

TO: The Sycamore Plan Commission

FROM: Bill Nicklas  
City Administrator

DATE: January 22, 2003

RE: January 27, 2003 Special Plan Commission Meeting

The Special Plan Commission agenda has one workshop item. We will meet in the City Council Chambers at the Sycamore Municipal Building at 7:00 p.m.

**I. Workshop Item.**

**A. Consideration of an Administration Request for Direction Regarding Preferred Land Uses On the Periphery of the Sycamore Corporate Limits.**

At the regular Plan Commission meeting of January 13, the Commission agreed to re-convene for a special meeting to carry the comprehensive planning process forward after receiving a range of public opinion during the image preference survey of January 7 and the charrette of January 11. As we continue our review of the City's land use policies, regulations and objectives, we are also obliged to consider the popular aspirations that were voiced during the open houses in the summer of 2002, along with a larger and diverse body of professional and personal opinion registered at over thirty Plan Commission meetings since the current comprehensive plan was adopted in May of 2000. As the Commission proceeds, some structure would be useful. At the January 13 meeting, members will have an opportunity to "color the map" as residents did during the charrette, particularly in the northeast quadrant of our planning area where abundant open space and development interest are colliding.

First, the Commission will be asked to review the goals and objectives of the current plan. A copy of those goals (Chapter Three of the Plan) is attached and has been slightly annotated to suggest some possible changes and some thresholds that have been reached in the past three years. In general respects, the goals detailed in the current plan are still legitimate. The ratings of the slides in the image preference survey indicate continuing strong support for the objectives identified under "Community Appearance," "Downtown Enhancement," and "Natural Features," in particular. Most of the other community goals and objectives still resonate.

For the sake of discussion, here are some hypotheses relating to what may have changed in our thinking over the past three years:

- a) We are looking for more definition in land uses, transportation routes, and greenways in the northeast corridor, which presently attracts the most development attention (in 2000, the “hot” sector was on the southeast side).
- b) We are looking for more formal means to regulate the pace of new residential subdivision development, with a clearer recognition of the fiscal impact of new development as well as the interrelationship of residential and commercial/industrial development.
- c) We are wondering if it is prudent to identify ultimate growth limits to the north and east. Our future growth to the south is limited by the proximate or nearing urban environments of DeKalb and Cortland, and our growth to the west is limited in significant ways by the Kishwaukee River floodplain.

Large-scale aerial views of our community in a wider geographical context will be available on Monday night to serve as our canvass. The meeting will be public and local residents are invited to attend and observe as always. However, the twelve members of the Plan Commission have not come together as a body to discuss our community’s development in general since the workshop that gave rise to our Bethany Road Regional Plan in April 2001. Hopefully, the Commission will work toward its own consensus in this special gathering that will be free of other business. In a very few months, the body will speak as one in recommendations to the Council on final drafts of a land use plan and revised comprehensive plan.

When the current Plan was drafted early in 2000, the downtown was recognized as the part of our community that defines us to others. There is no indication that our community feels any differently today. The top-rated slide in the image preference survey was a snapshot of the DeKalb County Courthouse. That building and the public space it occupies is an icon for local residents, of course, but also typifies what many small cities are striving to sustain or revive: a town center or core that has economic vitality and memorable public spaces. Here is an additional hypothesis to consider: If the central core of our community remains a magnet, and new development is linked physically (through bikeways, greenways, and thoughtful road patterns), architecturally (with more directive urban design characteristics) and economically (by resisting the rise of a competing commercial “town center”), measured growth can continue at our community’s edges without imperiling our cherished identity.