

Old Orchard Road bike path project continues despite lawsuit

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A month after [Skokie](#) filed an eminent domain lawsuit against the owner of Memorial Park Cemetery to acquire a small piece of the cemetery's property for a new bike path, the village continues to pedal forward with the project.

The Skokie Village Board Tuesday signed off on preparing a resolution authorizing the village to enter into a Local Agency Agreement for the construction phase of the project, which will create an east-west bike path along Old Orchard Road.

According to Director of Engineering Erik Cook, the cost of the path is estimated at \$543,200, but most of it will not be paid for by the village. Skokie acquired federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funding to be administered through the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, he said. Cook said Skokie's portion of the cost is \$115,200. The Local Agency Agreement is a standard necessity to enter into the construction phase, he said.

"The project (will) provide a shared-use path that will be constructed on the south side of Old Orchard Road between Skokie Boulevard and Gross Point Road," Cook said.

Most of the path will be 10 feet wide with a 2-foot grass shoulder on each side, according to Cook.

"The path will narrow near the west end of the project due to current right of way constraints," he said.

That is the one wrinkle in the project since the village has not yet acquired a small piece of unused property that belongs to Memorial Park Cemetery.

Skokie officials said the village had an independent appraisal done of the desired unused strip of land, which came to \$20,500. Cemetery owner SCI Illinois Services, Inc. countered at \$260 a square foot, or \$543,000 in total, according to the village.

Corporation Counsel Michael Lorge has said the total value of the cemetery would be worth \$1.5 billion based on SCI's asking price. In a letter the village sent to SCI — acquired by the Skokie Review through a [Freedom of Information Act](#) request — he accused SCI of not being interested "in engaging in any good faith negotiation."

According to the village, the strip of land it seeks is 530 feet long and 15 feet at its widest and would never be used by the cemetery or any commercial entity. SCI did not respond to the Review's request for a comment.

The village has vowed to continue with the project — even as it pursues the cemetery property through its Dec. 10. lawsuit. Officials said it will build up to the cemetery property and narrow the path to about 5 feet for that small portion.

It is possible, Cook said, to later return and widen that section of the path once the eminent domain case against SCI is resolved. Construction on the path is scheduled to begin in spring, he said.

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