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Southwest Michigan

VB OKs Northpoint easement protection

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PAW PAW - Van Buren County commissioners have agreed to forever protect the Northpoint Conservation Area on Lake Michigan near South Haven from commercial development. Commissioners voted 5-2 to approve a conservation easement with the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.

County resident Dave Foerster asked that the agreement be sent back to committee. He said language in the easement allowed for an existing, vacant two-story house to remain on the property. He said that could open the conservation area to private development. "There is no restriction on the sale of the property," Foerster said at the board meeting Tuesday.

Commissioner Mike Toth agreed with Foerster that the matter should go back to committee. "If we're going to do this we should get it right," Toth said, noting the county had owned the property for 80 years. But Commissioner Susan Hammond said lawyers had put in the language to allow use of the structure for Boy Scouts to sleep overnight. It could also be used by a park ranger or a volunteer caretaker, should one be needed, Commissioner Tom Erdmann said. "We're trying to think of 100 years from now or 200 years from now," Erdmann said. But Toth wanted the resolution to say for caretaker only. "That just opens the door," Toth said.

Toth and Commissioner Christopher Randall voted no.

Julie Pioch, the director of the Van Buren County office of the Michigan State University Extension, said the home should be torn down so there would be no issue. "It's a crappy building," Pioch said.

Commissioners last year elected to sign an agreement with the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy to enforce a conservation easement at the 17-acre property.

Commissioners had considered having the county enforce the easement, but were concerned that future commissions could change things. Going with the conservancy makes it less likely that change would occur. The conservancy charged \$10,000 to enforce the easement. Commissioners asked the Friends of North Point organization to raise the funds privately, which it did.