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# Septage strategy dumped

## *Officials sell plot, plan to locate elsewhere*

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TRAVERSE CITY - Grand Traverse County has flushed its hotly contested plan to build a septage treatment plant near a Garfield Township industrial park.

Instead, the county agreed to sell the site for \$475,000 to developers of property in the Hammond Industrial Centre. Adjacent property owners recently filed suit against the county to stop the project.

"We don't want to force ourselves in," said county solid waste committee member Rob Manigold. "We're going to go somewhere else where we can get along and focus on cleaning up the environment."

Manigold said the water and sewer committee will negotiate to purchase four acres from the county road commission just west of the Hammond Industrial Centre and next to the Cherryland Humane Society.

The county was caught by surprise when six neighboring businesses in the industrial park sued in April to stop the plant.

With engineering nearly complete, the county decided to condemn its own property to negate the suit and push the project along. "We'd have won (the suit) but it would have taken a year and a half with a risk of tremendous legal bills," Manigold said.

The plaintiffs' attorney, **Lawrence LaSusa**, said he won't know the fate of the lawsuit until he speaks with county officials.

Michael Houlihan, attorney for the public works board, said he hopes the plaintiffs will dismiss the suit.

"They could continue the claim for damages but they'd just be holding themselves open for a countersuit by the board for our damages, which are substantial," Houlihan said.

Though the county retrieved its money on the property purchase, it lost funds on legal bills, engineering and interest on the building loan.

One of the six plaintiffs, Jerry Fielstra, said he's pleased the county relented.

The plant would have been a self-contained facility using state-of-the-art technology to convert sludge from septic tanks into an odorless mulch.

The location had been discussed in numerous open meetings and the developers knew, but no one shared the information directly with the neighbors.

Manigold said that communication breakdown won't be repeated.

He's already spoken to the humane society.

If an agreement can be reached with the road commission Manigold said they may still be able to break ground this year, three to four months behind schedule.