

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES
September 10, 2008**

The Economic Development Committee and Health & Human Services Committee of the DeKalb County Board met on Wednesday, September 10, 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, Ms. Vary and Mr. Walt. Others present were Mr. Paul Borek, Mr. Gary Hanson, Aaron Ruder, Ruth Anne Tobias and Ms. Margaret Whitwell.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Moved by Ms. Vary, seconded by Mr. Stuckert, and it was carried to approve the minutes from August, 2008.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Mr. Andersen asked to amend the agenda to include discussion on the Peace Road Access with the City of DeKalb since he feels that is also applies to economic development.

Moved by Ms. Tobias, seconded by Mr. Andersen, and it was carried unanimously to approve the amended agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

CHAIR'S COMMENTS

Chairman Dubin informed the committee that it was almost a year ago that she applied, on behalf of the committee, for a strategic planning grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development (DCEO). She recently received an email from Mr. Andre Ashmore, Managing Director of DCEO, stating that because of the budget crunch, planning grants are on hold for now, indefinitely.

Ms. Fauci suggested that possibly an intern could do the strategic plan for the County as a college project.

UPDATE FROM THE DEKALB COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION - MR. PAUL BOREK

Mr. Paul Borek, Executive Director, DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, presented his monthly update to the committee.

Mr. Borek highlighted some of the projects happening around the county related to development. He explained that there is many commercial and industrial development occurring all over the County. He said that 1.8 million sq.ft. of development valued at \$220 million has generated 960 jobs that have been completed during 2007 and so far in 2008. He continued by stating that when you combine that with the strength of the agricultural economy and the

stability of NIU, together it has increased the demand for manufacturing products by manufacturers all over the county.

Mr. Borek then informed the committee that his board convened their strategic plan. They have met with over 100 businesses and community leaders in Focus Groups throughout DeKalb County. After these meetings his DCEDC Board sat down and discussed the input that they received and moved forward to create a draft strategic plan. In August 2008 a group of their directors, DCEDC staff and Dr. Bob Gleeson of the NIU Center for Governmental Studies convened at Kishwaukee Community Hospital to craft this document. He hopes to be able to have the information and report available by the end of this year.

Chairman Dubin said that she would like a copy of the summary that she and the committee could forward on to Mr. Ashmore and build upon it.

Mr. Borek said that there is a growing Green Initiative in Genoa that is very active. They are very interested in the County's Go Green Initiative and your Economic Development Committee. He distributed copies of the Energy Conference and Registration Page to this group so that they could attend the conference.

He also mentioned that his office has received several calls on wind energy interests who are looking at DeKalb County. He was asked to attend an informational meeting in Lee that a local developer asked the village to set up with him.

The committee thanked Mr. Borek for a very good report.

REPORT ON UPCOMING ENERGY CONFERENCE

Ms. Fauci and Ms. Vary briefly reviewed for the committee the status of the Energy Conference that is to be held Saturday, September 20, 2008 at Kishwaukee College. We have 44 people who have already registered for the Energy Conference, said Ms. Supple.

Ms. Fauci said that she is thinking of an outdoors education conference for the next one. She is thinking of incorporating the outdoor environment and have teachers bring that into the classroom and teach them how to do that. We would have the teachers in the morning and then the kids do something in the afternoon, said Ms. Fauci.

PEACE ROAD ACCESS ISSUE BY THE DEKALB AIRPORT

Mr. Ken Andersen said that the issue under the Highway Committee's section of the County Board Agenda addresses an item regarding a proposed strip mall to be constructed near the DeKalb Airport with an access point or curb cut on a farm road that is being denied by the Highway Department. It is his understanding, from attending the Executive Committee last night, that the parcel of land and the farm road is under the City of DeKalb's jurisdiction and not the County's, and that the only reason the City came to the Highway Committee with the item was to show a spirit of cooperation. This is per an

agreement from 1994 that was made between the City of DeKalb and the County of DeKalb on access points on Peace Road.

Mr. Andersen said that he was wondering why we denied it, then if we have no authority over it? He said that he feels that this is of economic value to the County and the City of DeKalb.

Mr. Stuckert said that the City of DeKalb has permission to put in the curb cut at that point only on the farm road, not anywhere else. Where their access is they can turn either north or south.

Mr. Andersen then stated that he called Mr. Mark Biernacki, the City Manager of the City of DeKalb, to get his explanation of their request. Mr. Biernacki said that everything that we have discussed so far tonight is pretty much what was discussed at the Highway Committee meeting the other night. However, what they offered to the County, even though it was in a different location, was a more restricted in/out. That seems to be the objection from the committee because it was closer to Pleasant Street and would cause a bottleneck. The City of DeKalb feels that they didn't even have to come to us to talk about it, but they did it out of a spirit of cooperation.

Mr. Stuckert said that the City is coming to the full County Board Meeting on Wednesday night to explain everything.

After further discussion, Mr. Andersen said, that the economic benefits that will come out of this project will benefit the entire county, it's an economic tool for the entire county.

Mr. Stuckert said the developers don't want to compromise at all. The Highway Committee was told that if this doesn't happen, they would not come. That was the problem that some of us had on the committee. It was suggested to compromise and come right in off of Peace Road and go out on Pleasant Road. That's the portion of the Highway Meeting that you didn't hear last night.

Mr. Andersen said that Mr. Biernacki told him that it would be similar to the in/out situation on Route 64 in Sycamore.

Chairman Dubin said that she spoke with him today too and that Mr. Biernacki told her that it was the same kind of thing like the in/out near the Walgreen's store in Sycamore off of Peace Road.

Mr. Andersen said that he would like the committee to come up with a recommendation to say that we are in favor of this and to work with the City on this issue.

Mr. Stuckert said why not wait to see what the City has to say at the full board meeting, and if you feel the same way after that, I don't have a problem.

Chairman Dubin said that she wants, as far as economic development goes, to be as favorable as possible since the City wants to continue to have a good relationship with the County.

Mr. Stuckert said that this is about safety on that access point. Somewhere we have to compromise on this. He is all for going out on Pleasant Street and a then person can go in any direction that they want to go.

Chairman Dubin said that the committee consensus is to look at the economic development aspect of this project.

RESOLUTION: JOBS CREATION PLAN - STEVE WALT

Chairman Dubin said that Mr. Walt had called her and that he has told her that he had a job creation plan and that he would send it on to her in an email. He had said that it was geared towards industry and better paying jobs. However, she felt, that this plan from Mr. Walt falls under the Finance Committee.

Mr. Walt said that the three issues that he ran for the County Board seat were for quality jobs, which we all feel the same about on this committee. The second one was for new leadership on the Economic Development Corporation, which we have a brand new Director who is very good. The third reason was to cut the budget by five percent.

He feels that we need to cut the budget in order to look attractive to companies. He said that he did mention this when he ran for office. He stated that neighboring counties are cutting their budgets. State of Illinois he feels is cutting their budget. It would be good for us and for economic development.

Ms. Vary asked Mr. Walt, how does cutting the budget relate to job development?

Chairman Dubin said that this is about job cuts.

Mr. Walt said that he never mentioned job cuts.

Ms. Vary said her concern is that one of the things that she has been impressed with the staff of the county is that we have some world-class people doing all sorts of things and doing a good job of it. Part of the reason is because we have been able to attract good people because we have a good healthcare package and we have incentives for our employees to do above and beyond what their job descriptions say. Your suggestions are to cut the things that are actually attracting very good professionals to come here to work.

Mr. Walt said that he feels that the University needs world-class people there, I don't think that the County does. Yes, we want the best employees that money can buy and there is no doubt about it. Our competition is the university so we have to stay consistent with their compensation to attract good people. I decided to do this in December of last year, when we talked about the bonus plan for employees.

Ms. Fauci said that we don't have to award bonuses.

Mr. Walt said that the bonus that we handed out was greater than his entire salary as a county board member. In the real world, people don't get bonuses like that anymore. His bonus last year was \$25.00.

Ms. Tobias said that that isn't true, that her son works in retail and he will get a \$3,000 raise.

Mr. Walt said that is outrageous.

A heated discussion relative to Mr. Walt's resolution followed.

Chairman Dubin said that you bring up Kane County and what they are doing there. They are in a different situation than we are. They are in a budget crisis.

Mr. Walt said yes, they have a better funding source than we do - two casinos.

Chairman Dubin said that economically we are not in trouble.

Mr. Walt said yes we are.

Mr. Walt said that the public is what I am talking about.

Chairman Dubin said that she is sympathetic with everyone in the county, but I am talking about the County budget right now. We are not in a fiscal problem where we can't meet the needs of this budget. So much of our spending on personnel deals with unions. How many positions do we have control over?

Ms. Fauci said Ray mentioned in his memo that we had 18 non-union employees.

Mr. Walt felt there are about 300.

Chairman Dubin asked Mr. Hanson how many people we are talking about?

Chairman Dubin said that we are trying to go over some of the issues here that is brought up on Mr. Walt's plan. Because we do have unions here and I am trying to get a number of how many employees this would affect.

Ms. Fauci asked if we lowered the taxes by 2.5% in the County would it allow all small businesses in the county to hire a new person?

Mr. Walt said because we will be able to put some money aside for small businesses and offer incentives to them. It is not currently in the budget.

Chairman Dubin said to Mr. Walt that she would like to discuss, what you have in your plan? The first item that you bring up is on assessments, which she feels come under state law.

Mr. Walt said that at the last month's meeting he asked, how do we determine the property values? I was told the market - the real estate market. I then asked, who does that? And Ms. Whitwell, Supervisor of Assessments said, I do.

I don't believe that, the company line now, is everything is undervalued. Property values have dropped for three years and I don't see that, said Mr. Walt.

Ms. Whitwell said that we receive all documents that are recorded in the Recorder's Office. They do all the work that they are supposed to do with them and then they forward copies of these documents to the Department of Revenue. Then they, the Department of Revenue, do their job. As long as we agree if my numbers come out the way that they are supposed to, same way like the Department of Revenue...

Mr. Walt said what numbers?

Ms. Whitwell, said this is just like I told you last time, we look at three year averages and then what are houses selling for compared to assessments - not what the market is doing today. She further explained that people have this expectation that everything is going up by 10% and I'm going to put my house up for \$275,000 - what is the assessment? They will get a lot less than that, they may get \$240,000 or less and then they get mad because the market is down. Look at the assessment.

Mr. Walt asked who does the assessment?

Ms. Whitwell said the township assessor. These are all governed by state statute and there are regular procedures that we follow. That if the total assessment for that jurisdiction is not at the third of the market value, I have to put a factor on it, and it could be positive or negative.

Mr. Walt asked, who determines market value?

Ms. Whitwell said, it is what homes are selling for.

Mr. Walt said for example, let's say a house sells for \$200,000 and you say that it sold for 10% more than what it was worth, who assessed that?

Ms. Whitwell said, the township assessor.

Ms. Whitwell said that 2008 assessments are not indicative of what's happening in 2008. We are seeing some homes selling for more then they were bought for three years ago. Good sales are the only ones that she considers. They don't consider auctions because that is what the law says.

Mr. Andersen asked, even foreclosures?

Ms. Whitwell, said because they are not an indication of value, it is how much the people have outstanding, it is not going to be considered market, by state law.

When the State runs a sales ratio like they do, that is good, they compare every single sale, to what the assessment is, and we are still low. It took us years to get up to where the market was because they were all low. Now all of sudden the market is going down, it's going to take another year or two before it is reflected in assessments.

Mr. Walt said that the market has been going down for the past three years.

Ms. Whitwell said that is a difference of opinion.

Mr. Walt said that that is the problem that I have.

Chairman Dubin said that Ms. Whitwell has the data.

Mr. Walt said, excuse me did I misunderstand you, Margaret?

Ms. Whitwell said that it is my opinion looking at my numbers that....

Mr. Walt said that is my point.

Ms. Whitwell said that in the State of Illinois we have been awarded a 1 State factor for the past 20 years because our numbers are where they are supposed to be. We would not get that if they weren't. The State would come in and put a factor on the entire county, not township, but everyone.

Mr. Walt said why is everyone saying that the houses are too low now last night?

Mr. Stuckert said that the assessed value has been under assessed for years.

Mr. Hanson said that you have to remember that many of us get our data from the media and we don't have the data that Margaret has, which are the actual calculations. He continued by stating that the assessment matters to you in how much tax you pay in relation to your neighbor, it doesn't affect the revenue that comes to government. The revenue comes from our tax levy. If our assessment drops by 25%, we will generate the same dollars as we would if it doesn't drop. We will keep the levy. We're controlled in our growth by the tax cap, which includes the cost of living and new construction and nothing to do with assessments. If you drop your assessment by 10% you will not affect the county's revenues.

Ms. Vary said that a job creation is a good thing and she would like to cut the budget and cut taxes any way that we can. I am not overall opposed to this plan, I am looking at where you were going to take it.

Ms. Fauci said that the point regarding the new hires, she feels should probably go to the Finance Committee. But, then your point about future cost of living increases to the largest employer, NIU, it's true she is only getting a 2%. However, not all of the insurance costs are entirely on her shoulders.

Ms. Tobias said that NIU's raises are very different based on the type of staff that you are.

Mr. Walt said that we are pretty good to your employees here and I'm glad that we are. I just wanted to bring these items up for discussion that I have encountered since I have been on the County Board.

Mr. Hanson said that it would be easier for you to appeal the budget and go that route, and then you can hear from the other side then.

Chairman Dubin said that there are some ideas that she feels should be explored too.

Mr. Andersen said that the title of the resolution is a misleading title too. He feels that Mr. Walt is trying to hold the line on the budget. He also feels that this committee should suggest to the Finance Committee to hold the line on the budget.

Ms. Tobias said that we do have a balanced budget and we have the resources.

Mr. Stuckert said then don't create new taxes, use the resources that we have.

After further discussion Mr. Walt decided to withdraw the resolution from the agenda and the county board agenda.

LETTER FROM I.D.O.T. ON THE "WELCOME TO DEKALB COUNTY" SIGNS

Mr. Walt informed the committee that he received the approval from IDOT to put up the signs. We have to design the sign and then send it back to IDOT for approval. The signs, however, could cost as much as \$6,000.

Chairman Dubin said that the consensus of the committee is to table this item at this point.

EXEMPT EMPLOYEE EVALUATION - SUPERVISOR OF ASSESSMENTS

The committee then discussed the evaluation of Ms. Margaret Whitwell, the DeKalb County Supervisor of Assessments.

Chairman Dubin asked Ms. Whitwell if this year was a very stressful year with the housing problem, especially with the complaints that were filed?

Ms. Whitwell said yes it has been. Last year they had 300 hearings and normally they hold about 80 hearings. There were 698 people that took out complaint forms but only about half of that filed their complaints.

Ms. Whitwell then explained that she has completed her Standard Work Plan and her Professional Education.

The committee discussed the fact that the word "evaluation" is confusing to the committee members because they are not really evaluating the department head, they are reviewing their completion of the standard work plan and what Mr. Bockman's evaluation was. They suggested that from now on it should be labeled the Exempt Employee Review.

Mr. Walt moved to table the evaluation until next month so that the committee could get a better explanation from Mr. Bockman about what their purpose is relative to this evaluation. Seconded by Mr. Stuckert.

Chairman Dubin asked what more information do you want?

Mr. Stuckert also said that he would have liked a job description included too.

Ms. Fauci said that Mr. Bockman has determined that Ms. Whitwell has performed her duties.

Chairman Dubin said that we are also to decide if Ms. Whitwell is entitled to a bonus or merit increase.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Walt withdrew his motion.

The committee agreed that per Mr. Bockman's evaluation, Ms. Whitwell has completed her Standard Work Plan and Professional Education requirements.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectively submitted,

Eileen Dubin, Chairman

ED:mcs

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