

**DEKALB COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**March 24, 2011**

The DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) met on March 24, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. in the DeKalb County Administration Building, Conference Room East, in Sycamore, Illinois. In attendance were Commission members Ken Andersen, Jerry Thompson, Rich Gentile, Bill Nicklas, Derek Hiland, Roger Bosworth, and Martha May. Staff included Paul Miller and Rebecca Von Drasek. Dr. John Lewis (NIU) and Dan Halverson (DeKalb Fiber Optics) were also present.

**1. Roll Call** -- *Commission members Cookie Aldis, Frank Altmaier, Suzanne Fahnestock, Les Bellah,, Dave Maroo, Don Partridge, Becky Morphey, and Bill Beverley were noted absent.*

*Mr. Hiland noted the lack of quorum and stated that no formal actions would be taken.*

**2. Approval of Agenda** -- *No action was taken.*

**3. Approval of Minutes** – *No action was taken.*

**4. County Comprehensive Plan Update**

Mr. Miller informed the Commission that the public hearing for the update to the DeKalb County Unified Comprehensive Plan was held earlier in the day and that the Hearing Officer had indicated that he would recommend approval of the draft Plan. He explained that representatives of the DeKalb County Farmland Foundation had attended the hearing and encouraged the County Board to commit to creating and legally defending conservation easements, rather than encouraging voluntary easements. Mr. Miller concluded by expressing his gratitude to all of the Commissioners with their assistance in the planning process.

Ms. May asked Mr. Miller to summarize the request of the DeKalb County Farmland Foundation (DCFF). Mr. Miller said that conservation easements are a tool available to property owners who wish to preserve their land for agriculture rather than allow those lands to be converted to some other use. He explained that these types of easements could be controversial because property owners or others might seek to use them to surround a municipality and prevent the expansion of the community. Because the County and the municipalities within its boundaries have a good history of cooperation, the County might not want to endorse the creation of conservation easements, unless it were clear that these should be sought in areas of rural DeKalb County that are not likely to experience growth from any of the municipalities.

Mr. Andersen also attended the public hearing for the Comprehensive Plan update and noted that the DCFF had advocated increasing the acreage to build a farm residence. Mr. Miller stated that the minimum area requirement has been discussed several times since the County decided on the 40-acre minimum lot size in the 1970s. Mr. Miller's impression was that 40 acres appeared to be the appropriate middle point between too many dwellings and too few constructed in the agricultural areas. Mr. Miller also said that he had appreciated all of the comments staff had

received on the draft comprehensive plan because it assisted staff in the preparation of the final document.

## **5. DeKalb County Fiber-Optic Project**

Mr. Miller explained that DeKalb County, in partnership with Northern Illinois University (NIU) and DeKalb Fiber Optics (DFO), was in the process of implementing a project to provide fiber-optic service throughout the County. He explained that the fiber optic lines will extend to each of the municipalities within the County and afford the possibility of high-speed digital service to interested property owners, businesses, and governments. He introduced Dr. John Lewis (NIU) and Dan Halverson (DFO) as representatives of the project.

Mr. Halverson explained that the fiber-optic project has received funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce and a cash-in-kind contributions from DeKalb Fiber Optics to allow the installation of the fiber through DeKalb County and into LaSalle County. He said that all of the public sector buildings within each of the municipalities will be able to connect onto the system. He briefly explained that “dark fiber” would then be made available for Internet Service Providers (ISP), allowing them to resell the connection to businesses and residences for the cost of operations and maintenance. Mr. Halverson stated that the funding was approved in February of 2010.

Dr. Lewis envisioned that this project would be a boost for encouraging economic growth in the region.

Mr. Nicklas asked who would be the broker for the fiber network. Mr. Halverson responded that DFO would negotiate access with the ISPs.

Mr. Nicklas also asked for clarification on the June 1, 2011 date. Mr. Halverson responded that the company hoped to be to Earlville by June, having completed the installation phase of the project by that time.

Ms. May inquired if the Village of Lee was included in the DeKalb County project. Mr. Lewis noted that the Village of Lee was part of a second project which would included nine additional counties in Northern Illinois and an additional 830 miles of fiber.

Mr. Nicklas opined that this type of broadband availability could be a significant draw for business growth in the region. He asked if the company had information on their website regarding this important resource. Mr. Halverson responded that the web site was being upgraded to include maps detailing the available and future fiber routes.

Mr. Andersen agreed that the fiber project was an added value for the region.

Dr. Lewis said that, once installed, the system would equal or surpass any other broadband system in the Country.

Mr. Halverson noted that the capacity was also offered at a competitive price. He expanded on the associate access fee which would be offered to local governments, pointing out that with utility easements, the municipalities will be given access to approximately four wires. The Commission briefly discussed the pricing for connecting government buildings to this system.

Mr. Nicklas said that community discussions should be held to explain the benefits of the jointly owned fiber project. He thought that these discussions should emphasize why each municipality needs to get involved to promote the region as an innovative place to do business. Mr. Nicklas also highlighted example projects such as electronic medical records or an interlibrary loan systems that will become dependent on such a network.

Mr. Thompson asked which entity would own the network. Mr. Halverson responded that DeKalb County would own the network and explained that DeKalb Fiber Optic had an agreement to manage the commercial aspects.

Mr. Lewis explained that the only restriction from the Federal government is that the system be an open network. He also noted that the Federal funding was from the Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act to encourage jobs and promote economic growth.

## **6. Member Reappointments**

Mr. Miller reminded the Commission that reappointment letters were sent out to the communities whose Commission Member Terms were ending. He thanked the members that continue to serve on the Commission and asked for their support in facilitating the reappointment letters.

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

Mr. Andersen stated that the County's AdHoc Committee was considering changing the number of County Board members to 18 (either with 18 separate districts or nine districts with two members) instead of the 24 members. He asked for any input from the Commission Members.

Mr. Bosworth stated that he thought that it was a question of work load. He asked if the amount of work accomplished by the 24 members could be taken over by 18 members.

Mr. Nicklas expressed concern that reducing the number may diminish representation for the citizenry. He also suggested that the process appeared to be the focus of the County Board lately rather than the product of many decisions. He expressed the belief that leadership is important and that the County Board need to take the responsibility to lead, make a decision, and then move on to the next issue.

Mr. Bosworth also expressed concern for a loss representation for the rural areas. He felt changing the district layout may force officials to choose more populated areas over their more rural residents.

Mr. Thompson asked what had initiated the discussion. He opined that there was no need to fiddle with the system without a apparent flaw.

Mr. Hiland asked how many committees Board Members were required to be on. Mr. Andersen noted that at a minimum Board Members must be on two committees.

Mr. Andersen thanked the members for their thoughts.

Mr. Bosworth noted that Waterman is in the process of removing two old buildings from the downtown.

Ms. May asked if a new development was proposed, does the a community have to improve the road or is the developer required to do so? Several Commissioners responded that the Village should require the developer to improve the road to the Village standards. The Village would normally be expected to maintain the road in the future, and the developer should therefore either pay for the road to be upgraded or build the road to the satisfaction of the Village.

**8. Next Meeting Date -- The Commission agreed that the next RPC meeting would be on May 26, 2011 at 7:00 pm in the Conference Room East.**

**9. Adjournment -- *No action was taken.***

Respectfully submitted,

Derek Hiland  
Vice-Chair, DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission

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