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DeKalb County Government
Sycamore, Illinois

**Forest Preserve District Committee Minutes
October 21, 2014**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday October 21, 2014 at 6:00 pm in the Conference Room East of the Administration Bldg. In attendance were committee members: Ms. Fauci, Ms. Haji-Sheikh, Mr. Brown, Mr. Cribben, Ms. DeFauw and Superintendent Hannan. Mr. Gudmunson and Mr. Jones were absent. Guest was local historian Barry Schrader.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Fauci called for a motion to approve the minutes of the September 16, 2014 meeting. Ms. DeFauw moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Brown and the motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Fauci noted that there would not be a need for Executive Session this evening and so called for a motion to approve an amended agenda. Ms. Haji-Sheikh moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Ms. DeFauw and the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Fauci noted that Mr. Schrader would be making a presentation to the Committee during Committee Members Comments.

MONTHLY REPORTS

Mr. Hannan began by noting that the usual monthly reports and information were in the packet. He called attention to photos from the South Branch Prairie and NIU calss studying prairie and wetland restoration work with Al Roloff and noted that for the past 15 years Northern Illinois University (NIU) has done many activities at the Forest Preserves. He added that Kishwaukee Community College and several of the local elementary schools and high schools also benefit from environmental educational activities in the Preserves.

Mr. Hannan commented that there are many benches located in the preserves that were donated as memorial benches by people in memory of family and friends.

The annual Halloween event will be held again at Sannauk Forest Preserve. This has been a successful fundraiser for the Sandwich High School music program.

On November 1st, 2014 from 10:00 am to noon there will be a ceremony at the 1835 Miller - Ellwood cabin showing the cabin work in progress and the 85th anniversary of

the Ney Grange. Local Representative Bob Pritchard will give a talk in the history of the cabin and local historian Steve Bigolin will speak on the history of the Grange. The Grange will provide refreshments and a Grange time capsule will be sealed.

Mr. Hannan reported that North Central Cyclery has donated a bike air pump and sign for the Great Western Trail. The donation, valued at approximately \$800, will provide assistance for cyclists on the trail. Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that she has been working with local residents Sue Hronek and Debbie Armstrong who have obtained a grant for bike racks for the area.

Mr. Brown asked if Mr. Hannan could speak to the composition and mission of the Adventure Works group mentioned recently as using the Preserves. Mr. Hannan noted that the group serves DeKalb county residents (age 6 to 18) through a series of outdoor therapy activities designed for youth counseling through outdoor adventure. Their mission is to “assist youth in overcoming challenges and becoming healthy adults through adventure based counseling”. Ms. Fauci noted that these programs are valuable in helping youth in need. Mr. Hannan added that they provide activities like fishing, camping, canoeing, archery, hiking, survival skills, environmental education, volunteerism, etc. in an outdoor learning environment. Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that outdoor activities are good for the physically and emotionally challenged as well.

FY2015 BUDGET

Ms. Fauci noted that the budget is scheduled to be moved forward to the full Board for approval at their November meeting. Mr. Hannan reminded the Committee that the budget as presented is the same as the one placed on public file and is the same funding levels as the 2014 budget. Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked when the Waste Management funds will appear in the budget. Mr. Hannan responded that there will be a separate line item for that revenue and will begin in 2015.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh and Ms. DeFauw complimented Mr. Hannan on producing a very responsible and sound budget.

Ms. Haji Sheikh moved to send the budget to the full County Board Forest Preserve Commissioners for approval, seconded by Mr. Cribben and the motion passed unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Fauci invited Mr. Schrader to address the Committee. Mr. Schrader began by providing a handout of the presentation to the Committee members. He noted that he is coming to the Committee as a member of the newly formed Annie Glidden Agrarian Society. The group seeks to rescue the Glidden-Oderkirk House and carriage house located on the NIU campus.

He began by noting that the House was used by the University until approximately 2005. After that time it has been largely left unattended and has fallen into disrepair. Mr. Schrader and fellow local historian Steve Bigolin have been trying to garner attention to the plight of the property with an eye to restoring it.

Currently the property is owned by the NIU Foundation and is leased to NIU. However, the Foundation does not wish to keep the property nor expend funding on its restoration. When approached by the Agrarian Society the Foundation initially offered to sell the property for \$1.00 if the Society would agree to have it moved to another location. Unfortunately, the costs of re-locating the building were prohibitive. The group then met with the NIU President and administration and they invited the group to present a proposal for the buildings use. Their requirement is that there had to be a student-based use attached in some fashion. After much discussion, they have settled on a proposal to use the facility as a drop-in/welcome center for foreign students.

The group has also formed an alliance with Dan Kenney of the DeKalb County Community Gardens. The Community Gardens has expressed interest in using the carriage house as a base of operations and also inviting students to bring seeds and grow native plants and vegetables from their countries.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that the Community Gardens has previously received assistance from the YMCA, but this would be a great kick start to getting them a physical base of operations.

Mr. Schrader noted that the Foundation has imposed one restriction on their group. They insist that they will only lease the property to an established not-for-profit entity or public organization. Unfortunately, they do not feel that the Community Gardens or the Agrarian Society has a sufficient track record to meet the Foundations' requirement. So the Agrarian Society is seeking a public agency or County wide organization to make the leasing offer. He noted that his group has spoken with several local citizens and has received very positive responses regarding support for the project. He noted that if they can partner with some agency that can make a serious leasing offer to the Foundation, they can then begin the work to raise the funds needed for the rehabilitation and maintenance of the buildings.

Mr. Schrader then stressed that they are not asking the leaseholder to expend any of their funds on the project, and certainly would not seek any tax money for the project.

He noted that the NIU Foundation has indicated that they will only entertain a lease or sale of the buildings, but not the property. He hopes that the Agrarian Society, the Community Gardens and whatever lease partner they can locate can then demonstrate fund-raising capability between now and June 15, 2015 when the current NIU lease expires. He noted that the University has expressed an interest in this being a Communiversitiy project.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked Mr. Schrader to define exactly what the group is asking from the Forest Preserve. Mr. Schrader responded that it would simply be to sign the lease. His group and the Community Gardens would raise the funds and be responsible for the rehab and maintenance. He noted this would be a one year lease initially and would be done on a year to year basis. As long as money could be raised to maintain and improve the property, the lease would stand. If they could not raise sufficient funds, the property would revert to the Foundation.

He noted again that the Foundation will not partner with either the Agrarian Society or the Community Gardens seriously because of what they perceive as a lack of stability and demonstrated income and funding sources.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked about restrooms in the buildings. She noted that there are none currently and the College of Education currently uses the Barsema Center bathrooms for the participants in programs at the Milan Township School building. She noted that the costs should be shared for that. Mr. Schrader noted that there are the remnants of a bathroom in the carriage house that could be restored fairly simply.

Ms. Fauci commented that entering into this sort of partnership would have to be carefully considered to be sure it fit into the statutory mission of the District.

Mr. Hannan noted that he has met with Mr. Schrader and had commended him for his work with the Ney Grange, the Hoppe Heritage Farm and Miller Ellwood Cabin and other projects. However, he did express that he was not sure this project was a good fit for the Forest Preserve District. He noted that all other buildings that the Forest Preserve has a responsibility for are located on Forest preserve property. He commented that perhaps this would be a better fit for the City of DeKalb, the DeKalb Park District or NIU itself.

Mr. Schrader noted that NIU does have a long running relationship with the property. They provide the Foundation with a \$4800 monthly lease and also handle needed, rudimentary maintenance.

However, NIU has made it clear that they do not want to take on the sponsorship of anything related to a heritage or historical site on the property to keep their options open. The houses sit on a valuable 5 acre property. The Park District has also expressed that it does not want to take on any historical sites at this time as well.

Ms. Fauci noted that buildings without clear and necessary uses do not seem to survive for long. However, she then added that she too feels this may not be a good fit for the Forest Preserve. She noted that the Forest Preserve charter clearly indicates that their main mission is the preservation and restoration of land, not the preservation of buildings or facilities. She commented that it is a shame the property can't be used as an agrarian facility give its history and the lack of such facilities on the campus.

Mr. Cribben asked Mr. Schrader to again explain why the Community Gardens, who have a clear non-profit status, is not an acceptable lease holder to the Foundation. Mr. Schrader replied that they want a long term sustainably funded agency and they do not feel the Community Gardens has a sufficiently long history.

Mr. Cribben then asked what the Community Gardens budget would be for the project. Mr. Schrader noted that he did not have that information, but would contact Mr. Kinney to discuss that. He noted that his hope was that if a long-term, county based organization

like the Forest Preserve were willing to do this, the Foundation would have a hard time throwing up additional roadblocks.

Mr. Cribben asked what sort of lease costs and other out of pocket expenses they anticipated. Mr. Schrader responded that they asked the Foundation for an initial \$1.00 monthly sublease from NIU which would allow them to continue receiving the \$4800 monthly funds from NIU.

He noted that they anticipated about \$50,000.00 in initial costs that would be needed just to determine the scope of the project and what would be needed to bring the buildings up to code.

Mr. Cribben noted that there really isn't a long-term commitment being sought here, that the relationship could be short term. Mr. Schrader responded that they are only asking for a one year commitment to see if they could get sufficient funding and to determine if the restoration could be accomplished. If they failed to develop sufficient funding or if the project exceeded what could be rationally or responsibly accomplished – the relationship could be dissolved.

Mr. Cribben noted that the advantage to the Community Gardens did make the project attractive to him. Ms. Haji-Sheikh reiterated that the Community Gardens has no set physical space to call their own. She commented that perhaps if the grounds around the building could be a larger part of the restoration, that might make this a better fit for the Forest Preserve.

Ms. Fauci noted that it is very frustrating that NIU is not willing to take a more active role in the preservation of the property.

Mr. Cribben asked if the Farm Bureau might be a possible source of assistance since the site has such a rich agrarian history. Mr. Schrader noted that they have discussed the project but the Farm Bureau, but they do not wish to be involved until the project is a bit further down the road.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh argued again that the advantages to the Community Gardens and the preservation of such important local history might justify this and not prove an undue burden to the Forest Preserve. She asked if anyone had contacted resident Jim Hovis about the property as he has been very active in supporting past restorations. Mr. Schrader indicated that he is not currently in a position to assist with this project.

Mr. Brown noted that he brings some bias and a bit of agitation about the issue. His district (County Board 6) surrounds the property. He noted that if this was owned differently or on a larger parcel that might be of value to the Forest Preserve he might see the issue differently. He noted that he has a long history with the property and attended many picnics and events there. The Foundation took the property from private developers with an assumption that it would have a future use and would be restored. However, after that acquisition was finalized, the house fell quickly into disrepair as the

University disregarded it. He noted that it feels somewhat disingenuous of the University to question whether someone else has the ability to care for the property when they have allowed it to fall into such a critical state of disrepair.

He noted that there was a rumor at the time of the acquisition that a large (\$1,000,000.00 to \$2,000,000.00) donor would be coming along to build a visitors center on the property. But that expectation did not materialize. Then there was talk of a 5 story parking deck that would be built to serve the athletic facilities.

In the late 1980's, early 1990's he noted that he had sent a letter to then-president LaTourette seeking to use the property as it stood as a welcome/visitor's center given its location and history. Unfortunately, that suggestion was rejected.

He commented that Annie Glidden Road is a key part of the campus and a major artery for the County and campus. This should justify it deserving support.

Ms. DeFauw noted that she has already stated publically her support for preservation of the house.

Mr. Schrader noted that the University had, at one point, removed all plumbing and wiring from the house in anticipation of upgrades that then never materialized. Ms. DeFauw commented that the building is worthy of restoration and preservation to honor the Glidden family who have been of critical importance to the County. However, she noted that she did have to agree that the project is not a good fit for the Forest Preserve. She commented that she is in support of exploring moving the building, though she does recognize the costs for that are great. She closed by noting that it is a pity that the Foundation cannot seem to see the value of the building and its history.

Ms. Fauci asked who had originally built the building. Mr. Schrader replied that it was built by Bill Lindberg's grandfather for John Glidden. John and his sister Annie then came to the property in the 1800's. Annie ran it for 20+ years on her own following a series of family tragedies. During this time she was extremely involved in researching and developing several important crops and agrarian practices.

Mr. Schrader commented that there had also been a proposal at one time to make it a faculty club or a Bed and Breakfast for NIU visitors, but both proposals met with rejection by the University and the Foundation.

Mr. Brown applauded Mr. Schrader and Mr. Bigolin for their work and noted that their proposal as a center for International students was extremely well thought out as such a facility is sorely lacking on the campus.

Ms. Fauci noted that when she had attended the University of Illinois in Chicago, they had placed a great emphasis on the preservation of Jane Addams Hull House as an important part of the campus. She commented that towns and counties can sometimes seem different regarding restorations. On one hand they often do not support restoration

based on costs, but yet many economic development activities center on the history and historical value of sites in their areas.

Mr. Hannan also expressed his question as to why NIU itself wouldn't just let the group's work occur while they continue to hold the lease.

Mr. Schrader closed by noting that he had three sample leases and would appreciate it if the Committee would at least review the documents to see what the leases would involve.

The Committee thanked Mr. Schrader for this efforts and the thoroughness of his presentation. Ms. Fauci closed by noting that it would be very sad if this site and its history could not be preserved.

In other Committee member comments, Ms. Fauci noted that she had received a letter from resident Dee Coover who recently embarked on a tour of all the County Preserves and was extremely impressed and pleased with the condition and usage of the sites.

Mr. Brown commented that the county was experiencing a great fall season for color.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that she recently noted that there were 9 counties that participated in the Illinois Halloween "Trail of Terror". She commented that she wished there were better ways of promoting that in the county since it involved several local attractions and activities.

Mr. Hannan commented that when he was growing up in DeKalb, he and friends would go trick or treating on 13th street. One house had pumpkins on the lawn with speakers inside. That house was Wally Thurow's who would go on to become "Mr. Pumpkin" the founder of the Sycamore Pumpkin Fest.

Mr. Brown commented that it is important to remember that agriculture is as much our culture as our economy.

Ms. DeFauw closed with a small fact about Annie Glidden. At her farm, she grew a white asparagus that was quite prized by Chicago restaurants.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. DeFauw moved to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Haji-Sheikh. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Fauci, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
JF:kjr