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ABA residents, Developer Spar Over Tree Cutting

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Private homeowners from the Green Lake Conference Center are calling into question the actions of Lindenwood Development, saying the firm is not following proper procedure as it begins removing trees from a proposed subdivision. But Lindenwood and town of Brooklyn officials say the company is fully compliant, with all necessary approvals in place at this stage. Lindenwood partner Doug Crusan confirmed logging is underway for the streets and detention ponds, but not the housing lots. "Our intention is not to cut lots until we're ready to build homes," Crusan said. He estimated that will begin around August.

Nearly 100 new homes are planned for the eastern side of the Conference Center on approximately half-acre lots. The plan includes seven cul-de-sacs, the longest being 1,500 feet. The town of Brooklyn approved the plans in March. Green Lake County's Land Use Planning and Zoning Committee will consider the plat June 4. Sewers, road grading and more will begin after county approval, Crusan said. Still, the tree removal is raising eyebrows, particularly among private homeowners who live on the Conference Center grounds. Tree removal began last week. Part-time resident Dick Martens, who lives on the grounds' west side, sent an e-mail Monday to the Green Lake Common Council and mayor — along with county, DNR and other officials.

"In speaking with Jennifer Huffman, stormwater specialist for the DNR last week, I understand that the developer agreed to give two-week notice before commencing logging to allow the developer to demonstrate to [the] DNR that the developer has taken the proper erosion-control measures," Martens' e-mail reads. "Jennifer indicated that she has not received any notice from the developers and has not reviewed the developers' erosion control plan for logging."

Crusan acknowledged he had forgotten to notify Huffman, but emphasized it was not required in the DNR permit. Doing so would have been a courtesy, not a requirement, Crusan said. Lindenwood will have to notify the DNR at least five days before starting to dig the stormwater ponds, but this won't start until after county approval, Crusan added. Martens also said Lindenwood has neglected to work with the county conservationist to minimize tree impact. "I understand that the developers have not contacted Jim [Hebbe] for his input in attempting to minimize the extent of the removal of trees at the proposed subdivision site," the e-mail reads. Martens cited the town of Brooklyn's pre-development agreement, calling for Lindenwood to "use its best efforts, in cooperation with the county conservationist, to minimize the extent of removal of trees." Crusan responded, "The reason we asked for private roads is so we could minimize the effect on trees. "Although the subdivision roads will be built to town standards, they will have 40 feet of impact rather than 80 feet of impact, Crusan said, adding this reduces the need for tree removal.

The location of each tree greater than 8 inches in diameter within the subdivision has been logged on a global positioning system (GPS). This helps Lindenwood minimize the removal of mature trees when plotting the houses.

Crusan added the Joint Advisory Committee on Land Use Matters (JACLUM) — which includes the Green Lake Sanitary District, Green Lake Association and County Land Conservation Department — has helped review the plans. JACLUM paid to have an independent firm review them with the county to suggest improvements beyond the minimum requirements to protect the lake, said GLA Executive Director Nancy Hill. “And I think the developers seemed open to our suggestions,” she said. Lindenwood has adopted more than 90 percent of JACLUM’s suggestions to minimize environmental impact, even though doing so was not required, Crusan said.

Martens said Lindenwood had an “act now and ask questions later” approach. “I realize that enforcement of this [county conservationist] provision is the town’s responsibility, but I believe it again demonstrates the ‘act now and ask questions later’ attitude of this developer,” his e-mail reads. But Town Chairman Mike Wuest is confident there have been no violations. “They’re in compliance with everything out there,” Wuest said. “ ... They’ve got everything they need right now to proceed with the logging.”

Wuest has been in contact with Jennifer Huffman of the DNR, who assured him Lindenwood was compliant. “All permits are in place, and Lindenwood has assured them — as they have assured the town — the protection of the lake is the top priority,” Wuest said.

At Monday’s Green Lake Common Council meeting, Ald. Donna Moore asked why Martin had sent his e-mail to city, county and DNR officials but not to the Town Board of Brooklyn — in which the subdivision is planned. Crusan emphasized all the necessary permits are in hand at this stage — including the DNR and Department of Transportation, and he would show them to anyone upon request. “Dick Martens and company have brought up a lot of red herrings — stuff that’s been irrelevant since the start — and here’s another one,” he said, referring to Martens’ e-mail. “ ... It all boils down to the fact that they just don’t want anyone else in their backyard.” “As we get closer to final approvals, the anger on their part is going to show.” Crusan added someone pulled more than 50 stakes that marked out Woodland Court in the subdivision two weekends ago. It will cost Lindenwood about \$1,500 to re-plot that area. The Sheriff’s Department was notified. Crusan said a bald eagle’s nest will not be harmed, as it is more than 200 feet from the property line of the nearest proposed house. A grove of chestnut trees won’t be touched, either. “They’re not even on our land,” Crusan said of land purchased by Lindenwood.