

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
(March 31, 2022)

The DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) held a meeting on March 31, 2022 at 6:30 pm, in the DeKalb County Legislative Center, Gathertorium, in Sycamore, Illinois. In attendance were Commission Members: Dan Olson, Janice Melton (alternate), Robert Pritchard, Frank Altmaier, Dan Chambers, Martha May (alternate), Becky Morphey, John Sauter, John Ecker, and Steve Faivre. Also, in attendance were: County Staff members: Derek Hiland, Jolene Willis, and Marcellus Anderson.

Roll Call – Mr. Pietrowski, Ms. Jergens, Mr. Latham, Ms. Wilson, and Ms. Fahnestock were not in attendance.

Approval of Agenda

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

Approval of Minutes for the October 21, 2021 Meeting

Mr. Sauter moved to approved the minutes of October 21, 2021, seconded by Mr. Faivre, and the motion carried unanimously.

Public Comments

None

Election of Vice Chair

Mr. Hiland reported that Brian Gregory (Sycamore) had been serving as Vice Chair of the Commission. He noted that Mr. Gregory was no longer with the City of Sycamore and no longer serving on the Commission; thus, a new Vice Chair needed to be elected to complete his term, which runs through the fall of this year. He then described the role of the Vice Chair, and asked for nominations for the position. Mr. Hiland reminded the members that the RPC representative did not have to be an elected or appointed official.

Mr. Olson nominated Mr. Sauter for Vice Chair, seconded by Mr. Faivre. Mr. Sauter accepted the nomination, and the motion carried unanimously.

Member Re-Appointment Status

Mr. Hiland reported that the final RPC member appointment had been made at the March County Board meeting. He noted that an updated list of the Commission members would be sent out to the members. Mr. Hiland reminded the members that the list was a great networking tool for them to use.

Building Services / Plan Review and Code Compliance Processes Countywide

Mr. Hiland noted that this topic had been brought forth when a member had inquired whether he was aware of any individuals who worked for multiple communities as a building official. To which Mr. Hiland responded that the only such situation he knew of offhand was that Cortland and Maple Park used the same building inspector. From this, he considered whether this might be an issue worth exploring, as a way to provide better services to our populations. He asked if the communities could share their experiences using the same individuals or firms.

Mr. Olson noted that it is an interesting concept. He suggested taking a survey of the communities to see who or what everyone uses, so that they could compare notes.

Mr. Hiland agreed with this idea, and started by noting that some positions would be easier than others to share. He noted that probably the easiest to share would be a plumbing inspector, and talked about the reasons why he felt that was the case. He then related that the County has a Building Inspector, Steve Julseth, who can handle most of the smaller projects. He added that the County utilizes the State Plumbing Inspector for plumbing issues, and B&F Technical Service (B&F) for more specialized inspections, with Mr. Julseth tracking all of them. Mr. Hiland also reported that Mr. Anderson handles setback inspections.

Ms. Morphey reported that Somonauk has a part-time building inspector, who is also qualified to as a plumbing inspector. She noted that he also worked part-time in Earlville and fulltime in Oswego. She reported that they were fortunate in that he lives in the Village, and is able to cover them very well. She noted he was very experienced, and that he also did their code work too. Ms. Morphey added that she handles zoning and setback for the Village.

Mr. Hiland noted that Cortland and Maple Park use Lou Larson for building inspections, who was the former building inspector for DeKalb, and that he had also worked for Arlington Heights too. He added that Cortland occasionally uses Dave Reynolds, who had worked as a structural inspector for DeKalb before moving on to work fulltime for Oak Brook.

Mr. Chambers reported that Kirkland uses B&F, adding that the Village doesn't have much happening, so it works well for them. He noted that the Village had bad experiences with the firm they had used previous to B&F. He added that their Zoning Board handles zoning matters. He noted that the Village has a link to B&F on their website, and that they have been responsive and available. Mr. Hiland noted that one advantage of a firm like B&F is the ability of such services

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to “scale up” if needed, whereas an individual might not be able to. However, he did not that the main con to such a service is that they are not always readily available as sometimes is needed. Ms. Morphey also noted that cost can be an issue.

Ms. Melton reported that Genoa was currently using a local resident, who was good and on call. She noted that Genoa has used both firms and individuals in the past, with up and down experiences. She added that they supplement the local guy if needed, and that Alyssa Seguss handles their zoning.

Mr. Ecker reported that Waterman also uses B&F, noting that they were better than the previous firm they had been using. He noted that Waterman has a Zoning Board, and that a board member handles zoning code. He did add that B&F had caught some zoning issues, on a job specific basis.

Mr. Olson reported that DeKalb had a Chief Building Official, a fulltime building inspector, a permit coordinator, and a plumbing inspector. These individuals also do simple zoning checks, with himself handling more complex issues. He noted that they have had experience with consultants. He reported that the main issues they had with them were: not always being available when needed; the expense of using them; the time it can take to get plan reviews back was an issue; and, that they had no local flavor/sensibility, being very black & white in their interpretation of the regulations. He did add that such firms were very good on expertise. Mr. Olson commented that he felt having on-staff people is the best option if possible.

Mr. Sauter reported that Sycamore had two fulltime inspectors, who handled everything. He added that one of the inspectors was a licensed plumber and the other a veteran electrician, and that he was acted as the zoning officer and handled a lot of the structural and final inspections. Mr. Sauter reported that he had approached DeKalb about having a reciprocity agreement with them for plumbing and electrical inspections, to cover those times when a particular inspector was out sick, on vacation, or otherwise unavailable. He noted that they were still talking about it, and if they decide to do it, they will put together an intergovernmental agreement addressing it. He added that a countywide arrangement along these lines would be a good idea.

Ms. May reported that Lee hired B&F about a year ago, and that it has been an interesting experience. She then detailed their experiences with them, in particular in regards to compliance violations they had sent out. She noted that they have a zoning board, but that they have a hard time getting enough people to serve on it.

Mr. Pritchard reported that Hinckley also uses B&F, but that their experience has been frustrating. He then described some of the issues they have had with them. Mr. Sauter noted that B&F was experiencing quite a bit of turnover and exponential growth at the same time, which was led to issues. Mr. Chambers noted that their contact person with B&F had changed, but that they had no issues with them. Mr. Ecker also noted that they had no issues with them.

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Mr. Altmaier reported that Kingston had previously used a firm that they were dissatisfied with. He noted that he is familiar with B&F and has spoken with them. He added that their strength is also their weakness, that they are big, and can handle a lot, but lack the one-on-one feedback and quick response time. Mr. Altmaier noted that these issues are typical when a community has to outsource, and that having on-staff people is better, if possible. He commented that B&F is having personnel problems right now, but they are trying to work that out, but their people are overworked and stretched thin. He added that the Village uses them for code enforcement, and commented on the good and bad of using an outside firm. He agreed that sharing inspectors can sometimes work. He noted that building codes are straight forward, but everyone has their own version, which can cause problems for inspectors serving multiple communities.

Mr. Hiland asked those members in attendance to indicate whether, five years ago, if they used a different firm or service than the one they are using today. He then commented that he would be looking further into the idea of sharing inspectors. He then inquired as which building code series everyone was using. He noted that he would be exploring the idea further, and planned to come back to the Commission in the future with the idea once he had worked it all out. He also commented that he would reach out to B&F to see what other opportunities may be there to address these issues.

Mr. Pritchard inquired about code enforcement in other communities, noting that finding someone who is consistent and who follows up is hard. Mr. Olson noted that fulltime staff is best, and using a consultant is problematic. He added that there seem to be demand for a localized agency, government or private, for code enforcement and building inspection. Mr. Hiland responded that the real challenge is the need for staff, in particular, the right staff to do it. They need to have the right people skills, education, knowledge of why the codes are important. And just as importantly, the community needs to back their enforcer. He finished by noting that there is no easy solution.

The Commission then had a discussion about adjudication hearings, describing some of the incidents the various communities had dealt with. Mr. Altmaier commented that home rule communities (such as DeKalb) have more options than non-home rule communities. He noted that collection agencies typically will not work for one town, as it is too small - not enough business for them, but pondered whether if the communities all worked together, one might be willing to work for them as group. He commented that he had been told by others in the industry that code enforcers are hard to find. He then elaborated on the best ways to go about using a firm like B&F in the adjudication hearings and for code enforcement. Mr. Altmaier commented that he had developed a fair bit of experience in this area and offered to talk to others about it.

Mr. Sauter commented that their code enforcer used to work out of the Sycamore Police Department, which he felt was much more affective. Noting that having the code enforcer in a police uniform was very effective.

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One County Initiative

Mr. Hiland informed the Commission that the County was starting its One County Initiative. He informed the Commission that it is a three-tiered approach to how the County is moving forward with local communities, an internal component, and external component, and a countywide component. He provided a history of how the Initiative came about and why. He noted that internally, the County is very spread out and divided up, with each department acting independently. The Initiative aims to help the various departments understand each other better by having members of each department visit with other departments and spending at least a couple of hours each quarter learning what they do. The external component focuses on the County trying to provide additional resources to local communities, and reminding them that County staff is a resource available to all of the local communities. Noting that the County, as a whole, rises and falls together, and that by the local communities working together and with the County, we all benefit. For the third component of the Initiative, the County wants to adopt/embrace/support something to give back to the community, ideally every month. He then described the current effort which involved donations to the County Home.

Mr. Hiland informed the Commission that the DeKalb County History Center has a new exhibit, The History of DeKalb County in 100 Items. He noted that some of the items are located in the local communities, and focus on items significant to DeKalb County and its communities.

Mr. Hiland commented that he hoped that the Commission will be able to get back to having the meeting travel between the various communities again.

Mr. Ecker noted that the infrastructure bill had been passed and inquired whether the County had seen anything on that. Mr. Hiland talked about a grant that the County was giving to each of the Communities of \$100,000.00 each. He noted that he had been out getting in contact with those villages he had not heard from yet.

Municipal Development Permits / Projects / Challenges / Champions

Mr. Sauter (Sycamore) reported that the new Starbucks near the Meijers would be opening soon. He also reported that two residential projects would be breaking ground in the spring. He commented that he had recently inspected a new warehouse addition for Nighthawk Video. He noted that they have up to six single-family permits this year so far.

Mr. Faivre (DeKalb County) reported that the biggest thing the County was currently dealing with was updating its solar energy system regulations. He noted that it was looking to be a contentious issue. He then talked about the community solar installations that were up and running.

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Ms. May (Lee) described a situation wherein the attorney for a property that the Village is trying to obtain for a water project will not answer the calls from the Village Attorney. She noted that the Village was making progress on a \$1.6 million loan and grant to put in a new well. She added that they needed a water tower, and that they have one on hold from Mendota. She also noted that the Village Engineer has retired and that they moved to a new firm out of Rockford. She then related the difficulties they have had in establishing a new well for the Village. Ms. May reported that the Village Mayor was resigning May. She also noted that the Village Clerk for Davis Junction was helping them out. She also noted that they would be losing their Village Treasurer in August, along with some trustees. She finished by describing some of the beautification things they have done in the Village.

Mr. Pritchard (Hinckley) reported that Hinckley had a new coffee house coming. He noted that they were negotiating for some land to put up a solar facility in the Village, and that they were looking at possibly creating a new recreational area. He reported that several new houses were being built. He added that they did not have a mayor either.

Mr. Altmaier (Kingston) reported that Kingston had treasurer and clerk positions that needed to be filled. He noted that they were working on resolving a stormwater issue in one of their neighborhoods. He reported that they might finally get the proposed bike path between Kingston and Genoa.

Ms. Morphey (Somonauk) reported that things were mostly quiet in Somonauk. She did note that a second solar garden was starting.

Mr. Chambers (Kirkland) reported that their public works supervisor was stepping down, and they needed to find a replacement. He noted that they were waiting on State approval for a cannabis dispensary. He noted that State Route 72 is to be resurfaced, and that they are hoping to pave the entire community at the same time. Mr. Chambers reported that they also had an increase in their sales tax on the next ballot.

Ms. Melton (Genoa) reported that City was also working on some roads. She noted that the City had received a \$100,000 grant, which they were hoping to use to add a lift station east of the City. She inquired whether anyone else had received the DNR report on the South Branch of the Kishwaukee River. She noted that it indicated that all the local areas were doing well. Ms. Melton reported that Genoa is now mostly surrounded by city owned woodland and prairie. She mentioned a hidden gem in the City, an 80-acre prairie and woodland project along the Kishwaukee River, starting at Citizen Park with a pedestrian bridge across the river.

Mr. Ecker (Waterman) reported that they were continuing to develop some of their parks. They are developing a children's garden, with the DeKalb County Community Gardens, which will be next to the splash pad installed last year. He noted that dugouts would be going in next to the ball

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fields, and the soccer fields would be going in. Mr. Ecker reported that three model homes were close to finished in the Greenridge Subdivision (Ryan Homes), and would be opening soon. He noted that the Village also needed a treasurer.

Mr. Olson (DeKalb) started by thanking the County for arranging the Planning and Zoning Commission training in December, noting that several of their Commission members found it useful. He reported that the site for the John Pappas project, Executive Suites, on Barber Green Road had been cleared. It will have sixty-one one-bedroom pre-furnished units. He noted that the City had a couple of approved sites for a cannabis dispensary, and that they had amended their regulations to ease up on the setbacks and to add it as a special use in the downtown district. Mr. Olson reported that a draft of the Comprehensive Plan would be going to the Commission for discussion. They hope that by the summer it will be approved.

Next Meeting Date

The Commission's next meeting date was proposed to be either June 16th or July 7th. Ms. Willis will be sending out an email survey of the members to see which date will work better.

Adjournment

Mr. Chambers moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Favre, and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Dan Olson
Chair, DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission

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