

**AD HOC OPEN SPACE STUDY SUB-COMMITTEE
MINUTES
MARCH 28, 2005
@ 7:00P.M.**

The Ad Hoc Open Space Study Sub-Committee met on Monday, March 28, 2005 @ 7:00p.m. in the DeKalb County Administrative Building's Conference Room East. Chairman Ruth Anne Tobias called the meeting to order in Committee Chairman's absence, Jeff Metzger. Members present were Julia Fauci, Julia Fullerton, Terry Hannan, Kevin Braden, Michael Haines, Gary Hanson, John Acardo, Frank Van Buer and Joseph Wiegand. Members absent were Jeff Metzger and David Baker. Others present were Greg Millburg, Mr. Rolloff, Ms. Anita Turner, Mr. Rick Turner and Mr. John Dlabal.

County Board Chairman Tobias said that she was filling in temporarily to help the committee nominate a Chairman Pro Tem because Chairman Metzger was out ill and there was no vice-chairman who was appointed to this ad hoc committee.

NOMINATIONS FOR A CHAIRMAN PRO TEM

Moved by Mr. Haines, seconded by Mr. Van Buer, to nominate Ms. Julia Fauci for Chairman Pro Tem, and it was carried unanimously.

Moved by Mr. Haines, seconded by Mr. Hanson, and it was carried unanimously to close the nominations.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Moved by Mr. Wiegand, seconded by Ms. Fullerton, and it was carried unanimously to approve the amended minutes from January 2005.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

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

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

Chairman Pro Tem Julia Fauci asked the committee if they had any questions or comments that they would like to make this evening? Mr. Wiegand said that he enjoyed the two different viewpoints on how to provide public goods that were presented at the last meeting that the ad hoc committee held. He felt that the presentations that were given that evening were very balanced.

Ms. Fauci said that she felt that the first presentation was obviously as a guide as to what we would do if we pursued the referendum issue and recommended it to the full board. Where do we go from here?

Mr. Haines passed out a handout on the original committee's request that went before the Forest Preserve Committee last fall. This committee being formed is the result of that meeting. He said that in the handout, the second to the last page is a history of referenda in the State of Illinois. The last page of the handout is a mission statement of the citizens committee called the Neighbors for Open Space, Clean Air and Water, which was the same one that approached the Forest Preserve Committee last fall.

Mr. Haines asked Mr. Hannan how much money has been privately donated? Mr. Hannan said currently they have \$4000.00 in private donations with DeKalb County Community Foundation. Mr. Haines said that that would buy us a half an acre. Mr. Haines also said that he did check out the price on Wagner Farm in Glenview that Mr. Tillman spoke of and that the people in Glenview were in favor of the tax referendum to purchase. They purchased 18.6 acres for \$7.2 million dollars or \$387,097.00 dollars an acre. So even Mr. Tillman can find this appropriate at times for tax monies to be spent on open space.

Mr. Hanson asked if there is a goal that we should be looking at? Mr. Haines said that we should be looking for willing sellers to adjoining existing forest preserves, property along the Kishwaukee River, and other land with natural features. We are also looking for land that is in imminent development danger.

Mr. Hanson asked how many acres? Mr. Hannan said people who have approached the Forest Preserve District Office have about 500 acres for sale. Mr. Hanson said do we want to purchase 10,000 acres, 20,000 acres, what is our goal? Mr. Haines said that the immediate goal would be to purchase the land that these sellers have approached us about (the 500 acres) and protect the land that is in imminent development danger.

Mr. Haines also stated that when he compared DeKalb County to other counties regarding public and state park land and add them altogether, DeKalb County's public land equals about 1%. (Less than 1% of DeKalb County is in Forest Preserves.) Most comparable Illinois counties have between three and ten times more forest preserve land than DeKalb County has forest preserves and parks altogether, he said. He continued by stating that DeKalb County has the lowest forest preserve tax levy of any county in Northeastern Illinois.

Mr. Wiegand said that he was very concerned about compelling people to pay a tax that they may not be able to afford.

Mr. Wiegand said that as a donor to the DeKalb County Community Foundation General Fund, he is curious with the report on only having \$4,000 in the Land Acquisition Fund. Does Mr. Haines know of any exerted effort, campaign or program, indeed any committees that you or anyone else belongs to, who did actively canvas our county to raise more than \$4,000 for that fund? Asked Mr. Weigand.

Mr. Haines said not recently. Mr. Haines said that the referendum has the people giving themselves an opportunity to decide how to spend their money. By having a referendum, it is the people who are deciding how to spend their money, not us.

Mr. Hannan explained that many land acquisitions have been donated or sellers have sold at less than appraised value making a donation to the sale. Grants, donated dollars, donate land and volunteers have been a big part of acquiring, developing and restoring natural resources.

Mr. Wiegand said that he would agree with Mr. Haines that everyone pays the property tax directly; certainly tenants pay it indirectly within the price of their rent. We have many citizens in this county that live in properties that are not taxed. They get to vote on taxing their fellow citizens while avoiding those taxes. An example would be students living in university housing.

Ms. Fullerton said that one of her concerns would be that she would not want to have any eminent domain decisions made and that we would need to make that clear to the voters - that this is not our intent and that we need to set parameters and limitations.

Mr. Hanson said that that is our intent, but that you have no control over what any future board may want to do. We have to look at what context you are putting the money on the table and trust that people will act in the best interest of the community at the time.

Mr. Van Buer said that he thought that all we were going to say is - can we go to the public and ask them what they think about it? He said that we have seen how successful these referenda have been in other counties, which suggests to him that there is much more than the majority who want to have a say in this - this is where we are at. If we fail to recommend this to the board and then the board fails to recommend it out, it's telling the public that we are not giving them a chance to say how they feel about open spaces. Are we willing to let our citizens say what they would like to happen relative to this? If they say no then we've given them the chance to say no and if they say yes, then we move from there.

Mr. John Dlabal who was in the audience, said that when he sat on the county board over a twenty-year span, they voted three times to let the people vote on tax caps. As they went around the table during these three times, the board members voted no and said that our citizens aren't smart enough to do that. I appreciate your position and let the people make the decision.

Mr. Wiegand said that recently the County Board voted against putting a referendum on the countywide ballot that was from Lt. Governor Quinn. It was an income tax policy that would provide for a progressive income tax on higher income levels. The majority of the county board decided not to submit that question to the voters. He certainly was an advocate to allow the county's taxpayers and citizens to vote on property tax caps. He voted against asking

the citizens whether or not the majority of them would like to tax a minority of them at a higher rate and derive some benefit from that vote.

He also said that in legislative bodies, since we are not generally a referendum state, these questions are not submitted to the voters. Generally our legislative bodies make these decisions, occasionally our state legislature empowers our county, as a division of state government, to in turn, submit questions to the voters. That doesn't necessarily mean it's right or wise to submit all questions to the voters or to submit questions, that in our collective judgment, we might be able to determine, that's not a good policy to promote, and therefore, we will not send it on to the voters.

Mr. Haines said that the referendum that we are proposing this evening has been overwhelmingly supported throughout the country showing that Republicans, Democrats, Independents alike feel that this is valuable. Do you want to go on record, Mr. Weigand, that you would deny the voters an opportunity to make that decision for themselves? I wouldn't hesitate at all, said Mr. Weigand. Mr. Wiegand said that he would ask him that those questions did not happen independently, there was a tremendous amount of federal funding being supplied to the foundations and to the organizations that promote open space. Would you acknowledge that the open space movement has benefited from tremendous amount of millions and millions of dollars in federal funding? Mr. Haines said that DeKalb County has a history of being able to take the little amount of money that it has for acquisition and then get matching funds where it has doubled the taxpayer's investment. Do you want to go on record to deny the taxpayers the ability to vote either up or down on this issue? Mr. Weigand said that if he reads this meeting correctly, he will be going on record.

After a brief discussion, it was moved by Mr. Haines, seconded by Mr. Van Buer, to recommend the referendum regarding Land Acquisition for the Forest Preserve to be placed forward to the voters in Spring 2006, and to forward this recommendation to the Chairman of the County Board.

Mr. Wiegand said, I'm sorry but the motion is entirely inadequate without a price tag.

Some of the other concerns that the committee had with the motion is that it needed parameters set and limitations, like no eminent domain. Another concern was why is the location confidential? Ms. Fullerton said that she would like to see a cap put on the amount.

Mr. Hannan, said that other citizen groups that have worked on referendums have done surveys to determine what dollar amount people feel is appropriate.

Mr. Haines called a question. The motion carried with a roll call vote with 4 no votes and 5 yes votes. The motion will now be forwarded to the full board for consideration.

Ms. Tobias asked Mr. Hannan, that if he wanted to buy land right now, what would we need to spend? Mr. Hannan said that in the bond agreement that we can spend up to 50% in the first 5 years so that you are not gaining interest on the money. Chairman Pro-Tem Fauci noted that there would already be some legal parameters that we would need to follow.

Chairman Pro-Tem Fauci asked if the committee wanted to amend the motion? Mr. Hanson stated the he would like to see two motions. One for the referendum to be sent to the full board and another to have the price determined and parameters set. He suggested that the county could raise the rate of the forest preserve district's general fund by 6 cents, which would generate \$960,000.00 a year. The forest preserves appropriated budget would come out of this fund along with having about \$650,000 - \$800,000 extra to be used for the acquisition of property. This would slow things down and the county could also ask for donations at the same time.

The committee also discussed how much it would cost a homeowner. Mr. Wiegand said that the original figure thrown out there was \$10 million dollars that would cost \$52 a year on a home valued at \$120,000.00. Mr. Wiegand asked if \$120,000.00 was the median home value in the county? Mr. Haines stated he did not know. Mr. Hanson said that he calculated it a little differently where he took a \$10 million bond that would cost \$35 a year on a \$200,000 home. This would be for a 20-year duration on the bond and the cost to the county would equal \$16 million dollars.

Mr. Haines said that if we go this route, could the County purchase some land today for the future? Would we need to bond it? You could, said Mr. Hanson, but you would need to borrow against the anticipated rate.

Mr. Van Buer said that he liked this idea and that it was less costly and it allows us to take advantage of the expertise that we have in the finance office.

Mr. Hannan said that we could vote for the open space twice, once to vote for the referendum and the other vote would be for the operations and maintenance. Kane County did this with their voters.

Mr. Haines asked that his handouts be included with the minutes. Mr. Wiegand asked that his comments be included in the minutes also.

The committee discussed briefly that this referendum will now be referred to the full board and Chairman Tobias will determine what standing committee will determine the price and parameters. The committee suggested that the Finance Committee could discuss both of these issues.

Before adjourning the meeting Mr. Wiegand said that he wanted to make one last comment. He said that the work that this committee has done has brought to light several perceived deficiencies by people with different viewpoints. There is a significant lack of effort and achievement in raising private funds to acquire property at this time. He asked that all of those who have the ability to join him and make new gifts to the DeKalb County Land

Acquisition Fund. He does look forward, as we tonight, really are passing the buck back to the county board and it's committees, to somehow, with public viewing, put a price tag on what has been voted on tonight.

Moved by Ms. Fullerton, seconded by Mr. Haines, and it was carried unanimously to dissolve this committee and to give the chairman the authority to edit the minutes from this last meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Jeffery Metzger

Mary C. Supple, Secretary

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