

### Neighbors to have role in traffic signal talks

06/27/02

BY BOB SEIDENBERG

Evanston Review

The Federal Highway Administration has granted "consulting party status" to U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky's office, as well as select residents of Ridge Avenue, after Schakowsky insisted the neighbors should be able to participate in discussions concerning a traffic light system planned for Ridge Avenue.

Schakowsky's office and some residents complained last week after city officials said they'd had a video conference with state and federal officials to set guidelines for a public hearing on the controversial project.

Residents asked why they weren't included in that meeting.

Residents have raised concern about why the public can't be more involved in planning the \$1.86 million project, 80 percent of which will be paid for with federal funds.

They object to the larger, mast-arm traffic lights mandated for use under the state plan, arguing they will detract from the ambiance of the surrounding Ridge Historic Preservation District and could result in the loss of as many as 50 trees.

Schakowsky, a longtime resident of Ridge Avenue, pressed federal officials to halt work on the project until Section 106 requirements have been met. One Section 106 requirement is a public hearing.

"People in Evanston want to and need to be involved in decisions concerning their city," she said. "In every step of the process we will make sure the stakeholders are at the table."

Following the June 10th video conference, she wrote the FHA, asking that someone from her office, Ridge Avenue residents, and a representative of the city's Historic Preservation Commission be granted "consulting party status" so that they will be included in any future meetings.

"I am disappointed that my neighbors and I were not appropriately included in the decision-making process up to this point, in violation of the spirit, if not the letter of the law," her letter stated. "But fortunately, it is not too late to develop a meaningful plan that will preserve the beauty and historic integrity of our city and improve the efficiency of our streets."

Illinois Department of Transportation officials have acknowledged that the public notice statutes were not adhered to on the project; and that a public hearing will have to be held.

Evanston Public Works Director David Jennings told the City Council last week that his staff will prepare a case study before the hearing that will summarize various positions on the issue.

Members of the city's Preservation Commission, a citizen group, also questioned why they weren't consulted.

The FHA granted Schakowsky's request to include her office, a representative from the local Historic Preservation Commission, and several Ridge Avenue residents, including Chat and

Gerald Gordon who first raised concerns about the plan.