

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES
April 9, 2008**

The Economic Development Committee of the DeKalb County Board met on Wednesday, April 9, 2008 @ 7:00p.m in the Legislative Center's Freedom Room. Chairman Eileen Dubin called the meeting to order. Members present were Mr. Andersen, Ms. Fauci, Mr. Metzger, Sr., Mr. Stuckert and Mr. Walt. Ms. Vary was absent. Others present were Aaron Ruder, Doug Dashner, Greg Millburg, Paul Borek and Kate Schott.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Moved by Mr. Stuckert, seconded by Mr. Andersen, and it was carried to approve the minutes from February 13, 2008.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Moved by Mr. Metzger, Sr., seconded by Mr. Walt, and it was carried unanimously to approve the agenda.

CHAIR'S COMMENTS:

Chairman Dubin said she received favorable comments from Mr. Ashmore that indicated that he seemed excited about the grant application. He felt that it would be approved because it showed a cooperation of many groups, including the University.

There was a breakfast meeting sponsored by the Economic Development Corporation that about 200 people attended. She felt that many people felt better leaving the meeting than when they arrived. She felt that the article that appeared in today's "Daily Chronicle" was very good.

STATUS OF WELCOME SIGNS – STEVE WALT

Mr. Walt said that he started out looking for information with Mr. Wayne Davey at the County Highway Department. He proposed to Mr. Davey the idea that basically the County had four highways and at each entrance into the County we propose to put up Welcome to DeKalb County signs. He said that we would be talking about 8 signs for four highways. He asked Mr. Davey if this would be possible? Where could we put them and on who's property? What are the Highway Department's sign making capabilities - could they make the signs?

Mr. Davey said that they can only make standard highway signs, they can't do anything special. The thing about where we could put them up is interesting. Mr. Davey gave him a phone number from the State's office to ask that question to because these are highways under the State's jurisdiction.

After he talked to the State they said that the County would basically have to get permission from the State in the form of a permit, they think, because it depends on what the signs consist of. Because they could charge a fee on some occasions. The kicker is that the State informed him that our County would not allow signs not authorized by the manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, which pretty much leaves out specialty signs. The holdup would be that our County won't allow it. He felt that we could work around this issue.

The committee discussed the idea of speaking to Mr. Paul Miller the County's Planning and Zoning Director and explain to him that the size would be approximately 4' x 8' and that they would be two-sided saying basically "Welcome to DeKalb County".

Mr. Andersen said that maybe we could look into having the students work on a design as a contest, if we proceed with this sign, as a suggestion.

Mr. Walt said that he will get in touch with the State and propose a 4' x 8' sign and then we will have to talk to Planning and Zoning. He will report back to the committee on his findings.

UPDATE FROM THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION – MR. PAUL BOREK

Mr. Paul Borek, the new DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation Director, updated the committee on his office.

He stated that they held a very informative Economic Outlook Breakfast yesterday morning. He said that because the housing is in a downturn we are feeling the effect. Some businesses are doing well and that the world economy is strong. They did hear some positive statements yesterday by Mr. Glassman for JP Morgan Chase & Company.

Mr. Borek also mentioned that he attended a Rural Economic Conference hosted by the Rural Center for Economic Development, which was founded by Mr. Norman Walzer, who now works at the Center for Governmental Studies at NIU. He spoke at a business round table in March 2008 and described some statistics and economic data. Mr.

Walzer chaired the rural economic development conference and one of the most striking opportunities of rural economic development around Illinois and the country is entrepreneurship. There is interest in setting up networks in regions where entrepreneurs can interact quickly with marketing resources and capital resources as examples.

He pointed out how the City of Genoa is very interested in learning about and sharing information with other cities with Main Street programs. He also sees a bright future for downtown DeKalb with the revitalization project that is going on.

He then updated the committee on various projects that are going on around the County like, the new industrial park developments, which is progressing in Cortland and Hinckley, a new "Crossroads Park" in Genoa, the Canadian Pacific Railroad in Genoa serving small businesses, and a new company that opened in Sycamore called TransWare Enterprises from the San Jose, California, which is an engineering company. He also said that in May 2008 the Economic Development Corporation would be hosting a business roundtable event regarding the Kishwaukee Health System at 11:30a.m. Mr. Borek pointed out that the Sandwich Hospital services are expanding down in the southern part of the County too.

He also mentioned that Mr. Kryzynski would be willing to speak at the next Energy Conference that the County is hosting this fall.

COMMUNITY-BASED FARMING UPDATE – JULIA FAUCI

Ms. Fauci updated the committee on an Organic Farming Community out of Woodbury County in Iowa. They are a rural area where they found that young people there did not want to continue with farming and they felt that they might have a bit of an emergency going on, she stated. What they decided to do is to have an organic farming community developed. So, they gave 100% real estate property tax rebate to any farmer for 5 years if they go organic farming. They did have numerous farmers that took the bait. They have now a Wellness Grant which they are trying to partner with the local Health Department to have local people grow healthy foods and for their local people to eat the health foods. Then they have the County and the public foods that goes through the County (school lunch programs) – who had to buy these organic foods - so now there was a market.

Then they wanted to create an additional market. So they had a deal with Omaha Whole Foods Market, which is a retailer, that said yes, they would buy it. Then they had a homestead ordinance to repopulate their community where they offered people no interest loans for people to

move there and farm the land. This worked so well that they also involved the neighboring counties around them.

Ms. Fauci said that she could pursue researching this further if the committee wanted her to. She said that our State is interested in what this County in Iowa did and so is our Federal government.

Mr. Andersen wondered if there were any organic farmers already here in our County?

Mr. Greg Millburg of the Farm Bureau said that we have several on the grain side. There is a process to go through to get certified as an Organic Farmer. It is very labor intensive to switch to organic farming he stated.

After a brief discussion the committee directed Ms. Fauci to investigate this issue further and report back to them. Chairman Dubin also asked if anyone is interested in working with Julia on this issue to please let her know.

TOURISM – JEFF METZGER, SR.

Mr. Metzger, Sr., said that last year on the last Economic Development Committee they were looking for ideas to discuss in the future. He thought that tourism would be a good issue to look into.

Mr. Metzger, Sr., met with Ms. Bonnie Heimbach, Director of Northern Illinois Tourism Bureau. He mentioned to her that he did not want to reinvent the wheel, but he just wanted a tool for people to just come into the County and not be afraid to go too far off the beaten path.

Ms. Heimbach said that they already have a tourism guide for Northern Illinois. He mentioned that we have a new committee now and that she would be open to coming before our committee and discussing this with the committee and Chairman Dubin.

He said that Ms. Heimbach was going to start emailing the County Board office again with updates. He mentioned that Northern Illinois Tourism Bureau does have their own website and that there is a place where a business can put their own business information on it.

He mentioned that the first problem that might impact her budget would be the printing of this guide. She already has a guide that they put out, but to add to it, he is sure that she has a limited budget, that is his one concern. He asked if shop owners could print this and make it available in their own shops until a budget is established?

Ms. Heimbach said that she saw no problem with that.

So this would be something immediate, Mr. Metzger, said. He said that if you look at this guide there really isn't a lot on our communities. There is a lot in DeKalb to do that is not mentioned in this guide now.

Mr. Metzger, Sr., said that he wanted to move on this right away. He said that maybe they could sit down with Ms. Heimbach, and then come up with a press release to let the small business owners know that this is available to them. He wants to make sure that she is ready to handle the volume of interest.

He said that it is his plan to put it together and bring it back to the committee to see if it sounds good with this committee. He wants to talk to her more about it and make sure that they are ready to handle the interest that may come to them.

Ms. Dubin asked the committee to review what Mr. Metzger has handed out to them tonight and to come back next month to discuss it further. Her suggestion is that she would like to have everyone look at this material and come back next month. She would like all of the committee members to think of a way of systematically doing this, getting the info that needs to go in the guide, and what would come afterwards.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Mr. Walt, seconded by Mr. Andersen, and it was carried to adjourn the meeting.

Respectively submitted,

Eileen Dubin, Chairman

ED:mcs