

*Note: These minutes are not official until approved by the DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission at a subsequent meeting. Please refer to the meeting minutes when these minutes are approved to obtain any changes to these minutes.*

## **DEKALB COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES**

(August 26, 2021)

The DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) held a meeting on August 26, 2021 at 6:30 pm, in the DeKalb County Legislative Center, Gathertorium, in Sycamore, Illinois. In attendance were Commission Members: Mark Pietrowski, Dan Olson, Alyssa Seguss, Robert Pritchard, Frank Altmaier, Dan Chambers, Theresa Voitik, John Sauter, Steve Faivre, and Suzanne Fahnestock. Also, in attendance were: County Staff members: Jolene Willis and Marcellus Anderson; Brian Gregory, DeKalb County Administrator; and, Steve Kapitan.

**Roll Call** – Ms. Jergens, Mr. Latham, Ms. Wilson, Ms. Morphey, and Ms. Swenson were not in attendance.

### **Approval of Agenda**

*Mr. Pritchard moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Faivre, and the motion carried unanimously.*

### **Approval of Minutes for the June 10, 2021 Meeting**

*Ms. Seguss moved to approved the minutes of June 10, 2021, seconded by Mr. Sauter, and the motion carried unanimously.*

### **Public Comments**

Steve Kapitan noted that he had seen that there would be discussion about the Comprehensive Plan updates, and expressed his concern about the Peace Road bypass ending at Gurler Road, just south of the I-88 Tollway. He asked whether any discussion or consideration had been given to extending this bypass south to link up with State Route 23, expressing his concern that plans need to be made for such an extension prior to the area being totally closed off by the ongoing development in that area.

### **Member Appointments and Re-Appointments Update**

Mr. Olson reported that he had been informed that all of the member appointments and re-appointments were completed. However, noting that a number of new appointees were present, he asked that the members and staff all introduce themselves.

### **Zoning 101: Comprehensive Plan Updates**

Mr. Gregory noted that at the Commission's previous meeting the topic of comprehensive planning was proposed for the next Zoning 101 discussion. He then gave an overview of comprehensive plans (Comp Plans), talking about his experiences updating Sycamore's Comp Plans, noting that Sycamore updated its plan four times while he was there. He noted particular elements included in Comp Plans, such as the County's determination that most new development should occur in the communities instead of in the unincorporated areas. Mr. Gregory elaborated on the Comp Plans created in the County in the early 2000's. He noted that they should be looking at updating their Comp Plans to reflect changes they have and are occurring in their communities. He explained that a Comp Plan should describe the vision a community has for itself. To look at future growth and to think about how it wants to look in twenty or thirty years, and to develop the tools, like Future Land Use Plans, to get there. He talked about how Sycamore and Genoa developed a green belt between themselves. Mr. Gregory cautioned that these plans need to be fluid, so as not to tie their hands, noting the need for flexibility as time passes. He described how and why Sycamore changed an area they had slated as a "Big Box" commercial location near the middle school into a fifty-five and older residential development. Mr. Gregory then discussed the challenges that may be faced in updating Comp Plans, discussing the hearings involved and the need to reach out to everyone. He noted that Comp Plan updates do not always have to be comprehensive in nature, describing how in 2014, Sycamore, which liked its overall plan, focused their updates on particular sub-areas of the plan, such as downtown, branding, etc. Mr. Gregory reminded the members that communities can help each other by sharing their experiences, challenges, and solutions in creating and updating their Comp Plans, and that they should reach out to each other for help. He encouraged the members to have their communities look at their Comp Plans and consider updating them, if they had not already does so. Mr. Gregory suggested that the RPC should consider spearheading a countywide campaign to update local Comp Plans in a couple of years, noting that the County may be able to help with the process. He finished by describing an experience Sycamore had (successfully) defending its Comp Plan.

Mr. Pietrowski reported that Cortland had waited until after the mayoral election to start developing a new Comp Plan. He noted that the previous Comp Plan had been created in 2003, and talked about the direction the Town wanted to go in, the need for them to lay needed groundwork and plan for future growth. Mr. Pritchard inquired where they got their funding. Mr. Pietrowski responded that it had come from the \$20,000 DeKalb County Community Foundation (DCCF) grant the Town had received. He also noted that after the Comp Plan is completed, the Town is going to create a Strategic Plan inhouse.

Mr. Olson reported that DeKalb had also done a lot of sub-area plans, and went on describe some of them. He noted that the 2005 Comp Plan had included a lot of residential development, and how the new plan was changed to reflect the new population counts. He noted that the decreasing student body at Northern Illinois University and the Covid-19 pandemic had significant impacts on their numbers. Mr. Olson reported that they were in the early stages of starting a new Comp Plan. He then talked about how the existing Comp Plan had been utilized during various special

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use cases, highlighting its usefulness as a support document if a community has to go to court over a zoning decision.

Mr. Gregory talked about the importance of infrastructure in attracting commercial and industrial growth. Noting that if a community wants shovel-ready sites, they should consider using funds to fulfill the vision in their Comp Plans.

Mr. Olson elaborated on the history of the County's move to focus on agriculture.

Mr. Altmaier inquired whether given the age of many of the Comp Plans in the Villages, even if they are not looking to modify the plans, is it a good idea to re-adopt the plan, to re-affirm that it is still valid. Mr. Olson responded that it is a good idea to review the plan to reaffirm things you don't want to change and to make small updates to reflect any changes that might have occurred since the previous update of the plan. Mr. Gregory agreed with Mr. Olson, adding that there is always something that can be added to update the plan.

Mr. Altmaier inquired other communities' experiences with developers challenging their Comp Plans. Mr. Olson noted that challenges will happen, and talked about a recent challenge to Sycamore's Comp Plan, which they won. Mr. Gregory added that the County has an Economic Development Committee which is working to get more involved with all of the communities, and highlighted that staff members Jolene Wills and Derek Hiland would be good resources for the communities to reach out to for help.

Mr. Pritchard inquired whether there were any other sources of funding besides the DCCF. Mr. Gregory responded that he was unaware of any. Ms. Willis noted that the program was mostly focused on helping the communities with beautification and other "low hanging fruit" types of projects that they could identify and see, but still tried to shoot for some long-range goals too. Mr. Pritchard noted that Hinckley came up with some Action Plans, but really had no follow through. Mr. Gregory noted that for many communities having limited resources and staff was a challenge, but added that while a consultant may be needed to create the map, much of the rest can be done inhouse by the communities. He did caution that they should have their village attorney's review any controversial changes and make sure they followed all of the steps in their zoning ordinances. Ms. Willis informed the Commission that the County Information Management Office has been working on the maps with many of the villages and could possibly be a resource to create new future land use maps.

Ms. Willis reported that Waterman's Planning Commission has been looking over their Comp Plan this past spring and discussing it. She noted that they were waiting for the census data, before doing too much. She added that a prime future topic for the Commission to discuss would be "what census data means for you."

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Mr. Olson noted that there is nothing wrong with doing a soft update of a communities' Comp Plan.

Ms. Seguss inquired as to what it was like working with consultants on a Comp Plan. Mr. Gregory responded by elaborating on the typical process. He noted that it is good to talk with neighboring communities, the County, or your consultants, so that they can share their experience and possibly provide some guidance or maybe an outside viewpoint of the proposed changes.

Mr. Sauter shared that Sycamore just updated their Comp Plan. Noting his thoughts that the future land use map is a valuable tool, and highlighting ways it can be utilized. He added however that he did not utilize the rest of the Comp Plan as much.

Mr. Olson highlighted the importance of keeping Comp Plans simple and practical, describing how overly complicated plans often end up on shelves unused.

Mr. Pritchard noted that many Comp Plans have design chapters for homes and buildings and inquired as to the helpfulness of such chapters. Mr. Sauter responded that most plans follow the same basic format, talking about various informative aspects of the community and, but reiterated his feeling that the future land use map was the most important and valuable feature of the Comp Plan. He then talked more about Sycamore's development of their latest Comp Plan.

Mr. Olson pointed out that Comp Plans can have general goals too. Noting that while details can be included, the overall goals are also important.

Mr. Gregory noted that Comp Plans are a good tool to help focus developers in a way the community likes, providing guidance that is more than just staff's opinion, it's the community's opinion.

Mr. Pietrowski noted that when he came in as mayor, one of the issues brought to his attention was that for years Cortland's guidelines were set up to make it like Naperville. He felt that was inappropriate for Cortland and was working on trying to redefine Cortland to reflect its rural nature, and get it away from the sort of development standards you would see in a Naperville. While these standards may one day be appropriate, they were more of a hinderance for a small town like Cortland.

### **Municipal Development Permits / Projects / Challenges / Champions**

Mr. Pietrowski (Cortland) reported that Cortland had just voted to develop a fishing pond, which will also allow for kayaking, canoeing, and paddleboats. He noted that the pond already existed by the Cortland Elementary School, off of Route 38, backing onto a wooded area, and that they planned to build fishing piers and a boat launch. He added that they were also developing walking

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paths around it and hoped to have it all ready by launch by Labor Day weekend (or at least sometime in September). He noted that it was a relatively low-cost project and gives Cortland something they did not have, which was a recreational use. Mr. Pietrowski reported that the Town was trying to diversify and grow. Noting that they were updating their plans as they went along and laying out the groundwork for bigger projects in the future.

Mr. Sauter (Sycamore) reported that construction has been steady in the City, noting that a new commercial building was being built near Meijers and that a new industrial building expansion that would soon be breaking ground. He reported that the new Nicor call center being built on Roosevelt, near the DeKalb Clinic, would also be finished soon. He noted that as far as single-family permits, they were at twenty-seven for the year, which is comparable 2019 & 2020 numbers.

Mr. Altmaier (Kingston) reported that the Village was in ongoing contract negotiations with the City of Genoa over their shared waste treatment plant. He noted that the Village was dealing with stormwater problems in one of their subdivisions, and described how they have used their Comp Plan in addressing the issue. He noted that it was an expensive issue for them.

Mr. Olson (DeKalb) reported that at the end of July, DeKalb approved Project Barb, which is a 700,000 square foot warehouse & distribution center, between new Ferrara facility and Crego Road, noting that the company should be announced in the next few weeks. He reported that the City had approved the zoning for a new home on Franklin Street for Safe Passage. Mr. Olson reported that at its last council meeting, the City approved an agreement with Brad Manning Ford, which will keep them in the City. He noted that the Anne Glidden North Area approved buying the strip center at 100 Hillcrest, which is just east of Anne Glidden Road, and will use recovery funds to do so. He finished by noting that Corn Fest would be happening the weekend of August 27<sup>th</sup> through 29<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Seguss (Genoa) reported that they had received a preliminary plat for a 100-unit, phase 2 of an existing subdivision. She talked about the talks Genoa and Kingston were having about their 40-year old wastewater plant agreement. She noted that the City were working on its garbage contract. Mr. Seguss reported that the City had a lot of turnover, noting that they had some new council members, a new mayor, and a new public works director. She finished by talking about recent changes to their building permit process.

Mr. Pritchard (Hinckley) reported that the Village was reaching some agreements with the developer of an 84-lot subdivision, which had gone through series of bankruptcies over the year, and it would hopefully get going soon. He noted that they were having an issue with vacant buildings downtown, in particular, the price structure that the landlord wanted being a problem. He noted that the Village was looking at possibly installing a solar system on a 17-acre parcel adjacent to the village. He finished by reporting that two properties that had been vacant for a long time were now getting some positive attention.

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Mr. Faivre (DeKalb County) talked about three large, industrial-scale solar developments, roughly 6,000-acres in total area, that were going through the Special Use Permit process, noting the County was on its third set of hearings regarding these projects. He talked about the differences between the development of the County's solar ordinance vs its wind ordinance, and about the various benefits the County can expect to receive should these projects go through. Mr. Gregory talked about how such projects helped with property taxes, which in turn helps to attract new development to the County.

Mr. Chambers (Kirkland) reported that the Resource Bank project was coming along well, and talked about how the Village was working them to get it done. He noted that they had a couple of private 2.5-acre solar projects that might be happening. He noted that the Village had revised its language on the keeping of chickens in the Village. Mr. Chambers mentioned that the Water Reclamation District had proposed a project to the Village, but that the project would have cost around four million dollars to hook up to, so they choose to stick with their existing system.

Ms. Voitik (Lee) reported that by 2022 or 2023, Steward Creek Solar project will be in place, wrapping around the Lee County side of the Village and landlocking them in that direction. She then talked about some of the things she had been learning from that process, in particular the need for a list of best practices for such projects. She noted that Lee only have two tax paying businesses in the Village. Mr. Gregory inquired whether the Village could annex the solar project. Ms. Voitik responded that the same idea had occurred to her and that she would like to, but as she is still fairly new to the Village, she is still looking into it. She reported that the Village's biggest issue at the moment was that they are applying for a grant for an update to their water system. They are looking to add a new tower to their system (by buying an existing water tower from another community), updating the existing water infrastructure, and installing a new well. She reported that a big challenge for the Village is staffing, noting that they would be losing their Village Treasurer in September, and that the Village Clerk resigned the previous month. She asked the members to let them know if they were aware of anyone who might want to come work for them. Mr. Pietrowski noted that Cortland contracts out for their treasurer, and told her that he would be happy to share their information with her. Mr. Faivre inquired as to whatever happened with the proposed meat packing plant. She responded that nothing had been finalized as yet, but she was unaware of the exact status.

Ms. Fahnestock (Maple Park) reported that the Village had received their census totals, and that their population was around 1,433 people, which meant they had minimal growth since the last census. She reported that last year, the Village Board recognized that they needed to reorganize themselves and that the Village had a lot of fixing to do. So, they approved a Capital Improvement Plan for the next eight years as part of their Maintenance Plan. She noted that they took all of their projects and prioritized them. Some of the key items were: water & water treatment facility; street repair; and, their TIF district. She reported that they were hoping to break ground for a second

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water tower this year. Ms. Fahnestock noted that for their wastewater treatment plant, while the growth was minimal, they still want to prepare for future growth, being prepared to add to the existing plant, or possibly build a new one. She noted that they were looking at acquiring a neighboring property were such expansion could occur. She finished by highlighting the Village's desire to coordinate their goals and priorities to accomplish more. Mr. Pietrowski informed Ms. Fahnestock that Cortland would love to talk to them about some ideas they had regarding their water and sewer.

Ms. Willis reminded the members that IDOT had released their Safe Routes to Schools grant program, and that the due date is September 30<sup>th</sup>. She noted that it was a great opportunity to upgrade sidewalks, crosswalks, etc. She also reminded the Commission that the free-trial offer of the County's GIS program was still available. Ms. Willis mentioned that after talking with some of the communities, the idea that more training should be considered. She noted that a planning Commissioner training was done several years ago with Ogle County, and that another one could be arranged through the American Planning Association (APA). She added that she would be sending out a survey to the members to see if there is any interest having these trainings, adding that the trainings would be done virtually, and the cost would be nominal. Ms. Willis noted that the census information had started to filter out.

### **Next Meeting Date**

The Commission discussed the remaining possible meeting dates for the rest of the year. It was decided that Ms. Willis would be sending out an email pole to the members to determine whether the Commission's last two meetings would occur on October 14<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> and December 2<sup>nd</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup>.

### **Adjournment**

*Ms. Seguss moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Chambers, and the motion carried unanimously.*

Respectfully submitted,

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Dan Olson  
Chair, DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission

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