITTEE** presents herewith “A Resolution Finding that Use of Property at Waukegan Savanna Forest Preserve for Airport Runway Purposes will have De Minimis Impact,” and requests its approval.

PLANNING COMMITTEE:

Date: 6-1-2026 Roll Call Vote: Ayes: 6 Nays: 1 (WASIK)
 Voice Vote Majority Ayes; Nays: _____

**LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT
LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS**

**A RESOLUTION FINDING THAT USE OF PROPERTY AT
WAUKEGAN SAVANNA FOREST PRESERVE FOR
AIRPORT RUNWAY PURPOSES WILL HAVE DE MINIMIS IMPACT**

WHEREAS, the Lake County Forest Preserve District (the “District”) owns a certain parcel of land known as Waukegan Savanna Forest Preserve (“Waukegan Savanna”); and

WHEREAS, the Waukegan Port District (“WPD”) desires to replace its Runway 5/23 with a new 6,000-foot runway (the “Proposed New Runway”); and

WHEREAS, for the Proposed New Runway, WPD has requested that the District convey to WPD (i) a fee simple interest in 0.25 acres of land within Waukegan Savanna (the “Fee Simple Property”) and (ii) a permanent avigation easement over 18.3 acres of land within Waukegan Savanna (the “Avigation Easement Property”; the Fee Simple Property and the Avigation Easement Property are, collectively, the “Conveyance Parcels”; a portion of Waukegan Savanna, a portion of the Current Runway, a portion of the Proposed New Runway, the Fee Simple Property, and the Avigation Easement Property are generally depicted on the map attached hereto in Exhibit A); and

WHEREAS, federal regulations limit the ability to use certain public land for airport uses, specifically “publicly owned land of a public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge of national, State, or local significance” (“Section 4(f) Property”) (23 CFR §§774.3 and 774.17); and

WHEREAS, the Federal Aviation Administration (“FAA”) will not approve the use of Section 4(f) Property, unless it determines that either (i) “there is no feasible and prudent avoidance alternative” and the proposed use includes “all possible planning” to minimize harm to the Section 4(f) Property, or (ii) the use of the Section 4(f) Property will have a de minimis impact (23 CFR §774.3); and

WHEREAS, a de minimis impact is one that will not adversely affect the features, attributes, or activities that qualify the Section 4(f) Property for protection (23 CFR §774.17); and

WHEREAS, in furtherance of obtaining FAA approval for the Proposed New Runway, the WPD has requested that the District’s Board of Commissioners concur in writing that the WPD’s proposed use of the Conveyance Parcels will have de minimis impact on Waukegan Savanna; and

WHEREAS, the District has no past, current, or future plans for any active recreational improvements within the Conveyance Parcels;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners of the Lake County Forest Preserve District, Lake County, Illinois **THAT**:

Section 1: Recitals. The recitals set forth above are incorporated as a part of this Resolution by this reference.

Section 2: Finding of De Minimis Impact. The Board of Commissioners of the District hereby finds that the WPD's proposed use of the Conveyance Parcels in connection with the Proposed New Runway would not adversely affect the features, attributes, or activities that make Waukegan Savanna publicly owned land of local significance and, as such, qualify Waukegan Savanna for protection as Section 4(f) Property. The President, Board Secretary and Executive Director of the District (and the Executive Director's designees) are hereby authorized to provide, execute, and attest to, on behalf of the District, all documents necessary to evidence such finding, provided that any documents have first been approved by the District's Corporate Counsel. This resolution does not approve the conveyance of the Conveyance Parcels to the WPD.

Section 3: Effective Date. This Resolution shall be in full force and effect from and after its passage and approval in the manner provided by law.

PASSED this ____ day of _____, 2026

AYES:

NAYS:

APPROVED this ____ day of _____, 2026

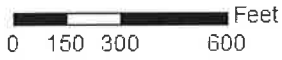
Jessica Vealitzek, President
Lake County Forest Preserve District

ATTEST:

Julie Gragnani, Secretary
Lake County Forest Preserve District

Exhibit No. _____

Exhibit A



Legend

- Waukegan Savanna Forest Preserve
- Fee Simple Property
- Avigation Easement Property
- Current Runway
- Proposed New Runway

Prepared using information from:
Lake County Department of Information
& Technology: GIS/Mapping Division
18 North County Street
Waukegan, Illinois 60085-4357
847-377-2373

Lake County Forest Preserve District
Land Preservation and GIS Dept.
1899 W. Winchester Rd
Libertyville, Illinois 60048

2025 Aerial Map Prepared 27 May 2026

Courtesy Copy Only.
Property boundaries indicated are provided
for general location purposes. Wetland
and flood limits shown are approximate and
should not be used to determine setbacks for
structure or as a basis for purchasing property.

