

**MINUTES OF THE
LEE COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

Regular Meeting

Monday, May 3, 2021, at 6:30 p.m.

**Third Floor Meeting Room
Old Lee County Courthouse, Dixon, Illinois**

Zoom Video- & Tele-conferencing

Meeting ID: 988 4502 4438

Password: 043424

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWvps5JAy5Y>

Board Members

William O’Keefe, Chair
Chris Henkel, Vice Chair
James Book, Member
John Hilleson, Member
Ellen Smith, Member
Ben Forster, Alternate Member

Staff

Dee Duffy, Zoning Officer
Alice Henkel, Clerk

At 6:30 p.m., Chair William O’Keefe called the meeting to order and asked the Clerk to call the roll:

Members present: O’Keefe, Henkel, Smith, Forster
Members absent: Hilleson, Book

Member Chris Member has taken the seat of Wendy Ryerson who is longer serving on this board.

The next order of business was the approval of the minutes from the January 6, 2020 meeting. Chair O’Keefe noted that the first sentence following roll call should read, “Member Chris Henkel has taken the seat of Wendy Ryerson...” Ellen Smith made a motion that the minutes be approved with the noted correction. A second was discerned, and there was no debate. A vote was taken, and the ayes prevailed. The motion passed, 4-0.

The next order of business was comments from the visitors’ section. Adam Lusz was present but had no comments at that time.

There was no old business.

The first order of new business was Lee County Greenways and Trails Plan updates. The minutes from the previous meeting reflect that this Board will be looking to update the Lee County Comprehensive Plan so that it more adequately reflects the greenways and trails that exist in Lee County. Additionally, Blackhawk Hills Regional Council (“BHRC”) is looking to work with six counties to update and connect the greenways and trails from county to county. The counties would be Carroll, Jo Davies, Ogle, Stephenson, Lee and Whiteside. A copy of BHRC’s proposal was provided to the Board members.

Chair O’Keefe asked if there was any objection to working with BHRC and Ogle County on developing an interconnected greenways and trails. There was no objection.

He noted that even if Lee County participated, it would still have its own greenways and trails plan in the Comprehensive Plan. Chair O’Keefe would like to see state parks, parks like Lowell park, areas like the Nachusa Grasslands, and the Green River recreational area included in the Comprehensive Plan.

John Hilleison arrived at 6:35 p.m.

Chair O’Keefe again emphasized that the collaboration with BHRC and Ogle County is a separate project from updating Lee County’s Comprehensive Plan. The collaboration will be looking to join the greenways and trails from County to County, while the Lee County Comprehensive Plan update will be focused on incorporating parks and other natural and recreational areas into the plan.

Emily Lauderdale from BHRC was present via ZOOM and gave a brief presentation on the BHRC proposal. She explained that there would be no cost to the County. BHRC would need the County to recommend 2-3 persons to join an advisory group and provide general information such as ordinances, GIS data/layers and planning/zoning documents.

Questions from the Board were heard.

The ultimate goal of this project is to provide a comprehensive recreation and trails document for County to support the County in assisting cities, park districts, villages and other entities with grant funding primarily. There is no regulatory aspect to this project. The final work product is expected to be completed within approximately 11 months of the project’s commencement.

John Hilleison made a motion that the Lee County Regional Planning Commission recommends that the Lee County Board appoint 2-3 knowledgeable and interested individuals from Lee County to participate with BHRC to develop a joint greenways and trails plan with Ogle County. A second was discerned, and there was no debate. A vote was taken, and the ayes prevailed. Motion passed, 5-0.

The next order of business was an update on the amended solar ordinance currently before the County Board.

Zoning Administrator Dee Duffy explained that the original ordinance was amended in November 2020. The County Board was still not happy with the ordinance following the amendment, so it formed an ad hoc committee to review the amended ordinance and make further changes. The ad hoc committee developed a second amended solar ordinance which the County Board voted to place it on the table until the May meeting of the County Board, at which time the adoption of the proposed solar ordinance would be voted on. Due to the lack of public notification and public hearing on the proposed solar ordinance before either the Regional Planning Commission or the Zoning Board of Appeals, the County Board will not be able to vote on it this month. Due to conflicts of interests with 3 of the Regional Planning Commission members, Mrs. Duffy suggested having the hearing before the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Chair O'Keefe said there is no issue with having the Zoning Board of Appeals handle the hearings for the ordinance amendment so long as proper notification occurs and the correct procedures are followed.

Ellen Smith asked for a synopsis of the solar ordinance. Alice Henkel, who was hired by the Zoning department in December 2020, explained the main changes to the second amended ordinance are increased setbacks and vegetative screening.

Rick Humphrey, who was present by ZOOM, had a question; however, the were technical issues with hearing Mr. Humphrey.

The Board moved on to questions from Kasey Considine who was also present via ZOOM. Mr. Considine stated that he feels it is the Board's job to review the solar ordinance and Comprehensive Plan and that he is not in favor of any other committee or board handling this. He feels that if there are conflicts existing with the current members that prevent them from performing the duties of this Board, then those persons should remove themselves from the Board.

Chair O'Keefe explained that it is up to the County Board to decide before which Board the text amendment hearings will occur.

Rick Humphrey was called and placed on speaker phone. Mr. Humphrey stated that his issue with the proposed second amended solar ordinance is that the LESA score has no impact on the siting of these projects. He feels that goes against our comprehensive plan and the LESA scores should impact where solar projects are constructed.

Chair O'Keefe explained that it needs to be determined whether solar is an agricultural use. If it is an agricultural use or is construed as an agricultural use, then no LESA is required. If a development in an agricultural district is an agricultural use or is allowed as a special use in an agricultural district, then no LESA is required. Since solar is allowed as a special use in an agricultural district under the Lee County Code, no LESA is required. Building a house in an agricultural district would require a LESA because a residence is not an agricultural use, unless it is a farmhouse

Mr. Considine thinks the County's Comprehensive Plan outlines where in the County and how it changes the aesthetic view and rural characteristic of the County. He said the main focus of the

comprehensive plan is to maintain the rural characteristic of the County. He feels it is this Board's job to define where solar farms should be placed and how many acres of solar farms should be allowed. He feels the public needs to have an opportunity to have their voices heard.

The next order of new business was a discussion about updating the Comprehensive Plan. It will be up to the County Board to direct the Regional Planning Commission to proceed with retaining a firm to work on updating the plan.

Adam Lusz stated that he feels solar farms should not be considered a special use in an agricultural district. He feels they have nothing to do with agriculture and should be reclassified as a commercial use. Mr. Lusz said he is for solar as long as it is done wisely. He feels solar farms need to be placed in more rural areas and not near the City of Dixon.

The next order of new business was review of the wind ordinance. The current wind ordinance needs to be updated to reflect the conditions the wind companies are required to follow. The Board will plan to meet next month to get started on this ordinance review.

There was no other new business.

At 7:52 p.m., John Hilleson made a motion to adjourn, and a second was discerned. A vote was taken, and the motion passed, 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Alice Henkel

Alice Henkel, Clerk