

**DEKALB COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**June 23, 2011**

The DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) met on June 23, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. in the DeKalb County Administration Building, Conference Room East, in Sycamore, Illinois. In attendance were Commission members Cookie Aldis, Ken Andersen, Suzanne Fahnestock, Les Bellah, Rich Gentile, Bill Nicklas, Don Pardridge, Becky Morphey, and Linda Swenson. Staff included Paul Miller and Rebecca Von Drasek. Jeff Whelan was also present.

1. **Roll Call** -- *Commission members Jerry Thompson, Suzanne Fahnestock, Jerry Olson, Dave Maroo, Derek Hiland, John Fischer, and Bill Beverley were noted absent.*
2. **Approval of Agenda** -- *Mr. Andersen moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Nicklas, and the motion carried unanimously.*
3. **Approval of Minutes** – *Mr. Bellah moved to approve the minutes from March 24, 2011 and January 27, 2011, seconded by Mr. Gentile, and the motion carried unanimously.*

*Ms. Swenson arrived at 7:02 p.m.*

**4. County Zoning Ordinance Update**

Mr. Miller informed the Commission that the primary tool by which DeKalb County attempts to bring about the vision of its Comprehensive Plan is the Zoning Ordinance. The current Zoning Ordinance was adopted in 2005, following the adoption of the 2003 Unified Comprehensive Plan. The County Board adopted an update to the 2003 Plan at its meeting on May 18, 2011. While the new Comprehensive Plan does not deviate in any substantial way from the land use policies, goals, and objectives of the previous Plan, it is still appropriate to review the regulations of the County Zoning Ordinance to assure that it remains effective in implementing the Comprehensive Plan. The updated Comprehensive Plan also creates an opportunity to revise regulations to address problems and ambiguities that have arisen in the past few years through administration of the Ordinance.

Mr. Miller explained that the primary change being considered for the Zoning Ordinance concern the elimination of the Use Variation regulations. The County's Zoning Ordinance currently stipulates that a Variation from minimum required lot size shall not be granted. This regulation is primarily intended to protect the integrity of the 40-acre rule for farm dwellings in the A-1, Agricultural District. However, the regulations for "Use Variation" create the possibility for just such lot size Variations. The Use Variation represents possible relief from the 40-acre minimum lot size under certain specific conditions. In addition, staff is suggesting various minor corrections to the text to clarify and define the regulations.

Mr. Miller concluded by noting that the Public Hearing to consider these revisions is scheduled for July 21, 2011 at 1:00 p.m. He encouraged the municipalities to consider reviewing their own ordinances to determine if updates were needed.

## **5. Urban Agriculture**

The Regional Planning Commission, at its meeting of January 27, 2011, discussed possible topics for its agenda this year. One of those topics of interest was “urban agriculture.” Mr. Miller offered the following as a means of initiating a conversation about this idea.

“Urban agriculture”, in its simplest form, is the growing of agricultural products, primarily plants and secondarily livestock, within municipal boundaries. Such products are usually intended for consumption by the individual property owner(s) on which the agriculture occurs, or by a community in close proximity to the site of production. A related activity is the hosting of “farmers markets” where locally grown agricultural products are sold.

As a land use, agriculture is often regarded as incompatible with higher density (non-rural) residential uses. This is due to the odors, noise, dust, and by-products sometimes associated with both uses (fertilizer, pesticides, corn chaff, animal waste, lawn clippings, petroleum-based pollutants from paved surfaces, etc.), as well as concerns over trespassing and property damage. While these compatibility issues are usually associated with larger-scale agriculture (row-cropping and animal confinement operations) vs. suburban-scale residential uses, the introduction of even small-scale agriculture into a residential or commercial area has the potential for conflict. Any municipality considering allowing agricultural uses within its boundaries, therefore, should give careful consideration to how those uses should be regulated.

Ms. Aldis noted the timeliness of the topic, stating that Cortland had just received an application for a variance to allow chickens on a residential property. She added that a variance cannot be granted for a non-permitted use.

Mr. Nicklas explained that the City of Sycamore had a different approach to urban agriculture by allowing it within a new Zoning District called “Rural Residential”. He provided the Commissioners with a handout outlining the “Rural Residential” land use by the City. He noted that generally lots in this district would be a minimum of three acres and could be used as “horse properties.”

Mr. Bellah offered the experience of the Village of Kirkland to regulate dogs and other domesticated pets, and questioned the difficulty in further regulating livestock.

Mr. Partridge questioned the Commission’s intention in discussing this particular topic. Mr. Miller responded that this was the opportunity for the municipalities to share information and ideas about how they are facing this issue. Given the economic condition in the nation, more individuals may seek to supplement their food by growing their own fruits and vegetables or raising their own livestock. Each community should decide what its disposition is toward small-scale agricultural activities within its boundaries.

Mr. Andersen noted that he would like to see better use of the vacant lots in abandoned subdivisions. Such lots could be used for agriculture until conditions improve and they are developed. He acknowledged there were probably some risk and liability concerns but he wondered if those were surmountable.

Mr. Miller stated that some of the municipalities may already offer some “community gardening” opportunities.

Mr. Nicklas noted that community gardens can require a lot of administration. Example issues like proximity to the water spigot, shading of one plot by another, and complaints of trespass can require staff time and resources. Mr. Nicklas added that the City allows the growing of soybeans on certain properties.

Mr. Gentile explained that the City of Genoa has a Special Use Permit that allows an annual permit to raise chickens on residential properties, and added that farming is permitted with an adequate lot size.

Ms. Morphey stated chickens were not permitted on residential properties in Somonauk.

Ms. Swenson observed that the Village of Waterman also has some properties with too many dogs or cats.

Ms. Aldis noted that other than animal husbandry, edible landscaping appeared to be an increasing trend, including vegetable gardening in front yards.

Mr. Miller stated that the on-going promotion of the environmental and financial benefits of “locally grown” produce will continue to encourage more property owners to invest in gardening.

Mr. Andersen asked if there were regulations over landscaping. Mr. Nicklas noted there were weed height requirements.

Ms. Swenson noted that the Village of Waterman will mow properties that are overgrown and then place liens to recover the cost. She indicated that the Village does this to keep the tall grasses from taking over and to protect surrounding property values.

Mr. Miller emphasized that in the current economy it is important to lay a firm foundation before problems arise. He encouraged Commission members to raise the issue of urban agricultural in their own communities, and use the related issues raised in this discussion to explore the topic.

## **6. Member Dues**

Mr. Miller reminded the Commissioners that Annual Dues for the Regional Planning Commission have not been received from Hinckley, Malta, Genoa, Sandwich and Waterman.

## **7. Municipal Development Projects/Issues:**

Ms. Aldis announced two upcoming Census Bureau “webinars” scheduled on June 27 and June 30, 2011. She also noted that the Town of Cortland had received four Building Permit applications for new homes and that the new Dollar General store should be opening in July.

Mr. Andersen reported that Faith World Outreach Church outside of Kirkland was under review by the County.

Mr. Bellah stated that there is an upcoming meeting with the management of Hines Lumber Company about its presence in the Village of Kirkland.

Ms. Fahnstock informed the Commissioners that a new Village Clerk for Maple Park has been appointed, and that there is a Network Administrator position to be posted soon. She also noted that the Village had been approved for a few grants for a water main project, a civic center, and a stormwater study. She reported that the Village was also investigating the creation of a TIF District.

Mr. Pardridge stated that Shabbona had also received a grant for sewer improvements. He observed that the Casino project appeared dormant.

Mr. Nicklas noted that the Courthouse expansion project was underway.

Ms. Swenson stated that foot traffic in the Village of Waterman appeared to be increasing due to the Aurora Sportsmen's Club.

**8. Next Meeting Date -- The Commission agreed that the next RPC meeting would be on August 25, 2011 at 7:00 pm in the Conference Room East.**

**9. Adjournment -- Mr. Andersen moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Pardridge, and the motion carried unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl "Cookie" Aldis  
Chairman, DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission

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