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IEPA Urges ComEd to Work with Village, Park District  
to Restart Barrie Park Environmental Clean Up

State environmental officials Wednesday told Commonwealth Edison and Nicor Gas to return to the negotiating table with the Village of Oak Park and Park District to come up with a mutually acceptable plan for restarting excavation of contaminated materials from Barrie Park, the former site of a 19<sup>th</sup> century plant that processed coal into gas.

“We are very pleased with the directions given by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency,” said Oak Park Trustee Barbara Ebner who led a delegation of community officials to Springfield to meet with IEPA Director Renee Cipriano and members of her staff.

“Our intent was not to have state officials tell us or the utilities what to do. We just wanted them make it clear to the utilities that they should not move unilaterally, but should work with the community to come up with a plan we could all support.”

Added Village Manager Carl Swenson, “The IEPA did exactly what we had hoped. They chose not to review either the utilities’ plan or our recommendations and, instead, sent us all back to the negotiating table. Director Cipriano clearly understood the need for all the parties involved to agree to a plan before her agency became involved. Her efforts certainly are appreciated.”

Excavation at the site, a 3.5 acre parcel on the Village’s southeast side, was suspended in March when samples from two of the nine air monitoring stations along the perimeter indicated levels of benzene emissions would, by the end of the project, exceed the levels established before work began. Excavation was about 40 percent complete, and the site has since been covered with clay soil to control emissions from the coal tar buried when the plant ceased operations in the 1920s.

Commonwealth Edison and Nicor Gas, who are responsible for the clean up, recommended dramatically scaling back the project. When environmental experts hired by the Village and Park District developed a series of recommendations to maintain the original clean-up scope, the utilities unilaterally asked the IEPA to support their plan and reject the ideas presented by community officials, a step that led to Wednesday’s meeting in Springfield.

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Although Village officials say they are pleased with the outcome of Wednesday's meeting with the IEPA, much work remains to hammer out an agreement acceptable to all parties. The IEPA gave the utilities and community officials 60 days to come up with a single plan for state environmental officials to review. If a plan cannot be developed, the IEPA could step in and develop its own plan.

"The pressure definitely is on," Ebner said. "But as long as we are talking, there is hope and opportunity for agreement. The people in the neighborhood have endured too much disruption in their lives. Everyone – the Village, the Park District and the utilities – owe it to the residents to do our best to negotiate in good faith. I, for one, remain optimistic that we can reach an agreement."

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