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# The Civic Federation

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### LACK OF ACTION ON FY2011 FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT BUDGET DEMONSTRATES NEED FOR SEPARATE GOVERNING BOARD

(CHICAGO) Even though the staff of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County completed and filed its budget three months ago and is now over three weeks into the 2011 fiscal year, the dual board of Commissioners that governs both the District and Cook County has taken no action to review or debate the spending plan. Unfortunately, this inattention is only the most recent example of the negative consequences of continuing the dual board structure. The Civic Federation calls on state officials to enact legislation that creates a separate governing board for the Forest Preserve District and urges President Preckwinkle and the Board of Commissioners to support the legislation.

“The Civic Federation and other supporters of the Forest Preserves have grown impatient waiting for the Cook County Board of Commissioners to find the time to oversee the budget and other critical issues impacting the Forest Preserve District of Cook County,” said Laurence Msall, president of the Civic Federation. The Federation is therefore taking the extraordinary measure of releasing its 55-page analysis of the \$198.0 million Forest Preserve District budget outside of the traditional public review process. “It would be hard to think of a clearer demonstration of the need for a separate governing board for the District than the Cook County Board’s inability to find time to perform their basic fiduciary oversight of the Forest Preserves,” continued Msall.

In the analysis, available on the Civic Federation’s website [civicfed.org](http://civicfed.org), the Federation announced its support for the proposed FY2011 budget. The District plans to slightly decrease appropriations by 0.1%, hold its property tax levy flat and maintain adequate budgetary reserves. At a time when the residents of Cook County are facing serious economic hardships, the Civic Federation commends the District for minimizing the burden it places on taxpayers.

The Civic Federation is concerned, however, that the District will need to begin long-term financial planning to ensure future stability and deal with issues such as rising personnel costs and the declining health of its employee pension fund. The funded ratio for the Forest Preserve District Pension Fund has fallen from 103.7% in FY2000 to 68.7% in FY2009. The Civic Federation urges the District to seek reforms to its pensions in addition to those enacted by the State of Illinois in 2010 for employees hired after January 1, 2011.

The Federation also recommends that the District explore operating efficiency reforms such as transferring swimming pool operations to park districts and transferring law enforcement duties to the Cook County Sheriff. Neither law enforcement nor swimming pool operations are central to the District’s mission acquire and protect natural lands.

*The Civic Federation is an independent, non-partisan government research organization founded in 1894. The Federation’s membership includes business and professional leaders from a wide range of Chicago area corporations,*

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*professional service firms and institutions. For more information, please visit the Federation's website at [www.civicfed.org](http://www.civicfed.org).*