

**DEKALB COUNTY JOINT PUBLIC HEARING
OF THE DEKALB COUNTY COMMISSIONERS AND COUNCIL
March 1, 2021**

The following Commissioners were present:

President William L. Hartman
Vice President Michael Watson
Vice President Todd Sanderson

The following Council Members were present:

President Richard Ring
Vice President William VanWye
Member Eldonna King
Member Robert E. Krafft
Member David Yarde
Member Amy Demske
Member Amy Prosser

Others present:

Auditor Jan Bauman
Attorney James P. McCanna
Attorney Donald J Stuckey

President Ring opened the public hearing at 9:00 a.m.

This public hearing was advertised in advance of the meeting in the Star newspaper and in accordance with statute.

Commissioner Todd Sanderson spoke first. He went over the appraisals the Commissioners had done for the property they want to sell and the property they would like to purchase. The Commissioners would like to sell 306 East Ensley Avenue in Auburn. The two parcels involved are 18-06-32-401-003 and 18-06-32-401-004. This is where the Highway administrative office and garage buildings are located. The two required appraisals came in at \$310,000 and \$300,000—an average of \$305,000. The Highway Department is asking to have 12 months to vacate. There is a lot of equipment to move, and much preparation needs to be done at the new site.

The Commissioners would like to purchase 3942 US Highway 6, Waterloo (the “Henderson” property). The 5 parcels involved are: 05-06-03-426-002, 05-06-03-426-007, 05-06-03-426-001, 05-06-03-426-003, and 05-06-03-402-001. The two required appraisals came in at \$1,100,000 and \$1,046,000—an average of \$1,073,000. Mr. Henderson has agreed to sell it for that amount. He has also requested one year to relocate, and maybe sooner if he purchases the current Highway Department property. He has agreed to allow access on his property to the County to build additional buildings that are needed. Commissioner Hartman will be meeting with the Waterloo Town Manager to make sure the County would be allowed to build on the site. Mr. Henderson is going to provide the County with Phase I documentation to show that the site is not contaminated.

The Commissioners believe relocating the Highway Department can be done out of pocket without borrowing any money if Council allows the proceeds from the sale of other properties to be allocated toward the monetary needs of the Highway relocation.

The Henderson property has an 11,600 square foot building on it which has 2,300 square feet of office space as part of the building. A separate service shop will need to be constructed as well as cold storage and a larger salt barn. The current salt barn is too small. All of the salt needs to be used before the Highway can receive a new load. This is problematic because it can take up to 8 days to get a load of salt delivered. The salt barn is also in a flood plain currently.

Councilman VanWye asked if the current Highway property's fuel leak problem has been fixed. Commissioner Sanderson said he believes so and that Ben Parker can speak better to that. President Ring asked if the County is going to be responsible for maintaining the monitoring equipment on the leak that was cleaned up? Most likely yes, but that will be a question that needs to be asked. Commissioner Hartman added that the leak has been remediated.

There was more discussion about the current salt barn and the salt barn that will be constructed.

Councilman Krafft asked about the size of the Henderson property and said it would have room to store excess gravel that gets donated to the County at times. Commissioner Sanderson said the property is 16.2 acres. He also explained that the Army Corps of Engineers has a 75 foot right-of-way but where the Commissioners would be building is not in a flood plain. The current property on Ensley Avenue has approximately 5 acres, of which 3.6 are useable acres.

President Ring said he has had several calls from citizens asking why the County Farm property is not being utilized for the Highway Department. He explained that the advantage is there are buildings there that we can use. It has sewer, water, ingress and egress off a major road, and it is more central to the County than the County Farm. It is a more viable solution. Commissioner Sanderson added that if the County Farm property were the site, access onto State Road 8 would be difficult, so a road would need to be built for access to County Road 40. Councilman Krafft further stated that at the Waterloo location, neighbors are used to the large trucks. The area has other industry rather than being residential.

Councilman Yarde complimented the Commissioners that this project is revenue neutral. It is a good savings to the taxpayer by being able to do this out of pocket.

Council President Richard Ring asked if the public had any comments.

Lynn Reinhart of 4224 CR 71, Butler, chose to speak. He said he understands there comes a time when what we have becomes obsolete. With the low interest rates, it makes sense to want to do this now. Mr. Reinhart wanted to make it clear he is not against it but wanted to bring information to everyone's attention to help as they make a decision. He distributed documentation he had compiled so all could follow along.

Mr. Reinhart claimed a map he had shows the majority of the Henderson property lies in a flood hazard area. He believes well over 50% of the property is within a flood area. He also contended the County has a third appraisal. He showed that the total assessed value of the 15.91 acres is \$250,700. He remembered that the purchase price was going to be around \$1 million. The County Highway property is 1.932 acres with an assessed value of \$202,000. There are actually 4 parcels for a total assessed valuation of 417,600. This is less than what the appraisal came in at. The County already owns 280 acres, 1.5 miles of road frontage, and access from Potter Drive. There is less than a half mile difference than the Henderson property from the center of the County.

The Commissioners confirmed that they would want to sell all parcels associated with the current Highway location on Ensley Avenue. Commissioner Hartman responded by saying we can't have too much confidence in assessed valuations. Properties are only worth what they will sell for, which is why

appraisals are done. As far as the existing buildings on the Henderson property are concerned, the cost to replace those same buildings would be about \$900,000. The buildings are in excellent condition and will be there for many years. Getting trucks and equipment onto SR 8 from the County Farm property would be an accident waiting to happen. Taking the back way would cause the trucks to go through the City of Auburn which is not something the City wants. And, on the County Farm they would have to start from scratch with new buildings. The Henderson property is probably best.

Councilman VanWye asked if the Commissioners were aware of the flood zone on the Henderson property. Commissioner Sanderson said that the property is in a flood “fringe,” which is not the same as a flood “plain.” Before they sign anything, they are confirming with the Town of Waterloo of their plans for the site to make sure there will be no issues. Commissioner Hartman added that Waterloo is very happy to have the Highway Department located there. The Highway can store aggregate in the flood fringe area no problem. The property has a well, sewer, gas, and good access in and out.

Has the property ever flooded? Commissioner Sanderson said he hasn’t seen it flooded, but he’s sure it has in the fringe area, especially with a 50 or 100-year rain. The ground where the new buildings are going to be constructed will have to be raised in places.

When asked, Attorney Stuckey confirmed that the Council did not need to act today—that they will vote after a purchase agreement is presented by the Commissioners. Today satisfies the public hearing requirement.

Mr. Reinhart was given the opportunity to speak more. He said the County Surveyor and Plan Commission director could help define what the flood “fringe” means. He questioned how much the existing buildings on the Henderson property are worth to the County. President Ring reminded everyone that all of the buildings even at the current location are in such bad shape that new buildings are going to have to be built anyway. Finally, Mr. Reinhart wondered what it means to our whole property tax system if we can’t accept our assessed valuations. He did mention one more time that he didn’t want the takeaway from his comments to be that he is opposed to the Highway Department relocating, and he thanked Council for allowing him to speak. Commissioner Hartman said every part of the Henderson property will be utilized.

There was discussion about the assessed values of properties.

Kevin Webb from 113 Matthew Cove, Auburn, came as a citizen and member of Auburn City Council. He is more interested in what the County plans to do with the current Highway Department property. The City owns property next to it. He doesn’t want to see the City be excluded from the purchase of the property. Mr. Webb is also concerned about the road located on the property. He doesn’t want to see that closed if a private entity purchases the property. Another property in that stretch could become landlocked if the road is closed. The Commissioners said that the property will be open to bids and will be sold to the high bidder which will be best for the County.

Attorney Stuckey said that Council can’t approve the sale until there is a purchase agreement. The Commissioners always have the authority to put something up for sale.

With no other comments from the public, President Ring closed the public hearing at 9:43 a.m.

DEKALB COUNTY COMMISSIONERS:

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Michael Watson, Vice President

Todd Sanderson, Vice President

ATTEST:

Jan Bauman
DeKalb County Auditor

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