

TO: Sycamore Plan Commission

FROM: Bill Nicklas
City manager

DATE: April 7, 2010

RE: April 12, 2010 Plan Commission Meeting

The Plan Commission has one workshop item.

I Action Items--None

II. Workshop Items

A. Consideration of an Administration Recommendation for a Sub Area Plan for the Northwest Quadrant of the City of Sycamore, Illinois.

This workshop session will consider the prospect of a sub-area plan for the northwest quadrant of the Sycamore planning area. The impetus for this session lies in an earlier Plan Commission consideration of a unique development concept for the former Fowler Farm.

In February 2008, the Plan Commission held an informal workshop session to consider a conceptual plan presented by Dr. Steven Glasgow for a rural “conservation” subdivision on the former Fowler Farm, which is situated west of Motel Road and is not presently contiguous with the Sycamore corporate limits. The area within which the Fowler Farm lies is noted on the City’s 2008 Future Land Use Map as a “rural residential” area. This land use designation was intended to recognize the existence of areas within the City’s mile-and-a-half planning jurisdiction that already have an established rural residential character, and which may see the development of additional, large-acre home sites utilizing individual wells and individual septic tank absorption fields. If a portion of this rural residential area was annexed by the City of Sycamore, it is logical that it would be designated an “Agricultural” zoning district, as defined by the 2009 Unified Development Ordinance, which describes an “AG” district as a land area well suited for animal husbandry, farm production, and sparse housing to support such uses.

The concept plan Dr. Glasgow presented in February 2008 depicted a 41-acre parcel containing six house lots ranging from 2.4 acres and 12.6 acres in area, for a gross density of 0.15 units per acre. Several outlots were dedicated to common space such as a horse arena and stables, a landscaped entrance, and storm water detention. Among the planning issues considered by the Plan Commission in February 2008 were the following:

- a) Planning jurisdiction. The former Fowler farm is not contiguous to the City's corporate limits but is within the City's mile-and-a-half planning jurisdiction. The City's inclusion of the rural residential subdivisions in the 2003 and 2008 Future Land Use Plans was primarily intended to offer an opportunity for contiguous County-zoned parcels to possibly connect to City utilities through an annexation process, and not to proactively expand the City's corporate boundaries to the northwest. The County land use plan has not allowed scattered residential subdivisions for several decades, in order to conserve farm land and to reduce the impact on County services that may be required by remote residential units. According to the County plan a minimum of 40 acres is required to plat one new single family residence.
- b) Utilities. Sanitary sewer cannot be extended by gravity means. Public water can be extended but no looping of the main would be possible, diminishing the quality of the public water that would flow through a dead-end public main extended to the property.
- c) Roadways. The concept plan proposed private roads for the subdivision. While this approach relieves a future public street maintenance and snow plowing responsibility within the proposed subdivision, the City would be responsible for maintenance of the intervening roadways--sections of Motel Road and Brickville Road--connecting the subject parcel to other parcels that would need to be annexed to establish contiguity, unless the Sycamore Township Road Commissioner continued to assume this maintenance responsibility.
- d) Open space. The plan featured large conservation areas.
- e) Bikepaths. The 2008 concept plan did not show bike paths but Dr. Glasgow informed the Commission that pathways and nature trails would be planned to connect the proposed subdivision to other bikepaths in the Stonegate and Villagio Estates developments.

The Commission was aware that some determination from the IEPA regarding the drilling of residential wells within potential city limits was a first step, and deferred judgment until this and other issues were addressed.

Two years have passed since that informal workshop, and Dr. Glasgow has requested a second workshop to consider additional information relating to his property and several adjoining properties. In addition, on March 19 the City Manager met with a number of intervening landowners including Dr. Michael and Deb Schelkopf, Rick and Lois Hoffman, Kathherine Koehling, and Art Gehrs, representing St. John's Lutheran Church, to discuss their possible interest in annexation under the "rural residential" designation. Considering these inquiries, the City administration would consider it useful for the Commission to begin envisioning key elements for a sub-area plan that would not only take into account Dr. Glasgow's interests, but the interests of neighboring property owners and the general interest of the City with respect to the northwest edge of the City's planning jurisdiction. The balance of this background report will highlight some building blocks for a subarea plan, and will inform the Commission of what has been learned through intermittent contacts with Dr. Glasgow and nearby property owners since the February 2008 workshop.

The Northwest Rural Planning Area

In anticipation of a general workshop discussion of the Motel Road corridor and nearby properties, the City Manager recently contracted with Chuck Hanlon of Land Vision for some very conceptual mapping that would provide a starting point for considering a new subarea plan for this area. The attached conceptual plan comprises an area—about 630 acres—that is much larger than any conceivable development interest. The size of the proposed planning area is a function of the logical hard edges to a future subarea plan, namely, the flood plain boundary to the west, North Grove Road to the north, the present City corporate limits to the east and Motel Road to the south. This area might be shrunk as discussion ensues, but at this point it is prudent to consider boundaries that do not dissect existing parcels in an arbitrary fashion.

The attached draft of a possible planning area does not delineate zoning classifications, any interior private or public roads, storm water detention facilities, bike paths, nature trails, parks or conservation areas. The first challenge is simply to graphically describe the study area. If the Commission wishes to proceed with the preparation of a sub-area plan, the land use, transportation, storm water, utility and other issues will need to be investigated.

The Fowler Farm and Rural Residential Development

1. Potable Water. Since the February 2008 Plan Commission workshop meeting, Dr. Glasgow has continued to investigate a number of issues raised by the Commission. His busy schedule as one of the area's foremost orthopedic surgeons has slowed the pace of this investigation and study, but has not diminished his interest. In May, 2009, Dr. Glasgow received a definitive answer from the IEPA regarding whether the City of Sycamore can permit private wells within its corporate limits. According to the assistant counsel for the IEPA (see attachment), the City is not under an obligation to the IEPA to prevent private wells within its jurisdiction. The City may prevent private wells on its own accord and has in certain circumstances, as in the case of known contaminated areas and within a certain distance of its public wells. Hence, it is at least legally possible for a remote area that cannot be served adequately by the City's public infrastructure to be served by a private well. Practically speaking, the City insists on public water supply where a main extension can be engineered in a looped system, circulating fresher water to all locations in the system. A single water main extension to the Fowler Farm could not be looped to other main extensions and would likely create some water quality issues that older subdivisions on the City's east side experienced until Well #9 was built on Airport Road.

If the City were to permit private wells in the northwest planning area, the allowable number and the proximity of these wells to septic systems would be worthy questions in terms of public health. Private wells for drinking and bathing purposes on three-to-five acre lots would not pose an inherent public health hazard if properly planned within public health standards. Nevertheless, the intensity of the land use in the planning area would need to be considered, in conjunction with soil testing relevant to well use.

2. Sanitary System. The Fowler Farm and most of the area within the proposed sub-planning area could not be served by Sycamore's gravity sewer system. Presently, there are no sanitary lift stations in the City's collection system and the City is not interested in establishing any lift stations in view of the ongoing maintenance costs.

3. Territorial Contiguity. Several large intervening properties (the Schelkopf farm, Hoffman Farm, St. John's Lutheran Church, and Koehling farm) separate the Fowler Farm from the City's corporate limits, namely, the Villagio Estates planned unit development at the northeast corner of Peace and Brickville Roads. Under DeKalb County zoning regulations, only one residential structure could be located on the Fowler Farm parcel owned by the Glasgow family. Possible annexation has been considered by each of these intervening owners. It is understandable that each intervening owner would consider annexation only within the context of an annexation agreement identifying respective City and owner obligations.

4. Compatibility with Adjacent Land Uses. A key component of any planning area is the compatibility of its planned uses with established uses in the neighborhood. One purpose of this workshop is to open a dialogue with adjacent owners to assess the compatibility of the proposed low density residential uses.

5. Municipal Services. The City's Fire department presently serves this area, which falls within the Sycamore Fire Protection District. Assuming no municipal water or sanitary treatment services are required, the potential for additional city services to the Fowler Farm alone is limited to occasional police patrols. Until the use of the un-annexed properties intervening between the Fowler Farm and the Villagio Estates P.U.D. is determined, the extent of additional police protection, road repair, snow plowing, etc, is unknown.

The City Manager recommends Plan Commission support for the drafting of a "Northwest Sub Area Plan" to be presented at an upcoming Commission meeting. Once the land use, zoning, utility, public service and related issues are generally addressed, the particular interest of Dr. Glasgow and nearby property owners in annexation under unique "rural residential" standards can be more objectively considered.