

**FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT COMMITTEE
MINUTES
May 20, 2008**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday, May 20, 2008 at the Afton Forest Preserve at 6:00 p.m. In attendance were committee members, Ms. Fauci, Mr. Gudmunson, Ms. DeFauw, Mr. Rosemier, Mr. Lyle, Mr. Anderson and Superintendent Hannan. Guest for the evening was Greg Milburg of the County Farm Bureau. Ms. Turner arrived after roll call.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Fauci began by asking if there were any changes to the February 19, 2008 minutes. Hearing none, Mr. Lyle moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Rosemier and the motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Fauci asked if there were any other additions or corrections to the agenda. Mr. Anderson moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Rosemier and the motion passed unanimously.

WELCOME TO GUESTS

Ms. Fauci welcomed Greg Milburg of the Farm Bureau.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Mr. Hannan noted that the State had finally released the approval letter and contract for the OSLAD grant money applied for by the District. He noted that the source of these funds derives from a portion of the Real Estate Transfer taxes with a direction that it go toward the acquisition and development of land for parks and public open space.

Mr. Hannan noted that the District must now obtain an independent IDNR certified appraisal on the land and that local appraiser Bob Merriman would be handling the work. He noted that the appraisal would determine the fair market value of the land and set the benchmark for the 50% of fair market reimbursement from the grant. He added that they must also get an archeological survey and that Mark Maher of the NIU Anthropology Dept. would conduct the survey. This is done to assure that the land contains no significant archeological sites.

He noted that since the entire grant calendar has been pushed back by six months due to the delay in the release of the funds, that the payment would be six months later than usual as well and likely to occur in January or February of 2009. The grant from the State that should arrive at that time will be approximately \$384,200.00. The release will follow the approval of the appraisals in the fall and final billing procedures.

Mr. Hannan then noted that the remaining loan balance for the Afton Addition to the County Opportunity Fund of approximately \$160,000.00 with a 5% interest rate would be paid in June with land acquisition funds available following the June tax distribution.

Mr. Anderson asked what the chances were that the State would renege on the grant after approval. Mr. Hannan responded that would be exceptionally unusual once the letters and contract had been sent. He went on to note that he had made a point to thank Representative Bob Pritchard for his efforts on behalf of the District's grant application when he saw him at the recent Potawatomi Woods 8K run. Senator Burzynski was also thanked for his support. Mr. Hannan closed by passing the project agreement documents from the grant to Ms. Fauci for her signature.

FOREST PRESERVE MONTHLY REPORTS

Mr. Hannan noted that as usual, the monthly Forest Preserve reports were included in the packet. He commented that the money had been released to the Outdoor Education programs by the Illinois Extension Office. However, he added that the office had asked him to sign an agreement on the program prior to June 30. Mr. Hannan commented that with the state of the Extension funding, he was hesitant to sign any binding agreements unless there is a guarantee that Peggy Doty and her $\frac{3}{4}$ time assistant are funded. The funding situation is currently not clear in the University of Illinois Environmental Education pool and may not match funding partners. He closed by commenting that the Committee may want to hold further discussions regarding how to continue with the Natural Resource Education programs given the new funding climate.

Mr. Hannan then reported that the 3 spring migration Pete Olson bird walks held recently had been very successful with many people attending and over seventy species of birds sighted at the Wilkinson Marsh preserve one Saturday morning. He then added that volunteer activities to clean up the various preserve areas have also been occurring and well attended. The Mothers Day wildflower walk was very nice this year.

The Potawatomi 8K run was well attended but had a lower runner count due to the inclement weather (very windy) and the competition of another run that day. He commented that just over 70 runners participated.

Mr. Hannan reported that he had received a handout from the Department of Agriculture on the Emerald Ash Borer and noted that the Department would shortly be setting traps around the county to determine if the infestation had reached DeKalb.

He reported that the final donation from a Chicago Boy Scout troop had been received and brought the tally to approximately \$1500.00 donated toward shelter improvements (staff labor) at MacQueen Forest Preserve. Another upcoming activity would be the MS Ride that will be happening throughout the County June 21-22, rest stops for the bike riders will be at Adee Woods and MacQueen.

Mr. Hannan then noted that the recent woodland burns were starting to show improvement in holding back the spread of the garlic mustard plant and that a troop of Sandwich scouts had also volunteered to pull out the invasive plants at Sannauk Preserve.

Ms. Fauci asked about the work she had observed occurring along Bethany Road. Mr. Hannan reported that the road work add 2 lanes and a sidewalk to Nehring Forest Preserve.

Mr. Rosemier noted that during the recent clean up of the trail areas near the Wal-Mart, that the vast majority of the trash consisted of discarded Wal-Mart bags. He asked if it might be possible to approach Wal-Mart or the other retailers regarding providing either financial or staff assistance with future clean ups. Barring that, he asked if they could be encouraged to put up higher fencing or plant shrubs to keep the bags from traveling onto the trails.

MEMBERS COMMENTS:

Mr. Anderson noted that there have been quite a few sightings of turkey vultures in the area. Mr. Hannan noted that they have been congregating near the rocky, craggy areas where they like to nest mostly at quarries.

CHAIR'S COMMENTS:

Ms Fauci noted that she and Superintendent Hannan had attended a Water Shed Eco System Partnership seminar and came away with many productive ideas on how to bring the message to the population that water affects us all. One discussion of note concerned efforts to turn 6 designated alleys in Chicago into improved green spaces with the use of six different environmentally supportive practices. All were designed to eliminate and better utilize standing water that had occurred in the alley areas.

Ms. Fauci then reported on the “No Child Left Inside” initiative supported by the Chicago Wilderness Foundation. She noted that the initiative is designed to encourage communities and families to learn more about outdoor education and to foster a greater awareness of nature with the current generation. She noted that studies have shown that strong outdoor education helps students live and learn more effectively.

Mr. Hannan noted that Will County and other Forest Preserve and Conservation Districts has been very active in this regard stressing the importance of connection to nature as being highly beneficial to children’s educational and emotional development.

Ms. Fauci noted that this comes at a time when attendance at National Parks is at a low level. Mr. Anderson noted that getting the parents involved and supportive is crucial to any program’s success. Ms. Turner noted that some parents are fearful of what can occur when their children are engaging in unsupervised play.

Ms. Fauci noted that this is a major movement and initiative and she hoped the District could find some way to participate in the process.

Ms. Turner commented that many outdoor education programs have had their funding drastically cut in the past few years and that makes publicly supported initiatives like this all the more important.

Ms. Fauci commented that funding and encouragement for these activities is often provided by the manufacturers of outdoor equipment as a means to assure they will have a future customer base.

TAX ABATEMENT POLICY

Ms. Fauci began by handing out an informal document detailing various how the City of Sycamore and the City of DeKalb have approached various tax abatement requests.

She noted that initially the County had opted to support whatever the cities opted to support. However, the County had recently been moving from an automatic agreement based on the cities determinations to a more careful case-by-case review. She noted that there had also been additional criteria added to their considerations related to wages, benefits and overall value to the County. As mentioned in previous meetings, the City of DeKalb had leaned to a 90/80/70/60/50 five year phase in of taxation as a popular abatement scheme.

Ms. Fauci noted that the District needed to consider how it wanted to handle abatement requests brought to it, given the fairly small scope of the District tax impact.

Mr. Anderson asked for a comparison of the tax value of property to the various taxing bodies before and after development with abatement limits applied. He noted that it was his feeling that even with the abatements the bodies were realizing greater revenues than they would have if the land had stayed undeveloped. He commented this would likely even be the case for a small participant like the District.

Mr. Anderson went on to say that he felt the District should follow the lead of the County in these situations. However, Ms. Fauci countered that the goals of the County may not be in total sync with the stated open land preservation goals of the District. Mr. Anderson stated again that the taxing bodies benefit from development, even with tax abatements applied far more than they do from undeveloped farm land.

Ms. Fauci noted that the Committee can certainly continue discussions, but that at some time, preferably before too many abatement requests surface, a decision would have to be made.

Mr. Rosemier noted that the abatements are perceived by tax payers as benefiting the companies at the expense of the individual tax payer. Mr. Anderson and Mr. Rosemier then debated the perceptual issues surrounding the abatements at length.

Ms. Fauci commented that as an independent taxing body, the District can elect to adopt their own unique approaches based on the District's mission.

Mr. Gudmunson asked if anyone had heard any thoughts on the matter from Mr. Bockman of the County.

Ms. Fauci closed by noting that there are far greater values attached to farm and open space than simply the monetary and asked the Committee to continue thinking of ways to approach the abatement question.

LAND ACQUISITION UPDATE

Prior to the beginning of the discussion, Ms. Fauci asked for a motion to enter Executive Session. Ms. DeFauw moved the Committee into executive session for the purpose of discussing current information on District land acquisition opportunities, seconded by Mr. Gudmunson. A roll call vote was held and the motion passed with 7 Committee members voting in the affirmative and none in the negative. Following the Executive Session, Ms. Turner moved to return the Committee to public session, seconded by Ms. DeFauw. A roll call vote was held and the motion passed with 7 Committee members voting in the affirmative and none in the negative.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Lyle moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Anderson and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Fauci, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
JF:kjr