



New gold rush hits Kane County fields they're prospecting for gold in Kane County's fertile farmland.

Instead of sifting through gravel in shallow pans, however, these prospectors are cruising down farm roads, counting the mileposts. And while corn has a golden hue, right now that's not the color these guys covet. The gold they're seeking is colored green. What's happening, say two land brokers I've talked to is a push by major home building firms to lock up the best sites available on which to build sprawling, new residential subdivisions in the county's hinterland.

"The demand (for land) is probably higher than it's ever been," said **Mark Allen**, a Geneva-based land broker. "And the number one customer is the production builders, the big boys. They trade on the world stock exchanges.

"A decade ago, (Kane County) didn't have production builders, they were in Naperville. Well, Naperville ran out of their number one resource, so now the production builders are here, they are knocking on the doors, they've got a pocketful of money"

All of which puts pressure on existing farmland owners, whether farmers or not, to sell their land. But it's not quite as simple as all that.

**John Bates**, a land broker in Naperville for **Coldwell Banker Residential**, said Kane County poses a particular hurdle for developers. For one, there has been more public resistance to large-scale development in the county's central and western townships, he said. He compared the situation to Will County, in the Joliet-Plainfield area, where home building is going on at an even faster pace than in Kane. For another, access to essential water and sewer services in rural Kane can make development a tough nut to crack, Bates noted.

"Right now, things aren't all that conducive to development," Bates said. "Kane County as a whole, they are really not open-armed welcoming the builders and developers. The utilities issue is one that holds up potential subdivisions," Bates said. "When you don't have sewers that are readily available, it will slow down growth." Bates said. "The same thing goes for water."



Paradoxically, there are factors right now that are

putting all the more pressure on developers to piece together huge chunks of land for massivel subdivisions, according to Allen and Bates. They point out that some Fox River communities e-g., the tri-cities are setting limits on their westward growth. That means developers are looking at building developments on land that's currently unincorporated and might stay that way, even if it is developed.

In turn, Kane County government is the gate keeper for these large acreages, deciding which projects to OK and how these projects are going to be designed.

"Most certainly, you can't do 80 acre or a 100-acre developments, because you can't afford to put up a water tower (for that small amount of land)." Bates said. "The thing to do, is to find first of all a willing farmer who wants to sell," Bates said. "Then you need to be close enough to existing water and sewer (services) to make the project a reality. Finally to make it a reality, you have to be within a community that wants to see that piece come in."

Highway access for subdivisions is another big concern for potential builders, say the brokers. All of which places a premium on aggregating several farms together, for developments on a grand scale.

Allen said the losers include the small, locally based house builders who want to do modest-sized subdivisions. The costs of building today which include costly set asides for schools and parks, impact fees and the like all help to assure that only the very largest subdivisions are economically viable. "So, we are losing the scattered little, 10-, 20 unit subdivisions," Allen, said. "The new subdivisions on the planning table are very large. You don't buy one farm, you buy five."

That much is evident. We've got Mill Creek, Fox Mill and now, possibly, Grande Prairie. All are big and unincorporated. Blackberry Creek is another major development, but it will be attached to Elburn. New developments in Sugar Grove also are expected to be of the jumbo variety.

"The down side is, who's in charge?" Allen said of the large subdivisions, which in reality are communities in themselves. "When these things start to go up too rapidly, (sometimes) they don't go up properly. Kane County's tough storm water runoff standards and lot size rules for homes built on well and septic and, it's ambitious long-term land planning document also help to discourage small country subdivisions.

From an overall planning standpoint, that can be good. But it all combines to up the ante as prospectors bid up the price of land.