

**AD HOC OPEN SPACE STUDY SUB-COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
OCTOBER 21, 2004  
@ 7:00P.M.**

The Ad Hoc Open Space Study Sub-Committee met on Thursday, October 21, 2004 @ 7:00p.m. in the DeKalb County Administrative Building's Conference Room East. Chairman Jeffery Metzger called the meeting to order. Members present were John Acardo, Kevin Braden, Julia Fauci, Julia Fullerton, Terry Hannan, Gary Hanson and Joseph Wiegand. Members absent were David Baker, Michael Haines and Frank Van Buer. Others present were Rick Turner, Steve Kuhn, Greg Millburg and Doug Dashner.

**APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Moved by Mr. Wiegand, seconded by Mr. Acardo, and it was carried unanimously to approve the agenda.

**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF THE COMMITTEE**

Chairman Metzger welcomed everyone to the meeting and had the committee members introduce themselves to each other and the audience. Chairman Metzger explained that the committee was formed to explore the possibility of a bond referendum that would fund the preservation of open space for the future for the DeKalb County Forest Preserve. This committee expires in one year, you can choose to meet for 1 meeting or every month, whatever you decide, said Chairman Metzger.

**OVERVIEW OF FOREST PRESERVES BY MR. HANNAN, FOREST PRESERVE SUPERINTENDENT**

Mr. Hannan said that the Forest Preserves were formed through a state statute in the State of Illinois in the 1930's. Counties had the option to get "x" amount of signatures to put a measure on the ballot to establish a forest preserve district in their county. Not every county in the State has a forest preserve district. Most of them are located in the northern part of our county. The objective has been to preserve natural areas within counties, not all forests. There are wetland preservations, flood plain preservations, wooded areas, prairie restorations, etc. Their philosophy is that they like to keep 90% of their areas in a preserved natural state with 10% in picnic areas, hiking trails, fishing opportunities, educational facilities, etc. Our niche is: close to home, preservation, natural resources, education, preserve areas and restoration. We are trying to get native species back into the park, continued Mr. Hannan.

Mr. Hannan then explained the packet that he handed out to all the committee members present. He said that the forest preserve currently is the lowest taxing district in the county, which is about 1/3 of 1%. Another page covers the Mission Statement of the Neighbors for the Protection of Open Space, Clean Air and Water in the county. There is a page included that is a letter

from a constituent in support of the forest preserves in our county. The 4<sup>th</sup> page includes what the Forest Preserve District is looking at. Typically, there have been a lot of plans of this like the Regional Plan, Vision 2000 Plan, Forest Preserve Plan, as examples. The Forest Preserve is looking at land to buy that is adjacent to existing forest preserves, flood plain areas, and waterways, areas that might connect cities and schools to each other, places of business. In counties east of here they have looked at flood control issues and buying land, too. He continued by stating the County has been looking at areas that they would like to place into conservation areas, but we do not have enough money to buy the areas.

The next two sheets shows where they have been from 1941 to 1980 and then from 1981 to 2003 and how thru grants and donations they have been able to acquire wonderful sites throughout DeKalb County. DeKalb County is a wonderful network of parks, city parks, state parks, township parks and forest preserves. If we were not going to change, we already have a wonderful system of parks. However, with recent land use changes and forecasts of a lot more development coming this way, we need to look at where we are headed in the future, said Mr. Hannan.

Mr. Hannan also commented on a non-native invasive plant called garlic mustard brought in by settlers. They try to manage it with burns, which can be a challenge. Their goal is to return the areas to pre-settlement times.

Mr. Hannan then presented a slide show of the various forest preserves and bike paths throughout DeKalb County and some of the duties that they perform at the preserves.

Ms. Fullerton arrived at 7:30p.m.

#### **OPTION FOR A BOND REFERENDUM – MR. GARY HANSON**

Mr. Gary Hanson, DeKalb County Deputy County Administrator, handed out a sheet highlighting financing scenarios for the Open Space referendum. The first one discusses the proposal from the Citizens Group, the second one is to look at the costs of the \$10 million bond that they talked about and the third scenario is his own thoughts on the proposed referendum.

Mr. Hanson highlighted some background facts for the committee. DeKalb County has an Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) of \$1.6 billion for 2005. That is only important if we pass a tax referendum, he said. One cent of a tax levy raised \$160,000 in revenue. So for a \$200,000 home the tax rate costs the owner just under \$7 per year. Each \$1,000,000 of a bond issue requires about \$80,000 in an annual payment for 20 years if it was at 5 percent. When you do a bond issue it costs about \$40,000 to pay for legal and financial costs.

Mr. Hanson said that if the committee looked at the proposal from last month about a \$10 million referendum - it would take about \$800,000 a year (.5 cents added to the tax rate for 20 years for a home works \$200,000). This

would cost a homeowner about \$35 a year and for the owner of one-acre of farmland would pay 12 cents per acre per year, or \$20 for 160 acres.

Mr. Hanson then explained the second part of the citizen's group proposal that discusses the costs. He said, like Mr. Hannan said, that if the forest preserve grows then you need to take care of it, you will need staff. So if you use \$160,000 or .1 cent added to the tax rate, the owner of a \$200,000 home would have to pay \$7 per year. Those two areas together would take two referendums to do that. It's dangerous if you pass one and not the other (one is for land acquisition and one is for an operating fund), he said.

Scenario #2, Mr. Hanson said, is to levy the operating rate by .6 cents, but not sell any bonds. You could then spill out the operating and land acquisition. The disadvantage is that you would not have a pool of money all at once. If you had a \$5 million land acquisition, this would generate \$800,000 a year in this scenario. However, over the same 20-year period you would have \$16 million for land acquisition instead of \$10 million because you are not paying interest costs.

Ms. Fauci said that she wanted to know the rate that the DeKalb land has been increasing for over a year? And how would it be judged against both of these scenarios, that is, if we are not going to keep pace with the cost of land..... Ms. Fauci said. Mr. Hanson said that our tax value increased this last year about 6½ %, it's outpacing inflation, but he didn't know if it was outpacing land costs. Mr. Millburg of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau said that he didn't think that land costs would have any affect on how it plays out when it comes to farmland. This is because you are talking about farmland assessments, not based on market values, it's based on productivity. The \$235 for cropland is at ten-year lows, said Mr. Millburg.

Ms. Fullerton asked if there have been any preliminary scouting done for what land is available now and what the costs would be? Mr. Hannan said that on page four of his handouts it covers what is available now and will be, around the county. The first part deals with willing sellers that have willed their land to the forest preserves. The other is to connect land throughout the county along the trails. Will that happen in the future, he doesn't know, but we also have to look at if there is money available to purchase certain areas too. There are other properties adjacent to forest preserves that have been available in the past and may be made available again in the future. In the statutes it states that part of the acquisition money can be used for maintenance and restoration of areas too.

Mr. Wiegand asked about the 180 acres, second line item, that is adjacent to donation, are these donations that have already occurred and the donating party has additional land? Mr. Hannan said yes.

Mr. Wiegand said that with regards to the Conservation Reserve Program, how many do we have in DeKalb County and are they going to be open spaces for my grandchildren to enjoy in the future or not? Mr. Hannan said probably not, they would be privately owned land. Mr. Wiegand, said but taxpayer

subsidized through original payments to establish this here. Do you have any idea how many acres we have in this county? Asked Mr. Weigand. Mr. Hannan, said no, but we can find it out for you. Mr. Wiegand said that he would like to see an inventory of open spaces at our education facilities including the university.

Ms. Fauci feels that the program is fantastic. She would like to have the committee discuss what are some of the goals, like public access. Chairman Metzger said that when he heard the presentation from the Citizen's Group, it was conveyed that we would need to preserve open space in general before it's taken. Chairman Metzger said then you are saying, to not only preserve the land but also to preserve land that can be used, not just to have open space? Ms. Fauci said correct.

Mr. Braden, said that based on comments that Mr. Hannan said earlier, let's say this committee and the county board decides to put a \$10 million referendum on the ballot, are you going to look at the voter and say, I want you to give us \$10 million to buy numerous parcels of land, but I'm not going to tell you where they are? Because I believe that it would be a no vote. Mr. Hannan said that we have willing sellers and we have areas to buy. There is something in these bonds, we have to have so much of this spent within the first few years. Mr. Braden said that he could hear people in Sandwich say that they don't want to buy \$10 million worth of property in Fairdale.

Chairman Metzger said that maybe one of the options that this committee needs to determine is, what is the money going towards, and should the public have input for that much money involved.

Mr. Braden then asked if it would it be possible for someone to get us some numbers telling us the percent of forest preserve land in comparison to the total acreage of the county? Mr. Hannan said that for as far as other counties he doesn't have those with him. Chairman Metzger asked Mr. Hannan if he could get those numbers together for the next meeting in November. Mr. Hannan said yes. Mr. Hanson said that this leads us to a question that he hears often which is, what is the number of acreage that we should be looking for? Do we include state parks? What should our definition be?

Chairman Metzger asked Mr. Hannan, what have other counties done with regards to that question; do they have a plan? They've looked at their forest preserves only and set a target for "x" amount of money.

Ms. Fauci said that she would like to look at how much tourism does it bring in, like the star gazing event at one of the forest preserves here. There is also the flooding issue, which she feels is a big issue and that we should look at, especially at the southern end of the City of DeKalb where the river is coming in at full force after a heavy rain.

Chairman Metzger said that he feels that the committee needs to look at the priorities for the taxpayers. What is the timetable that we need to look at to

have a referendum on this issue? We may have another referendum for the jail and we need to see if it conflicts with this one.

Mr. Rick Turner, speaking on behalf of the Citizens Group, said that there was no way that they felt that a referendum could go on the ballot in 2005. They spoke with a non-for-profit organization from Naperville called the Conservation Foundation that were successful with referendums, that is, they did DuPage, Kendall and Kane. They pull all the bells and whistles out when you are trying to get a referendum passed. What they stressed was not on the open space issue, but also water quality, flooding, those issues that they have been faced with more than we have. They did an economic analysis on it and said, here's one way to deal with the problem with the number of roofs and blacktop that you have and then here's another one through preservation, open space and wetlands. Yes, it costs money, however, in the long run it will probably save you some money, as well as, provide you the aesthetic things that you observed on the slideshow. In order to do that we don't want to push this thing too quickly, so we are looking at targeting the Spring of 2006. Mr. Turner also reminded the committee that Mr. Hannan's numbers were pretty legitimate for capital basis but to remember that DeKalb County is at the bottom of the list for open space in counties in Northern Illinois.

Mr. Braden asked how much an organization like this would charge to do this analysis for DeKalb County? Mr. Turner said around \$5,000 to \$10,000. His group also asked the Naperville group if we could run polls through the NIU Public Opinion Lab? They told him no matter how you do it, you probably are going to get the same results depending on the type of questions that you ask. Mr. Turner also said that one of the things about polling is designing the referendum to meet the various issues that the county is raising that is what are the taxpayer's going to ask? We need to be able to ask these questions.

Mr. Wiegand asked if there would be anyone else from his Citizen's Group who will be coming before this committee to visit with us? Mr. Turner said yes that one of them would continue to come to the meetings.

Mr. Metzger briefly summarized some of the issues that were raised this evening by the committee that need to be answered for the next meeting. Those were: how do we want to define open space; if we are going to increase taxes to buy public land shouldn't the taxpayer know what land we are purchasing; what is the percentage of open space that we have in relation to other counties; we're looking for what acreage, what year, what dollar amount, what the economic development benefits for future open space would provide for the county; what our priorities are when it comes to tax dollars; what other funding mechanisms are available for preserving future open space; and determine as a committee, to allocate funds to do research on this issue and if so, how much are we willing to spend to investigate this.

Before adjourning, the committee discussed that their next meeting date will be either November 22 or November 23, 2004 @ 7:00p.m. Chairman Metzger will get back to all committee members about the confirmed date.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Mr. Braden, seconded by Ms. Fauci, and it was carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

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Chairman Jeffery Metzger

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Mary C. Supple, Secretary

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