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DeKalb County Government
Sycamore, Illinois

**Committee of the Whole Minutes
May 13, 2020**

The Committee of the Whole of the DeKalb County Board virtually met via Zoom on Wednesday, May 13, 2020. Chairman Mark Pietrowski called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Those Members virtually present via Zoom and/or by phone were Mr. Tim Bagby, Mr. Scott Campbell, Ms. Rukisha Crawford, Mrs. Karen Cribben, Mrs. Laurie Emmer, Mr. Steve Faivre, Vice-Chairman John Frieders, Ms. Kiara Jones, Ms. Dianne Leifheit, Ms. Maureen Little, Mr. Jim Luebke, Ms. Mann-Lamb, Mr. Roy Plote, Mr. Chris Porterfield, Mr. Craig Roman, Ms. Linda Slabon, Mr. Paul Stoddard, Mr. Larry West, Mr. Jeff Whelan, Ms. Suzanne Willis, and Chairman Mark Pietrowski, Jr. Those absent were Mr. Tim Hughes, Mr. Tracy Jones, and Mr. Jerry Osland. A quorum was established with twenty-one Members present and three absent.

Others present included Gary Hanson, Derek Hiland, Greg Millburg, Kathy Lampkins, Linda Johnson, Kelsey Rettke, Jerry Smith, Curt Lang, and Doug Johnson.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Mr. Luebke moved to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Plote seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously by voice vote.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

It was moved by Mr. Whelan, seconded by Mr. Stoddard and it was moved unanimously to approve the minutes from the April 8, 2020 Committee of the Whole Meeting.

Mr. Tim Hughes arrived. The roll now reflects twenty-two Members present and two absent.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

CHAIR'S COMMENTS

Chairman Pietrowski shared that Vice-Chair Frieders and he have been conducting weekly County update calls with featured speakers every Friday at noon for several weeks now and have started to record them as well. They have also been hearing daily from constituents and small businesses with questions, concerns and in need sometimes of resources. There is a Restore Illinois Plan for the whole State with phases and DeKalb County is in a region with Winnebago County and others west and north. The DeKalb County Health Department has also recently been briefed by the state on what this means.

Chairman Pietrowski shared he is working with the Winnebago County Chair to organize a call with leaders in the region to talk. There are metrics to be met to move into different phases and with Winnebago County being the largest and biggest hot spot in region they will be the drivers on when our region can move into different phases. He added that through this process we will continue to listen to residents and approach the State with any tweaks they think are needed to

the plan as we move forward. The region is currently slated to move to Phase 3 of the Plan on May 29th but it is a situation that is constantly changing.

As Board Members they can of course all have varying opinions and beliefs on the State response but they do still need to follow the guidelines from the County's own Health Department and the State, Chairman Pietrowski shared. He noted that as Elected Leaders they have to serve an important example to the County. There is room for debate and questions and concerns always but he asked the Board Members to please practice social distancing and wearing masks when representing themselves as County Board Members.

Later in the meeting, the Chair would like to have a brainstorming session where Board Members can feel free to bring up ideas for potential local programs or efforts we can do as a County to help DeKalb County residents, nonprofits or businesses.

The Chair additionally recent requested the State's Attorney's Office investigate the filing of a PTAX-761 form with the Assessments Office which was publicized that doing so will reduce their assessment based upon the current COVID-19 situation. The Sycamore Chamber of Commerce has now disseminated this information by starting in an April 24, 2020 email:

“Visit our website for the PTAX Form, Request For Reduction Due to Destruction. This form is a request for reduction of assessment of property taxes due to destruction. This may give some of you relief as the definition of destruction includes a denial of customary use. This is particularly important to landlords and property owners whose stream of income has been interrupted.” See <http://sycamorechamber.com/covid-19/>

That information is again posted on their website directing them to contact the County Clerk. It is the DeKalb County State's Attorney's opinion that is an incorrect reading of the PTAX-761 form and its associated statutes. The language on the form is: “You must complete Form PTAX-761 to request a reduction of assessment if a building, structure, or other improvement assessed for property tax purposes was damaged or destroyed and rendered uninhabitable and unfit for occupancy or customary use. The destruction must be by natural disaster or accidental means and not by the willful misconduct of the owner.” PTAX-761 Request for Reduction Due to Destruction.

This language is based on 35 ILCS 200/9-190 (and 35 ILCS 200/9-180), which use the same terminology when explaining when such a reduction would be done. It is about physical damage to property causing an effect. (The Form asks you to provide “what caused the destruction”). The Form specifies that it is for property damaged or destroyed by a natural disaster or accidental means – not due to health emergencies or economic changes. The inclusion of “customary use” is directly tied to the property having been damaged or destroyed in the first place. So, the effect of lost ‘customary use’ would be dependent on whether there was damage or destruction in the first place.

The State's Attorney's Office shared that at this time, they have not been provided any basis to opine otherwise and there is no legal authority provided that changes this understanding. Thus, to read that the form can be used by those whose property cannot be utilized for retail sales/rental/etc. because of the current health emergency is not proper and is going to cause more problems for the general public and the County itself than is reasonable. The State has also been consulted and they agree that an improper interpretation is being spread.

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PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS

Reports from Committee Chairs

Mr. Faivre, Chairman of the Planning & Zoning Committee, shared the Committee did not meet so they have no action items for the Board to consider. However, on May 28th there will be three Virtual Zoning Public Hearings assuming that the Executive Committee and County Board approve the proposed Ordinance that would allow for the ability to hold Virtual Zoning Public Hearings.

Ms. Leifheit, Chair of the Law & Justice Committee, reviewed that the Committee receiving staffing updates from the Public Defender. The Courthouse is currently not holding courts besides essential courts and bond calls virtually. The plan is for the Courthouse to reopen in early June. It was reiterated that Ms. Margi Gilmour is retiring next month after 30+ years of service to the County under the Court Services Department. Mr. Michael Venditti has been officially appointed as the Court Services Director. The Committee also reviewed the grants of the Court Service's Department and what their plan is when their Department reopens as well. Mr. Michael Douglas provided the Committee with a Treatment Courts update and an update on the Sober Living Home. Chair Leifheit added that the Committee forwarded one Resolution to the full County Board for consideration. The Resolution is to approve new Dispatching Agreements for the consolidated PSAP entities, as well as the planning amounts for rural Fire Departments and non-PSAP Police Departments.

Mr. Plote, Chairman of the County Highway Committee, shared that the Committee held a short virtual meeting but has forwarded one Award Resolution to the full Board for 13 timber pile repairs on two bridges. He also shared that at the meeting two citizens spoke reiterating their comments and concerns about the driving conditions of Plank Road, specifically between Moose Range Road and just east of Lukens Road. They expressed their gratitude to Mr. Schwartz for exercising his engineering judgement to extend the current no passing zone through the Gerry Lane and Lukens Road intersections. Concerns still remain with the current speed limit of the road and the number of crashes caused by passing at intersections and vehicles passing when vehicle(s) in front of them are making a turning movement that requires them to cross a lane of traffic.

Mr. Stoddard, Chairman of the Forest Preserve Operations Committee, shared the Committee forwarded a Resolution to the full Board of Commissioners to approve year-end budget transfers for the Fiscal Year ending December 31, 2019. He also shared that the County Forest Preserves are still open but the shelters, restroom, and the Natural Resource Education Center are closed. Forest preserve staff is working independently on spring maintenance projects at the various preserves.

Mr. Porterfield, Chairman of Health & Human Services Committee shared that the Committee discussed and decided on the Senior Services Tax Levy Allocations. Due to COVID-19, the Committee did not conduct their usual interviewed but the same agencies that applied this year are the ones that applied last year. The Committee reviewed the applications over a period of time and decided that they were able to make their decisions based on the applications. The Committee's main focus was to help provide extra funding to agencies that provide food and shelter to the elderly during this time. They ended up adding an extra \$5,000 from their reserves to better support some priority agencies. The Committee additionally received behavioral health

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updates from Mental Health Board Director Deanna Cada. Next month the Committee will be holding a Virtual Public Hearing on the Voluntary Action Center annual Resolutions for their pass-through grants.

Mrs. Emmer, Chair of the Economic Development Committee shared that DCEDC Executive Director Paul Borek brought forth for the Committee's consideration an Add-Territory Boundary Amendment to the DeKalb County Enterprise Zone for Project Buffalo/Syngenta. Mr. Borek shared that DCEDC has worked for nearly a year and a half with CBRE site selectors and consultants representing this project. Project Buffalo is Syngenta, a global Agribusiness company headquartered in Switzerland, with 28,000 employees in 90 countries around the world. The selected site is located on the northeast corner of Route 38 and Willrett Road, west of Kishwaukee College. The Committee also forwarded a Resolution to the full County Board to extend the deadline for filing applications for Senior Freeze Exemptions with the County Assessor's Office.

Mr. Bagby, Chairman of the Finance Committee, shared that the Committee reviewed a summary from an Actuarial Study that was conducted on the County's Tort & Liability Fund. No decisions were made at this time but will be in the future. Another future item that was presented was the potential of a Nursing Home Bond Parameters Ordinance. The Committee saw no issue with the County allowing the addition of loan options to employee's 457 Plans. Although, it may be too early to tell, Mr. Stefan provided some budget projections on how the COVID-19 pandemic may affect the County's Budget in FY 2020. At this point, his projections indicated a possible \$2 million budget shortfall. They also reviewed a proposed Resolution to fund the Courthouse Expansion Project but decided to defer any decision on that until the August Committee Meeting. The main topic of the evening and the action item that the Committee forwarded to the full County Board was an Ordinance in relation to waiving interest on the first installment of property taxes for Tax Year 2019 (payable 2020). The Ordinance would approve that the penalty interest shall be waived for the first installment of property taxes due June 5, 2020, for the 2019 taxable year (payable 2020) for those who pay the first installment of their property taxes owed on or before September 3, 2020 with the condition that property owners seeking this waiver of interest penalties must complete a form that contains the specific language approved by the Committee attesting to current or potential financial need for this waiver and that this form must be submitted with any payment made after June 5, 2020.

County Administrator's Report

County Administrator Gary Hanson shared that one of the things he is currently trying to sort through is what things does the County have to do to reopen safely. There are certainly a lot of complicated issues with that. Some offices, practicing social distancing will be easy but others won't be so much because all of the employees share a common open area. He also expects that once they open, some employees will still not feel comfortable coming to work and what their options may be to accommodate those individuals. He anticipates that everyone will be under the limitation of ten or less people that can be in a gathering situation so Zoom Virtual Meetings will continue up until the Board's Summer Recess and they will evaluate how to continue at the end of July.

The Nursing Home has done an extremely good job of not allowing the COVID-19 virus into the building so far. Expansion construction is continuing which adds some additional challenges but

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the workers have been taking the same precautions as the Nursing Home employees. The financing for the Nursing Home Expansion is continuing but the bond market is currently volatile.

The Courthouse Expansion funding has been put on hold until August but they are using this time to finish up all of the plans and get all of the code reviews done so when they can go out for bid, everything will be ready.

In early April, there was a hail storm on the north side of Sycamore. The storage building that the County purchased from the City of Sycamore now has quite a bit of hail damage on the roof. One estimate came in at \$28,000 worth of damage. The building is insured but there is a \$10,000 deductible. The not as good news is there were four Sheriff's squad cars damaged as well and there are no insurance on those vehicles.

Mr. Hanson lastly announced that there will be a Virtual Mental Health Forum being held tomorrow, May 14th at 7:15 p.m. It is being let by Chairman Pietrowski and State Representative Keicher.

BRAINSTORMING SESSION

Chairman Pietrowski led the Committee in a brainstorming session. His goal was to get a sense if any Board Members have and ideas on programing, partnerships, or any type of collaborations that maybe haven't been happening yet to assist the residents of DeKalb County during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Board Members and City of DeKalb Mayor Jerry Smith had about a 30 minute brainstorming session. No specific programs or partnerships were identified but the idea of collaboration and communication were a key component of the conversations. Board Members expressed their concern with the lack of testing in the area. Others expressed their discontent with individuals not being able to participate physically in religious gatherings. Food for children and domestic violence safety were also areas of concerns expressed.

Ms. Leifheit reminded that the County has many excellent social service agencies that are helping citizens in many situations. She did not see what they were being asked to do as a function of County Board Members but what they can do is help communicate information to the public about what local social services agencies are out there and how they can help citizens.

Mr. Bagby noted that there are many service organizations in the County such as Rotary and Kiwanis that are willing and ready to help the community in any ways possible.

ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Mr. Whelan, seconded by Mr. Luebke and it was carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 p.m.

Chairman Mark Pietrowski

Tasha Sims, Recording Secretary

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