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**IDEM Issues Rare Denial of Wetland Permit**

Today community voices were heard and respected when the call for “Wetlands Not Warehouses” was upheld by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) with the denial of a permit application to destroy wetlands for the purpose of building speculative warehouses located at the northeast corner of the intersection of East County Line Road and South Arlington Avenue in Marion County.

Hoosier Environmental Council along with community members have advocated that wetlands should be preserved alongside any commercial development of the area to allow their critical natural functions to be preserved. “I couldn’t be more pleased with this decision” said Sam Carpenter, executive director of the Hoosier Environmental Council. “Indiana’s wetlands play a critical role in having abundant clean water. Wetlands serve as natural and cost-effective infrastructure for water purification, flood control, carbon capture and storage, wildlife habitat and so much more. Wetlands hold storm water and allow it to slowly seep below ground to recharge our aquifers. At a time when Central Indiana is projected to have future water shortages; at a time when Marion County is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade its storm sewer system; it does not make sense to trade these precious wetlands for more speculative warehouses, when Indiana already has a higher warehouse vacancy rate than most other states,” said Carpenter.

“There is an opportunity to create an environmentally friendly development that will support economic growth in the community and preserve the natural wetland assets” said long-time Franklin Township resident Cathy Burton. Unfortunately, owners of Gershman Partners who submitted the denied wetlands permit, have not shown interest in working with residents to shape the project to both protect wetlands and create economic opportunity. Hoosier Environmental Council and residents have had several requests for a conversation go unanswered.

Robin Heldman, whose home borders the planned development said, “because of 2024 state legislation that further reduced protections for class III wetlands, it is critical for the communities impacted by future development to make their voices heard if they want to protect our remaining wetlands. Our state must carefully weigh our need for abundant clean water with allowing developers to continue to destroy wetlands in the name of economic opportunity,” said Heldman.

Indiana wetland protection has been steadily reduced in recent years. First through SEA 389 enacted into law in 2021, many class II wetlands lost any measure of protection. Then the US Supreme Court Sacket decision, released in May 2023, removed protection for those wetlands that did not maintain a surface connection with other bodies of water. In 2024 the Indiana General Assembly passed HEA 1383 which reduces protection for class III or the most protected class of wetlands in Indiana. The Indiana Builders Association has led the push to erode state laws that provide protection for these essential resources. The Hoosier Environmental Council and partner groups worked to address some of the Builder’s stated concerns with current law but ultimately were not able to secure necessary protections through legislation.

“Hoosier Environmental Council has been engaged with the community around protecting these particular wetlands for two years,” said Carpenter. “We launched our ‘Wetlands Not Warehouses’ campaign just weeks before a public hearing for the permit and are grateful for the strong showing of support that emerged. We will continue to advocate for these essential and rapidly declining wetland assets in both the court of public opinion and with state legislators,” said Carpenter. “Currently the economic value of our wetlands is not being properly assessed. Just like any asset, the rarer it becomes, the more valuable it is.”

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