

STEPHENSON COUNTY BOARD MEETING
Wednesday April 11, 2007

DRAFT



The Stephenson County Board met in the Courthouse on Wednesday April 11, 2007. Chairman Blum called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Ms. S. Hooper gave the Invocation and Ms. Devine led the Pledge of Allegiance. The Clerk called the roll. Members present; Samuel Newton, Bennie Brown, Charles Hilton, Jeffrey Mikkelsen, Debra Devine, Sheila Hooper, Todd McKenna, William Hadley, John Blum, Donald Parker, Vicki Hooper, James Graham, Linda Dotson, Jim Kuhlmeier, Sandra Kubatzke, Andrew Kuhlemeier, Brenda Boynton, Michael Boomgarden and Salvatore Detente. Members absent: Alvin Wire, Lowell Bicker and Forrest Senn. Nineteen members present. Three members absent.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Chairman Blum requested the Agenda be amended to place the Zoning, Pecatonica Prairie Path, Emergency Management and 9-1-1 reports to follow the State of the County Address. Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to approve the agenda as amended. Second by Mr. McKenna. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve the agenda as amended carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF THE MARCH 14, 2007 MINUTES

Ms. V. Hooper made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 14, 2007 meeting as received. Second by Ms. Kubatzke. Mr. A. Kuhlemeier made a motion to amend the minutes to the Planning & Development report stating Mr. Déte's motion was to "table until everyone had a chance to review all documents". Second by Mr. Déte. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion to amend the minutes. Motion to amend the minutes of the March 14, 2007 meeting carried unanimously. The Chair called for a motion to approve the minutes of the March 14, 2007 meeting as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

CLAIMS ON THE CLERK'S DESK

Ms. V. Hooper made a motion that all claims on the Clerk's desk be referred to the proper committees without reading. Second by Mr. Detente. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion that all claims on the Clerk's desk be referred to the proper committees without reading carried unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS

The Clerk reported the following communications had been received.

Public Defender Report for March 2007; 277 New Cases, 292 Cases Closed and Income of \$3,171.50

Ms. V. Hooper made a motion to approve all communications and place on file. Second by Mr. McKenna. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve all communications and place on file carried unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

Resolutions #07-04-1444 & #07-04-1445 for sale of Surplus Property. Mr. Graham made a motion to approve the Resolutions to transfer title for the sale of surplus properties. Second by Mr. Boomgarden. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve the Resolutions to transfer title for the sale of surplus properties carried unanimously.

STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

Chairman Blum presented his fifth annual State of the County Address as Chairman. He spoke on his perspective of the challenges and opportunities the County is facing. (See attachment)

Noted arrival of Mr. Wire and Mr. Senn

ZONING REPORT

Residential Special Use #07-04; request by Jeffrey Weiner. The Zoning Board of Appeals has recommended the request be granted by a vote of 4-1. Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to approve the Residential Special Use

request. Second by Mr. McKenna. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion carried unanimously. Residential Special Use #07-04 was granted.

Residential Special Use #07-05; request by Susan Kerley. The Zoning Board of Appeals has recommended the request be granted by a vote of 5-0. Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to approve the Residential Special Use request. Second by Mr. Detente. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion carried unanimously. The Residential Special Use #07-05 was granted.

Residential Special Use #07-06; request by Scott Johnson. The Zoning Board of Appeals has recommended the request be granted by a vote of 5-0. Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to approve the Residential Special Use request. Second by Ms. Dotson. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion carried unanimously. The Residential Special Use #07-06 was granted.

Residential Special Use #07-07; request by Ruth Carus. The Zoning Board of Appeals has unanimously recommended the request be denied. Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to approve the Residential Special Use request. Second by Mr. J. Kuhlmeier. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion failed unanimously. The Residential Special Use #07-07 was denied.

Residential Special Use #07-08; request by Billy Goeke. The Zoning Board of Appeals has recommended the request be granted by a vote of 5-0. Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to approve the Residential Special Use request. Second by Mr. J. Kuhlmeier. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion carried unanimously. The Residential Special Use #07-08 was granted.

Resolution #04-04-1438; Final Plat Approval #07-01 for Timber Ridge Estates Subdivision. The Planning Commission has recommended approval by a vote of 5-0. Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to approve Resolution #07-01 for final Plat approval for Timber Ridge Estates Subdivision. Second by Ms. Dotson. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion carried unanimously. The Final Plat for Timber Ridge Estates was approved.

PECATONICA PRAIRIE PATH/JANE ADDAMS TRAIL

Mr. Groves presented Resolution #07-04-1436 adopting a three-year operating budget for the Jane Addams Trail. Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to approve the Resolution. Second by Mr. Newton. The Chair called for a roll call vote on the motion. Members voting aye: Newton, Brown, Hilton, Mikkelsen, Devine, S. Hooper, McKenna, Hadley, Parker, V. Hooper, Graham, Wire, Dotson, J. Kuhlmeier, Kubatzke, A. Kuhlemeier, Boynton, Boomgarden, Détente, Senn and Blum. Motion carried unanimously. Resolution #07-04-1436 was approved.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT REPORT

Mr. Groves distributed the 2nd Quarter FY 2006-2007 report.

9-1-1 REPORT

Mr. Groves distributed minutes from the April Meeting along with the monthly stats and status report.

SHERIFF'S REPORT

Chief Deputy Eikstadt reported two Tele-communicators and one Road Deputy have resigned.

HIGHWAY REPORT

Mr. Isbell presented the following Resolutions;

HD 07-14; Agreement with IDOT, for the installation of (4) Solar Powered Flashers and Engineering costs at the intersection of Sabin Church and Bolton Roads not to exceed \$8,000. Mr. J. Kuhlmeier made a motion to approve HD07-14. Second by Ms. Kubatzke. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve HD07-14 carried unanimously.

HD 07-15; Approving low bids for Township Seal Coat & Bituminous Patching Mixture. Mr. J. Kuhlmeier made a motion to approve HD07-15. Second by Mr. A. Kuhlemeier. The Chair called for a roll call vote on the motion. Members voting aye: Newton, Brown, Hilton, Mikkelsen, Devine, S. Hooper, McKenna, Hadley, Parker, V. Hooper, Graham, Wire, Dotson, J. Kuhlmeier, Kubatzke, A. Kuhlemeier, Boynton, Boomgarden, Détente, Senn and Blum. Motion carried unanimously. Motion to approve HD07-15 carried unanimously.

HD 07-16; Approving low bid for (2) One-Ton Dump Trucks. Mr. J. Kuhlmeier made a motion to approve HD07-16. Second by Ms. Kubatzke. Discussion followed on the difference in cost between the State Bid and Local Bid purchase. The Chair called for a roll call vote on the motion. Members voting aye: Newton, Brown, Hilton, Mikkelsen, Devine, S. Hooper, McKenna, Hadley, Parker, V. Hooper, Graham, Wire, Dotson, J.

Kuhlmeier, Kubatzke, A. Kuhlemeier, Boynton, Boomgarden, Détente, Senn and Blum. Motion carried unanimously. Motion to approve HD07-16 carried unanimously.

HD 07-17; Approving low bid for Commercial Zero Turn Mower. Mr. J. Kuhlmeier made a motion to approve HD07-17. Second by Kubatzke. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve HD07-17 carried unanimously.

HD 07-18; Approving low bids Rock Run Township Seal Coat & Bituminous Patching Mixture. Mr. J. Kuhlmeier made a motion to approve HD07-17. Second by Mr. McKenna. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve HD07-17 carried unanimously.

Mr. Isbell reported on IDOT's plan to close the west intersection at Salem Road and Highway 20, east of Lena. The Lena Street Project should begin the first part of May. Mr. Isbell will have further information at next month's Board Meeting.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT REPORT

Mr. Beintema distributed the Animal Control Report, Food Scores for the month of March, and a handout on the Well Woman Pink Ribbon Campaign. He reported radon kits are now available at the Health Department. The Department will begin mosquito testing in late May. The Health Department conducted an exercise to test their medication dispensing site in Dakota on March 27th at the Grade School. They had 24 volunteers and 199 people participate.

NURSING CENTER REPORT

No Report

PROBATION DEPARTMENT REPORT

Mr. Pauley reported on the Probation Department Statistics for the Month of March.

STATE'S ATTORNEY REPORT

State's Attorney Vogt reported the new Witness Coordinator has introduced some new ideas. She just finished the quarterly report for the State. The Office is applying for a Witness Coordinator grant.

PROCLAMATION; NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK

Stephenson County Victim/Witness Program is joining forces with service programs, criminal justice officials, and concerned citizens throughout Stephenson County and America to raise awareness of victims' rights and observe National Crime Victim's Rights Week. Ms. S. Hooper made a motion to concur with the Proclamation. Second by Mr. Brown. The Chair called for a voice vote. Motion carried unanimously. April 22-28, 2007 was proclaimed National Crime Victim's Rights Week in Stephenson County.

APPOINTMENTS

Chairman Blum recommended the following reappointments to the Fire Protection Districts:

- Reappoint William Scheider to Cedarville Fire Protection District
- Reappoint James White to Dakota Fire Protection District
- Reappoint Stephen Kroeger to Freeport Rural Fire Protection District
- Reappoint Jack Ross to German Valley Fire Protection District
- Reappoint James Raders to Lena Fire Protection District
- Reappoint Kevin Finkenbinder to Orangeville Fire Protection District
- Reappoint Charles A. Laible to Rock City Fire Protection District
- Reappoint John Ammon to Winslow Fire Protection District

Ms. V. Hooper made a motion to approve the Appointments. Second by Mr. McKenna. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve the Appointments to the Fire Districts carried unanimously.

Action Items from Standing Committees

Finance

Mr. Graham reported the grant for a Veteran's Shelter has been delayed for further information on the process. Mr. Graham reported the NICAA Grant for Mobility & Accessibility Rehab has been delayed until next month.

Public Property & Safety

Mr. Boomgarden presented Ordinance #007-04-1446; for the Fireworks Permit Fee which was increased by Board action at last month's meeting. Mr. Boomgarden made a motion to approve the Ordinance. Second by Senn. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve Ordinance #007-04-1446 carried unanimously.

Administration

Proclamation; May 3, 2007 as the National Day of Prayer in Stephenson County. Ms. Dotson addressed the Board reporting on the scheduled events. Ms. S. Hooper made a motion to concur with the Proclamation. Second by Ms. Dotson. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion carried unanimously. May 3, 2007 was proclaimed as the National Day of Prayer in Stephenson County.

Ms. S. Hooper presented the following Raffles with all fees paid and bonding in order;

- 1402 Freeport Moose Family Center #162, Manager Lynn Folgate
- 1403 VOICES – Women of Excellence, Manager Michelle Stubbe
- 1404 Pearl City SNO Pearls, Manager Steve Simler
- 1405 Lena American Legion-Home Town Hero's, Manager Steve Neuschwander
- 1406 Orangeville Volunteer Firemen, Manager Scott J Setterstrom
- 1407 Freeport Moose Family Center #162, Manager Kenneth A. Kostenbader, Sr

Ms. S. Hooper made a motion to approve the Raffle Applications. Second by Ms. V. Hooper. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve the Raffle Applications carried unanimously.

Court Services

Ms. V. Hooper reported the Millionaires' Club has requested \$1,000 for supplies and food. Mr. Hilton asked permission to abstain from discussion and voting on this issue due to personal conflict. Mr. Graham made a motion to grant permission for Mr. Hilton to abstain. Second by Ms. V. Hooper. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion carried unanimously. The Millionaire's Club teaches young people, ranging in age from 5 to 17 years. Their programs include lessons on the principles of positive self-esteem, self-image, responsibility, manners, etiquette, good health and money management. The money would be paid from Youth Diversion Fee revenue. Ms. V. Hooper made a motion to approve the request. Second by Mr. Brown. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve the request from the Millionaires' Club carried unanimously.

Planning & Development

Resolution #07-04-1437; accepting a \$265,000 Grant from the Illinois Housing Development Authority for Small Rental Properties Program. Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to approve the Resolution. Second by Mr. McKenna. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve the Small Rental Properties Grant Resolution carried unanimously.

Intergovernmental Agreement with IHDA to issue revenue bonds for financing and purchasing mortgage loans for single family residences for low and moderate income persons. Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to approve the Intergovernmental Agreement. Second by Mr. McKenna. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve the Intergovernmental Agreement for the IHDA Home Buyer Program carried unanimously.

Information Items from Standing Committees

Finance: Mr. Graham reported Stephenson County had the highest number of attendees, at the UCCI Legislative Conference. He announced the Finance Committee and the Nursing Center Committee would be having a joint meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday April 16, 2007.

Administration: Ms. S. Hooper reported her Committee has reviewed the County Board Code of Ethics and Ethical Decisions. She stressed the County Board's responsibility to review and eliminate incorrect or unnecessary items from the County Code Book.

Nursing Center: Ms. Kubatzke announced that Ms. Gravenstein has recently been appointed to the National Nursing Home Accreditation Review Board.

CLAIMS

Finance & Procurement	\$	693,217.35
Administration	\$	31,126.07
Public Works	\$	243,113.03
Nursing Center	\$	432,491.17
Public Property	\$	35,318.44
Court Services	\$	22,309.20

Public Safety	\$	46,574.05
Planning & Development	\$	8,957.47
9-1-1	\$	15,821.20

Mr. Graham made a motion to approve the Claims as presented. Second by Mr. Detente. The Chair called for a roll call vote on the motion. Members voting aye: Newton, Brown, Hilton, Mikkelsen, Devine, S. Hooper, McKenna, Hadley, Parker, V. Hooper, Graham, Wire, Dotson, J. Kuhlmeier, Kubatzke, A. Kuhlemeier, Boynton, Boomgarden, D tente, Senn and Blum. Motion to approve the Claims as presented carried unanimously.

Mileage & Per Diems – *Subject to review by Finance Chairman*

Bicker 0 days, 0 miles-Blum 9 days, 0 miles-Boomgarden 4 days, 64 miles-Boynton 3 days, 35 miles-Brown 3 days, 8 miles-Detente 4 days, 50 miles-Devine 3 days, 10 miles-Dotson 3 days, 109 miles- Graham 4 days, 442 miles-Hadley 3 days, 14 miles- Hilton 3 days, 6 miles-S Hooper 3 days, 6 miles-V Hooper 5 days, 10 miles-Kubatzke 4 days, 135 miles-A Kuhlemeier 3 days, 94 miles-J Kuhlmeier 5 days, 118 miles-McKenna 3 days, 12 miles-Mikkelsen 4 days, 8 miles-Newton 3 days, 6 miles-Parker 4 days, 16 miles-Senn 3 days, 42 miles-Wire 4 days, 638 miles. Mr. Graham made a motion to approve the mileage and per diems. Second by Mr. A. Kuhlemeier. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to approve the mileage and per diems carried unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE

None

EXECUTIVE SESSION

None

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Mikkelsen made a motion to adjourn until 6:30 p.m. Wednesday May 9, 2007. Second by Mr. Senn. The Chair called for a voice vote on the motion. Motion to adjourn until 6:30 p.m. Wednesday May 9, 2007 carried unanimously at 8:42 p.m.

Mr. McKenna will lead the Pledge and Mr. Hadley will be responsible for the Invocation at the May Meeting

State of the County Address
April 11, 2007

Members of the Stephenson County Board, Elected Officials, Staff, and especially the citizens of Stephenson County, I am again honored to stand before you and present a summary of the challenges and opportunities we face in this 170th year of our history as a County.

This is my fifth annual address to you and serves as a milepost in our efforts as we strive to forge new opportunities for our citizens.

I would like to first commend this Board for working consistently, democratically, and with a continuous view toward the future. We consist of twenty-two different viewpoints and a diverse collection of cultural and life experiences. Our job is to represent all of the people in our county and make decisions in a manner that is fair, ethical, balanced, and informed. There is no room in this representative body for individual agendas and certainly no personal biases that would prevent our collective majority from implementing decisions for the good of all the people of Stephenson County.

I would next like to commend the elected and appointed department heads for their efforts and leadership in the consistent performance of your constitutional duties and in the delivery of mandated services to the people of Stephenson County.

And finally, I would like to express my appreciation to the employees of Stephenson County that work everyday to meet the needs of the citizens that come to us for service, support, and information.

This last year has been very active and we have experienced a great deal of progress toward the goals of a stronger economy and increasing opportunities for our citizens. We also recognize that challenges to our future growth and success still remain and new ones will continue to be identified. These challenges need to be dealt with as they come, in a timely fashion, and with a collective resolve established through mutual trust with a combined energy and focus. As Abraham Lincoln said, "You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."

The operations of County government are becoming more complex everyday. Interrelated issues are numerous and require a great deal of effort to maintain priorities, perspective, and performance. The time for talk is getting shorter and shorter while the need for action is becoming more and more important. The sign on the door to opportunity reads PUSH, and push we will do.

Back in 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt said during his inaugural address that, ".....our greatest primary task is to put people to work. The task can be helped by definite efforts to raise the values of agricultural products." This strategy is even more important today.

The local growth of value-added agriculture remains a strong catalyst to attract new investment and new jobs while giving our local farmer more control over the significant cost and risk involved in raising livestock or growing crops.

The growth of the ethanol and biodiesel industry alone has added more than \$150 million of new investment in our county and has added new markets for our corn and beans.

This momentum is building and will snowball into significant new investment and new jobs as we control more agricultural value here at home. These are investments and jobs that cannot ever be exported.

Our region is among the leaders in the State at the production of corn, beans, cattle, dairy, and swine. Local opportunities for processing these products are huge and would create more job opportunities. Some of the current businesses we have that are involved in this value-added effort are Berner Foods, Pearl Valley Eggs, Torkelsen Cheese, Kolb-Lena Cheese, Furst-McNess, Kent Cheese, Adkins Energy, and Lena-Maid Meats. Our efforts to add value to agricultural products must be maintained.

One of the largest economic development efforts ever undertaken by Stephenson County is the new Economic Development Project Area we call Mill Race Crossing.

We are about (14) months into the development process and have made some significant progress.

We have purchased (142) acres of land within Mill Race Crossing and have begun the development of an industrial park.

This park will have excellent access to US Route 20 and the Canadian National railroad. The park will be serviced with water and sewer along with its own internal road system. The park has been platted and zoned for manufacturing development and has enterprise zone benefits available.

The park is adjacent to one of the biggest manufacturing plants in NW Illinois, Titan Tire.

Stephenson County has arranged approximately \$6 million to finance the initial development with returns anticipated from the sale of developed land, property tax increment from new investment, new sales tax revenues, water and sewer fees, enterprise zone fees, and new jobs for our local economy.

We have made a great deal of progress in receiving grant funding for Mill Race Crossing. Congressman Manzullo is working to reaffirm a grant from HUD in the amount of \$500,000 to assist with our infrastructure costs. We have reached the last phase of securing a \$1.5 million EDA grant and, just a few days ago, we received news from the EDA that they want to raise the amount of this funding to \$1.725 million.

This indicates the strength of our project in the eyes of the federal government. We are entering the negotiating phase of securing a \$1.1 million grant from IDOT to help pay for the new railroad development. This is \$3.3 million of very welcome funding that will significantly reduce the initial financial burden of developing the new park.

I would challenge any county of our size to match the degree of success we have had at establishing and building a new industrial complex within an environment filled with so many challenges and sometimes mortared with negativity. I believe it was Jack Welch that said, "Successful leaders see the opportunities in every difficulty rather than the difficulty in every opportunity."

The first new resident of the Mill Race Park will be Blackhawk Biofuels, LLC. This homegrown company will soon begin building a \$60 million, 30 million gallon biodiesel production plant. This project will take about (18) months to complete and will directly employ about (26) people.

The redevelopment agreement has been approved and we are in the process of closing the purchase on the land and the issuance of the building permits.

It is phenomenal to have such a complex project break ground in less than (15) months from the time we were able to legally establish the development area.

We had initially planned that Freeport Farms would be the first project to break ground in Mill Race Crossing. This project has different complexities and is married to a number of market forces including the price of corn, the availability of hogs, industry competition, and the demands of some very large international customers. The decision to build any project within Mill Race Crossing can only be made by a private business. Absent that decision, we would be placed in a position of negotiating with ourselves. Freeport Farms has not made that

decision and any negotiations with them cannot, and will not, resume until they decide to move forward. Any continued local speculation concerning this particular project is premature, unwarranted, unfair, and unhealthy at this point in time.

Other opportunities are growing for Mill Race Crossing. We have had serious discussions with companies that wish to build more than 1.2 million square feet of new manufacturing space.

We have had discussions with businesses that want to build new facilities along and near the US 20 interchange. We sit on a great deal of potential and fully intend to smartly develop it.

A second strategy for economic development is renewable energy. I have already discussed the presence of ethanol and biodiesel production in Stephenson County. In addition, we have seen some significant interest in wind energy development.

This Board approved a wind energy ordinance a few years ago along with the standards of development. This action, in effect, has designated wind energy as a permitted use within the agricultural district. Pursuant to this ordinance and standards, we have approved the development of a wind farm in Lancaster Township and another near Waddams Grove. Subsequent to the approval of these wind developments lawsuits were filed with the intent of stopping them.

We have not yet had an opportunity to legally respond to these suits, but I assure you that we are preparing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and intensive response in order to deal with these suits as soon as possible and in the best interest of the entire county.

Wind energy offers a number of direct and indirect benefits to our county.

Directly, we can become a producer of a very clean, efficient, and renewable electric energy thereby reducing our dependence on foreign oil as well as reducing damaging gas emissions into our atmosphere. We would gain significant construction investment followed by a gain in property tax revenue.

The indirect benefits far outweigh the direct benefits. We are having discussions with manufacturing companies that build the components for the wind industry. If these companies choose to locate in our area we will gain significant manufacturing jobs along with more new investment and further expansion of our tax base. This area of development will require a vision for the future that must balance all concerns against the benefits. As Lincoln once said, "No issue is wholly good or wholly bad. It is our responsibility to determine which is more good than bad."

There are other renewable energy areas that have potential in our region. The potential of energy storage is rapidly growing especially in conjunction with wind power. We see the development of methane digesters as a benefit to farmers. Furthermore, there is an active project where a local company plans to recover enough methane from the local landfill to power their boilers and ovens. As I have been told, "We sit on the Kuwaiti oil fields of renewable energy" Here in NW Illinois.

We continue to develop tools for enhanced economic development. One of these is the Enterprise Zone. Recently, we have been able to jointly implement a new policy whereby we can collect a fee for providing the benefits of the enterprise zone. This revenue will give us a financial resource to more fully fund economic development activities, especially through the Freeport Area Economic Development Foundation. Another tool is TIF Districts.

There have been some significant successes around the county on a number of TIF Districts including Pearl City, Orangeville, and Davis.

This development has helped stop the erosion of population and investment in these communities.

The Brownfield Grant program has been yielding some significant results. These grant funds have begun to help a number of contaminated sites begin a return to economic viability. These sites include Hanks Town Pump and the former dairy in Pearl City, the former rail depot in Lena, an abandoned complex of quarries just north of Lena, a former park and mortuary on Adams Avenue in Freeport, an abandoned gas station in Freeport, some properties adjacent to the former Rawleigh complex, and others. These grant funds have been applied in a number of jurisdictions and in cooperation with other units of government.

Over the last three years we have invested more than \$15 million in the First-Time Homebuyer program.

These funds have helped families become educated in the requirements of owning and maintaining a home as well as providing low-cost tools to be able to finance a home mortgage.

These funds, coupled with a number of grant funds designed to help fund necessary repairs, has given us a start at improving the quality and quantity of housing stock available to our residents.

It has been a little more than a year since Titan Tire purchased the local production facility from Goodyear. I anticipate that there will be some significant and positive announcements from their management very soon concerning new growth potential at the local plant. This new growth will require a continued cooperative atmosphere between labor and management.

It is no secret that our State continues to wrestle with many serious issues that affect our future. There have been more than 5000 Bills introduced in the legislature and it is a full-time job determining which may have a negative affect on our county. There are proposals that can affect our electric rates. There is a proposal to implement a gross receipts tax to fund a comprehensive medical insurance program. There is a proposal to require an annual septic tank inspection with a \$500 fee. There is a proposal to raise the age of a minor from 17 to 18. There is a proposed \$5 per pack cigarette tax. But, nowhere is there a viable capital spending plan to maintain our roads, bridges, and schools.

The Stephenson Nursing Center continues to operate among a complicated set of challenges, some of which are caused by these funding challenges at the State level. I believe the responsibility for dealing with these challenges belongs to the Administration and Management Staff of the facility. I believe the responsibility for dealing with these challenges belongs to the Nursing Center Committee. I believe the responsibility for dealing with these challenges belongs to this County Board. In short, it is all our responsibility.

I believe the challenges facing the nursing home have never been greater and, as I have noted in each of my annual reports, it is time to further coordinate our efforts and make the decisions necessary to insure the continued, quality care for our senior citizens.

The needs of our court system have grown to a point where this courthouse cannot fully accommodate those needs.

I am planning to bring a proposal to this Board by June 1 that will deal with these space concerns. This proposal will include a plan for increased space as well as a means to efficiently pay for it.

Last month we began assembling a committee to look at ways to enhance the Black Hawk Monument from a historical and cultural perspective. This committee of volunteers has met twice now and is organizing efforts to redesign, expand, market, and fund upgrades to this significant location in Stephenson County. Through the efforts of George Buss, we have been contacted by the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission out of New York indicating that they are interested in visiting the site and determining how they may support our efforts.

This project, if done right, will define our local historical legacy in the development of these United States for all to see and experience.

We have begun an effort with the City of Freeport to develop a regional transit system. There is a defined process provided by the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Transportation or ICCT.

The process is intended to mobilize the stakeholders, determine the needs, determine the available transportation assets, and construct a transportation system tailored specifically to the needs. If this process is followed it will prepare us to secure the funding needed.

This process could take from (18) months to (3) years to complete and the outcomes will only be as good as the inputs. At this time the City of Freeport is taking the lead, and it is our job to provide input and push the process along.

In late March of 2007 a feasibility study was completed by AMTRAK that is a first step toward reestablishing passenger train traffic to NW Illinois. Three possible routes were evaluated. None of the three differ with regard to the route through Stephenson County, but differ tremendously as they exit Chicago. There will be a number of challenges to make any route capable of 70 mph passenger train traffic. New signaling, parallel tracks, replacement of segmented track with continuous rail, and from a local perspective, passenger stations.

The significant investment needed by AMTRAK and IDOT will need to be offset with rider-ship. We will need to sustain an adequate level of passengers on the route or it will be withdrawn. We will work very cooperatively with all of our regional partners to insure this service comes back and is maintained.

I would like to commend the Public Works Department for coordinating a project to repair Lena St. through the Village of Lena. This well-traveled road has been in need of a comprehensive rebuild for quite awhile. I know the citizens of Lena are very happy about it.

I am working on some preliminary discussion with the IDNR to begin securing some funding that could help rebuild Lake Rd. from the Village of Lena to IL 73.

More than 285,000 people visit Lake Le Aqua Na every year and the road is in need of serious upgrades. It is hoped that IDNR can allocate a large portion of the necessary funding and, if IDOT can eventually supplement these funds, the pressure on local road funds can be minimized. I will need the support of the County Engineer as we work through this opportunity.

We continue to maintain the former highway garage on South St. An effort to transform it into a new City fire station did not happen. Efforts to sell the building outright are complicated by the lack of Zoning. Currently, the building is providing a safe location for equipment owned by regional emergency management agencies.

If we sold the building we would need to find a secure and appropriately located facility to house this very expensive equipment. I would like to request that our Emergency Management Department work with the Public Works Department to produce a plan whereby the Public Works Department can divest themselves of the old highway garage, reallocate current property to improve public works efficiencies, and insure an appropriate, long-term location for the emergency services equipment. I would like this plan developed for a presentation to the respective committees by July 1, 2007.

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, "If you want one year of prosperity – grow grain. If you want ten years of prosperity – grow a tree. If you want one hundred years of prosperity – grow people."

As you know, there is rising concern in our communities for the welfare of our youth. We have seen what the cost of juvenile detention and placement has been on our budgets, but more importantly we see the negative aspects relating to the family and the future of each child.

I would like to complement the work of the Juvenile Justice Commission and all of the agencies such as the Boys and Girls Club, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the Martin Luther King Center as they reach out to our children and families. In addition, I would like to commend the work of Youth Becoming Leaders and the Millionaires Club as they work to help one young person at a time. I plan to work to find additional sources of revenue for these organizations to continue their work. The men and women that work and volunteer to help our children are true mentors. Mentors don't usually make very much money, but I can tell you what they do make. Mentors can make forgotten people feel cherished, confused people feel understood, broken people feel whole. They make more than most people will ever make – they make a difference.

This is my fifth year of service to you as the Board Chairman. I believe I have served you with a great deal of energy and consistency. The job takes on many shapes and forms as issues and challenges confront our small unit of local government.

Above all, I have always understood that any authority I exercise comes from the County Board.

The Chairman of the County Board is required to implement the majority opinion of the County Board. There is no legitimate way that the Board Chairman can carry an agenda developed by the minority opinion. The majority of our work is done at the committee level. By the time an issue reaches the full Board it has undergone significant staff and committee review.

As you all know, the Board Chairman serves on each committee as an ex-officio member and has no vote. You should also notice that when issues are voted on by roll call at the Board level I am called on last. This is to insure the Board itself has the say in deciding matters before it.

The Chairman has duties and responsibilities that are noted throughout the State Constitution, Illinois Statutes, and local ordinances. Some of these include: Registered Agent for the Nursing Center, County Liquor Commissioner, Chief Elected Official for the Local Workforce Investment Board, designated head of the public body for issues regarding the Open Meetings and Freedom of Information Acts, Chair of the Public Aid Appeal Board, responsible for declaring an emergency on behalf of any municipality and the county to the State and Federal governments, signs all legal documents on behalf of the County, appoints replacements to vacancies in county-wide offices, appoints members to all committees and commissions required by law, represents the County on Boards and Commissions required by law, and many others.

Personally, this job has taken a great deal of time away from my family, which has now grown to include two grandsons, Caden and Carson. I will certainly continue to provide the time and dedication necessary to meet my elected obligations and my responsibilities to this Board and to the citizens of Stephenson County. I believe I can serve as long as you and the voters of my District have trust in my performance, but I would like you to begin considering whom among you, present or future, may have the time, talent, trust, energy, and dedication to eventually step forward and serve you as your next Chairman. It may be a number of years into the future, but we must prepare in advance so that we can maintain the continuity necessary to complete the many long-term projects we have set in motion today.

We are individually fragile. Last year, at this time, Mr. Bob Miller was here and since then he lost his life to cancer. I miss him, but in turn welcome Mr. Hilton to carry on. We have had 170 years of continued service by citizens who stepped forward as elected representatives in this township form of government. We have an opportunity to make a collective contribution to this legacy.

We all make sacrifices to serve. It is true that, "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."

Thanks to all of you for your continued service to the people of Stephenson County.