

DEKALB COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

(June 25, 2020)

The DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) held a virtual meeting on June 25, 2020 at 6:30 p.m., via Zoom. In attendance were Commission Members: Dan Olson, Alyssa Seguss, Russell Kula, Frank Altmaier, Steve Devlieger, Martha May, Becky Morphey, Brian Gregory, and Steve Faivre. Also, in attendance were: Jack Sommese,; Pete Stefan, DeKalb County Finance Director; and, County Staff members: Derek Hiland, Jolene Willis, and Marcellus Anderson.

- 1. Roll Call** – Ms. Aldis, Ms. Jergens, Mr. Redden, Ms. Wilson, and Ms. Swenson were not in attendance.

Mr. Hiland noted that the Commission Chair, Ms. Aldis, was on vacation and that the Vice-Chair, Mr. Fisher, was no longer on the Commission. He noted that the Commission did have a quorum and asked for a nomination for someone to act as Chair Pro-Tem for the meeting.

Ms. Morphey moved to nominate Mr. Gregory to act as Chair Pro-Tem of the meeting, seconded by Mr. Olson. Mr. Gregory accepted the nomination, and the motion was carried unanimously.

- 2. Approval of Agenda**

Mr. Faivre moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Olson. A roll call vote was held, and the motion carried unanimously.

- 3. Approval of Minutes**

Ms. May moved to approve the minutes of the January 30, 2020 meeting, seconded by Mr. Devlieger. A roll call vote was held, and the motion carried with eight (8) voting yes, zero (0) voting no, and one (1) abstention (Ms. Seguss).

- 4. Public Comments**

None.

- 5. Small Business Development Initiatives through Covid-19**

Mr. Gregory introduced Jack Sommese, D.B.A., Business advisor for the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Waubensee Community College. Mr. Sommese noted that the SBDC helps businesses start, thrive, and survive. He informed the Committee that much of their recent efforts during the Covid-19 crisis focused on “talking people of the ledge”, talking to them about financing and the need for effective communication between them and their employees, customers, suppliers, etc. Mr. Sommese

talked in detail about the kinds of services the SBDC offers to businesses, and gave examples of what had they had been doing during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ms. May inquired whether owning a craft store would count as a small business. Mr. Sommese responded that it does, elaborating that all businesses are basically the same, dealing with many of the same issues and concerns

Mr. Altmaier inquired about the best way to contact him. Mr. Sommese noted that Ms. Willis would be the best source for his contact information. He also noted that if anyone wants him to contact someone, he would do so within 24-hours.

Mr. Sommese explained that that it costs the clients nothing to get help from the SBDC, because they are paid through the State of Illinois Small Business Administration, Waubensee Community College, and Kishwaukee Community College. He also noted that other entities had donated resources to run specific workshops for them.

Ms. Willis reported that Mr. Sommese had been a huge benefit, describing how easy he had been to work with, and what a great resource he, and the SBDC, were. Mr. Sommese talked more about what the SBDC had to offer business owners.

Mr. Sommese finished by talking about the efforts by the SBDC to help small businesses get established and helping them through the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis.

6. Covid-19 updates

a. Community Impacts

The Committee began discussing the impacts of Covid-19, some of the challenges that have arisen, and how they were dealing with Phase 3 and Phase 4. Mr. Hiland noted that the one of things that is done well in DeKalb County is that they (local communities) learn from each other, contacting each other for advice and help. He noted that the pandemic has brought about a change in how the communities all operate. He then asked the members to describe what has worked for them and their communities.

Ms. Willis reported that she was involved with County Board Chairman Mark Pietrowski to get the local mayors together to write a letter to the Governor's office in May to fight for their communities and make sure their voice was heard down in Springfield and Chicago, and described the amount to work and effort that went into organizing it. She noted that they found that all of them wanted the same things, to have their communities open with the safety guidelines, but to not be left behind or ignored. She noted that she wanted to thank all of the communities, their leadership, for participating and making it happen. She also reported on the difficulties Sandwich and Maple Park had in getting opened, and talked about the efforts made to help them out. Ms. Willis wanted the members to know all about the behind the scenes actions taken by the local leadership to fight for their communities and help us all transition through the

Covid-19 crisis. Mr. Gregory noted that it is hard to make all efforts “all inclusive”, and talked about some of the challenges they (the communities leaders) had in getting the letter together, and talked about the need to be as inclusive as possible and about the lessons that have been learned in the processe.

Mr. Gregory reported that Sycamore had suspended a façade program they had, and re-allocated that money into a project with Upstaging, which is a company providing lighting for concerts and events across America, who had remade themselves during the Covid-19 crisis to make safety shield and safety masks. The City worked with them to provide free safety screens to local businesses. He noted that in response to the issues local restaurants had with the outdoor dining allowed in Phase 3, and described how the City closed a public parking lot and a section of Somonauk Road and set up these areas up with picnic tables and landscaping. He noted that as our region moves into Phase 4, things will change the dynamic dramatically.

Mr. Olson reported that DeKalb had suspended the hotel, bar, and restaurant taxes until the end of the year. He talked about the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on the City’s budget, and steps, such as a hiring freeze and budget cuts, they were taking to deal with the impacts. He also noted that they had suspended water shutoffs, and were working with people on payment plans. Mr. Olson noted that the City was temporarily allowing a lot of the restaurants to switch to a modified pick-up/drive-up, and to put seats out in their parking lots and on sidewalks.

Ms. May inquired what other communities have done about delaying water or utility bills. Mr. Olson further elaborated on how DeKalb was handling the water bills and shutoffs, and Ms. Seguss and Mr. Devlieger responded that Genoa and Kirkland, respectively, were doing the same thing.

Mr. Devlieger noted that Kirkland did not have as many issues as the larger communities. He did report that they had looked into reducing some of their liquor license fees, and had allowed some of the restaurants additional outdoor seating, which normally would not have been allowed to do so. He also noted that the community really pushed the idea of supporting local businesses. Mr. Olson added that both DeKalb and Sycamore had also put a lot of effort into pushing the idea of supporting local businesses.

Mr. Gregory reported that Sycamore had generally heard a lot of cautious optimism from their businesses, and inquired whether other communities had heard the same thing. Mr. Olson responded that DeKalb had been hearing generally the same thing, but note that while some businesses have done ok to well, some may not reopen.

Mr. Gregory inquired whether other communities were seeing the March sales tax numbers come in, and whether they were roughly where they thought they would be. Mr. Stefan responded that the County had initially predicted approximately a 15% drop in sales tax for the year in total, but did note that their calculations were complicated by the reduction in the airline fuel tax. He noted that they were doing pretty good, all things considered. Mr. Gregory reported that Sycamore was down about 16%, and they were expecting April and May to be about twice that. He noted that car dealers are one of Sycamore’s big revenue producers, and talked about how they have been struggling.

Ms. Seguss reported that Genoa has done most of the things mentioned already, such as putting off water shutoffs and working out payment plans. She noted however that the City also had a revolving loan program, and had offered to put some of those loans in forbearance to help out the local businesses.

Mr. Altmaier reported that Kingston had taken actions similar to everyone else. He noted that they did not have a lot of businesses, and talked about steps the Village had taken to help.

b. DCEO Programs

Mr. Hiland described a program that the City of Macomb had done, where the City gave a partial rebate on the water bill of people had a series of receipts showing that they were supporting local small businesses. He noted that he had sent information to the local mayors and some city managers.

Ms. Willis noted that several of the communities looked at the Downtown Stabilization Program, and that Sycamore and DeKalb had applicants. She asked for their feedback on how its been going, as she had heard that there was a backlog in the program. Mr. Gregory responded that Sycamore had five applications, but had not heard anything. He added that when they had called DCEO, they were told not to call and they would be informed when a determination was made.

Ms. Willis noted DCEO was rolling out the Rebuild Illinois fast-track, but did not know if any of the communities submitted for that. Ms. May inquired whether the deadline had passed for the program, and Ms. Willis responded that it had. Ms. May commented that she had been told that most of the money was going to Cook County would be getting most of the money, with the rest of the State getting only a little. Ms. Willis responded that she did not know, but that the plans were meant to be statewide.

7. Census 2020 Update

Ms. Willis reported that she had been busy driving around the County visiting the local communities. She noted that the they have been working hard to get their grant spent down, but explained that the Covid-19 crisis had wreaked havoc with all of their plans to do outreach for the census. She reported that working with the DeKalb County Community Gardens, they acquired insulated tote bags that could be distributed in conjunction with all the food drives around the County. She explained how the bags had been locally sourced. She noted that they have done two runs of postcards around the County encouraging people to complete the census. She reported that the bags have been well received and were being used by a variety of people and groups around the County, such as: Libraries, schools, churches, senior centers, farmers markets, food pantries, etc. She noted that bags have a Call to Action card that goes with them, with the website. She noted that she needed to have it all distributed by the end of the month, per the grant. Ms. Willis noted that the count had been extended to the end of October, and the enumerators will be going out in August. She talked about the advantages of completing the census online. She also noted that the County website was posting a bar chart showing what the response rate to the census was for the various communities, and that it compared the current numbers to the numbers from the 2010 census.

Ms. May inquired as the current count for the Lee. Ms. Willis responded that Lee was 58.7%, the lowest in the County. Ms. May reported that at their last Board she had talked about the census and her fellow Board members told her that, sadly, the responses they were getting that people just weren't interested, even when the benefits were explained to them.

Ms. Willis reported that six communities had surpassed their 2010 numbers, but that those communities should not get complacent, and that we need to get as many as possible. She noted that in the last census, the County had 71.1% responded, and that currently, the County was at 70.9%. She elaborated on all of the things impacted by the census numbers, and the importance of getting an accurate count.

Ms. Seguss asked, of those communities performing well in the counts, was there something that they were utilizing in particular to help promote the census. She noted that Genoa had been using social media and were using the promotional items, but had noticed that their response rate hadn't been increasing by much. Mr. Willis responded that part of the problem is that the market has been saturated and that everyone was worn out from everything. She noted that they are hoping that the tote bags will be a new conversation starter, along with several other promotional items. She noted that the pantries had really been doing a great job getting the word out, especially among the hard to count populations.

8. Municipal Development Permits / Projects / Challenges / Champions

Mr. Olson (DeKalb) reported that Project Ventus. The annexation and zoning plans were approved by the City Council on April 27th for an over 500-acre site on the south side of Gurler Road, and that the first building would be around million square feet. He added that the company would be announced within the next two weeks. He that they had been planned a ground breaking with the Governor and local leaders, but with the Covid-19 crisis, they will instead have a virtual announcement and video. He also noted that part of Crego Road was vacated as part of the project. Mr. Olson noted that a candy company was also constructing a distribution center and packing center south of the Tollway. He noted construction would soon be starting on Agora Tower, the new multiuse building was being constructed by John Pappas at North 4th Street and Locus, and that it would have 94 apartment units and some commercial units. He noted that the City had approved Isaac Suites, also being built by Mr. Pappas at the corner of Oakland Drive and Sycamore Road, adding that the building will be four stories and will offer 59 short-term rental dwelling units. He noted that the former Appleby's had been demolished and that a new Raising Cain restaurant was to be built there. Mr. Olson reported that the City had passed new signage regulations in March, noting that they would now allow address digital display signs. He reported that City Hall had moved downtown to the former Nehring Building on June 5th. He noted that the City Council and Planning & Zoning meetings were now being held at the City Library, and were being broadcast on cable and streamed live. Mr. Olson noted that the City Council had held some forums on the protests that had been held recently, with discussion on how best to address them.

Mr. Altmaier (Kingston) reported that they had hired a company to handle building permits and code enforcement for them. He noted that as a result, they needed to go through and update their ordinances

regulating their permit fees, zoning reviews, etc. He also reported that the record rains that had occurred had caused them big problems. He noted that some streets and residential properties were covered in stormwater runoff, and there had been two consecutive occurrences of this. He noted that they were looking for funds and solutions for their stormwater management efforts.

Mr. Kula (Hinckley) reported that Hinckley was pretty slow. He noted that, due to the Covid-19 crisis, they had postponed the "60520" event scheduled for June 5th to next year. He noted that he had just learned that a new business, the Midwest Sportsplex, providing instruction in hitting, pitching, and fielding, would be opening. He noted there was talk about building four more houses were being talked about for Royal Estates. He also noted that a couple of restaurants were staying closed due to the virus, and that two others had set up outdoor seating.

Ms. Morpheu (Somonauk) reported that the school solar project was just finishing up, and that groundwork on the second one had begun. She noted that they had a new building permit for a house. She also noted that all four of the local restaurants had stayed with carryout, but that they were holding their own.

Ms. May (Lee) reported that things were pretty much status quo. She noted that they had a couple of challenges, but she wasn't going to get into them at this time.

Mr. Devlieger (Kirkland) reported the several of the restaurants were doing well with the carryout, and that some were doing outdoor seating. He noted that one did close down, but that the owner had been planning to retire and sellout anyway. He noted that there were no new permits. He reported they also had issues with the rains that had come through, with the Big Dig project getting damaged and one of the retention ponds being torn out by the heavy rains. Their roads did get flooded, and they had a lot of clean up. He added that it also caused a blocked sewer pipe that they now have to remediate. He noted that they had a company had shown interest in possible locating there.

Ms. Seguss (Genoa) reported that they have had an influx of residential building permits, with permits being up about 50% since that time last year, with two larger subdivisions, River Bend and Brian Grainger's retirement community, growing rather quickly. She noted that they were transitioning from using B&F to having an inhouse inspector. Ms. Seguss reported that a new restaurant was coming to the downtown. She reported that another challenge was that they were getting a huge influx of food trucks, noting that they were just beginning to permit them, and were having to keep track of who has permits, where they are parking, traffic, etc. She finished by informing the Commission that Genoa had received an application for a façade grant.

Mr. Hiland (DeKalb County) reported that a few of the solar gardens which were selected for the State program should be starting construction in the next thirty days, while a some of those not chosen in the first round have are coming forward to renew their special use permits. He explained why the County had set sunset clauses on the permits. Mr. Hiland informed the Commission on the previous night, June 24th, the DeKalb County Planning and Zoning Committee had considered the Aurora Sportsmen's Club (ASC)

Special Use Permit amendment, elaborating on the changes that ASC were seeking. Mr. Hiland noted that permits were up this year compared to last year. Ms. Willis provided an update on the GIS MOU which was launched earlier in the year, noting they had received the MOUs from Genoa, Sandwich, Kirkland, and Shabbona. She noted that the Covid-19 crisis had started just as things were getting underway, and advised that any communities that had planned to participate to please follow up with them.

Mr. Gregory (Sycamore) reported that they have a 55 and older subdivision being built by Grainger, and that the new Meijers would be opening soon, though he did not know the exact date yet.

9. Next Meeting Date

Mr. Hiland informed the Commission that the next meeting date would be August 27, 2020, but noted that whether it would be virtual or in person was undetermined as yet.

10. Adjournment

Mr. Olson moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Devlieger. A roll call vote was held, and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Aldis
Chair, DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission

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