

**PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
November 4, 2004**

The Public Policy Committee of the DeKalb County Board met on Thursday, November 4, 2004, at 6:30p.m. at the Legislative Center's Liberty Room. Chairman Ruth Anne Tobias called the meeting to order. Members present were Mr. Wiegand, Ms. Vary and Mr. Sands. Mr. Osborne and Ms. LaVigne were absent. Others present were Ray Bockman, Greg Millburg, Larry Anderson and Renee Messacar.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

Moved by Ms. Vary, seconded by Mr. Wiegand, and it was carried unanimously to approve the amended minutes from October 2004.

**APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Chairman Tobias asked to add one item on the agenda regarding the December Meeting Date. Moved by Mr. Wiegand, seconded by Ms. Vary, and it was carried unanimously to approve the amended agenda as presented.

**LEGISLATIVE AGENDA DISCUSSION**

Chairman Tobias reminded the committee that they were not going to do any more work on the legislative agenda until the new board is seated in early December. However, there is one item that needs to be added to their legislative issues list and that would be the resolution from the Highway Department last month that dealt with the County Engineer being allowed to issue overweight permits for divisible loads when appropriate. In order to have the county issue the permits there would need to be a change in the state law, said Mr. Bockman, and that is why they are requesting that it be included on our legislative agenda list.

**MOVING FORWARD ON THE INDUSTRIAL HEMP RESOLUTION**

Chairman Tobias asked Ms. Fauci if there was anything that the Public Policy Committee could do to help her with the industrial hemp issue. She said that Ms. Fauci wanted to speak to Mr. Chuck Hartke, the head of the Illinois Department of Agriculture, because he sponsored the last bill to the legislature for their consideration. She said any help with phone calls or emails that the committee could do would be greatly appreciated. Mr. Millburg of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau said whomever the committee contacted regarding the resolution then he would be happy to communicate with the Farm Bureau in that area. The committee discussed writing letters to certain individuals, trying to get

a broader community input. Mr. Wiegand suggested contacting the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation to see if they could hold a luncheon regarding this issue. Mr. Bockman said that he would be happy to contact them and try and set up a date.

### **BEGINNING DISCUSSION ON HOME RULE**

Chairman Tobias passed out a brochure on home rule from the Center for Governmental Studies and a statement on what other counties in some states are currently doing. She read a statement from Allegheny County in Pennsylvania, to the committee regarding home rule. It states that the “basic concept of home rule is relatively simple: the authority to act in local affairs is transferred from state law to a local charter, adopted, and as need b, amended, by the voters through the referendum. Home rule shifts much of the responsibility for local government from state legislature to the local county decision makers. A county that adopts a home rule charter has the ability to amend its governmental organization and powers to suit its needs. A home rule charter is, in essence, a local constitution.” (See sheet attached to these minutes.)

She noticed in Florida and Pennsylvania that they had several years of studying the process and asking themselves what would be needed to be changed if home rule would be implemented? They concluded that a county would need to take their time so that the process is well planned out.

Mr. Bockman, DeKalb County Administrator, said that the reality is to look at the current political situation on the county board more than the merits of home rule. We have a huge problem that we are facing right now and that is, “what are we going to do about overcrowding in the county jail and the needed improvements in the criminal justice system?” said Mr. Bockman. We just had the public safety sales tax fail for the third time, we do not have a plan, nor do we have the taxing authority to solve the problems based on any reasonable estimate of what it’s going to cost to provide additional jail space whether it’s here or elsewhere. We don’t have a solution either on hand or in the future, said Mr. Bockman. If he reads the local press correctly, we have half of the board that have stated publicly that they do not favor home rule. Even if you could get a 13<sup>th</sup> vote, do you really want to launch a home rule initiative on a 13 to 11 vote? Mr. Bockman questioned the committee. He also said to keep in mind that the county has another committee starting an open space referendum.

Mr. Bockman further stated that he feels that home rule is in the long-term interest of this community and that it would be a good thing. He thinks that the transferring of power from Springfield to the local government agency makes more sense to him. It doesn’t matter much, however, unless it makes sense to a majority of the community. These things have failed miserably whenever they have been put on the ballot. If it fails, what’s the next move that this board would take regarding the jail issue? Mr. Bockman asked.

Ms. Vary said that she feels that education is part of the problem. There is fear in the community about increased taxes, maverick municipalities, etc. If we had home rule then she feels the county would have more to say as to whether or not an area could stay farmland; what area could be developed, etc.

Mr. Sands asked Mr. Bockman if that was true? Mr. Bockman said that the county would have all kinds of power that you could exercise only in unincorporated areas.

Mr. Bockman suggested that the committee and the board review what the board would like to accomplish, like controlled growth as an example, and see if home rule would be the solution. Maybe the county would need to get the state statutes changed instead of going through the process of home rule, Mr. Bockman added.

The committee discussed having educational meetings on the home rule issue, hold classes for decision makers in municipalities and publicize it more in the newspapers. They also discussed possibly have meetings one or two times a year where the county invites the public to speak about their concerns about home rule and growth in the county. The county could possibly pay for these meetings and have the Regional Plan Commission host them.

#### **ANNUAL RESOLUTION FOR THE FIRST TIME HOMEBUYERS PROGRAM**

Mr. Bockman said that this is an annual housekeeping item that needs to be approved by the full board. This program is designed to help first time homebuyers overcome the most frequently mentioned obstacle to home ownership, the down payment, by giving them back 3% of the purchase price to apply to the down payment. Last year the program helped 18 homebuyers with \$2.3 million dollars.

Moved by Mr. Sands, seconded by Ms. Vary, and it was carried unanimously to forward the resolution to the full board for approval.

#### **INTRODUCTION OF "SISTER CITY" CONCEPT**

Chairman Tobias handed out a sheet regarding Sister City membership. She said that the program began in 1956 by President Eisenhower. It is not just for cities, it can be any local government unit that can have a sister city. It promotes cultural understanding and stimulates economic development, volunteer action, etc. Would this be something that this committee would like to look at? Chairman Tobias asked. Mr. Wiegand said that he felt it was a very good idea but that he would like to see the \$600.00 needed for membership fees, to be spent on the salary of another deputy officer for the Sheriff's Department. The committee did not take any action on the issue at this point in time.

**DECEMBER MEETING DATE**

The committee agreed to cancel their December meeting date.

Before adjourning Mr. Wiegand notified the committee that there is a group of people that meet in the northern part of DeKalb County and Ogle County that will be meeting on Thursday, November 18, 2004 @ 7:00p.m. at the Creston Booster Hall regarding the Rochelle Landfill issue. He was inviting the committee to attend if they wanted to.

**ADJOURNMENT**

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

Respectively submitted,

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Chairman Ruth Anne Tobias

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Mary C. Supple, Secretary  
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