

# NORTHWEST HERALD

Local News and Video for McHenry County, Illinois

## Towns will get their say

By REGAN FOSTER - [rfoster@nwherald.com](mailto:rfoster@nwherald.com)

WOODSTOCK – A group charged with charting McHenry County’s future growth and development has agreed to add a 15th chair to its round table.

A representative of the McHenry County Council of Governments will join the McHenry County Regional Planning Commission as a non-voting liaison, commission Vice Chair Dennis Dreher said.

That representative will join County Board member John Jung Jr., R-Woodstock, and 13 volunteer commissioners in development-based debate. The commission is on-track to have growth-management recommendations laid out within the next two years, Jung said.

“We invited [the council] to participate on advisory committees, we invited them to provide their own staff involvement where they thought it would be appropriate,” Dreher said. “We want them to be engaged, we want them to be informed, and, frankly, we want them to share information with us.”

Jay Nolan, Harvard mayor and vice president of the council of governments, said the council wanted to ensure that its voice was heard to help secure the integrity of its communities.

“We want to protect our cities, to have a voice in the main plan,” Nolan said. “We’re looking forward to working with them and making it as correct as it can possibly be.”

Getting input from all interests has been a key activity for the commission in recent months, Dreher said. The group met for the first time last November, in the wake of the March 2006 melt-down of the previous plan.

“We’re trying to build on the work of the 2020 plan commission, so we’re not rebuilding the wheel,” Dreher said. “But at the same time, we are reaching out very aggressively to various interests in the county.

“That was one of the reflections, I think, a lot of people would agree on: For various reasons, there may not have been as much interaction between the [2020] planning commission and outside entities.”

The 2020 Unified Plan took seven years and thousands of dollars in taxpayer-funded

research to complete, but McHenry County Board members batted it down after conservation advocates butted heads with real-estate developers and builders. The issue became the center of a political firestorm focused on how burgeoning communities should balance growth and open space.

The original 2020 plan, released in 2004, kept much of western McHenry County agricultural. But the County Board and staff members revamped the plan to recommend more commercial and large-lot residential development.

Harvard could have been drastically impacted by the growth limitations imposed by the original drafted plan, Nolan said.

“It could have been devastating for us,” Nolan said. “We need to protect our rights and our boundaries as well as any other community. We want to have some room for some controlled growth.”

Since the vote, county development proposals have been weighed against a land-use plan ratified in 1993.

Commission members made a presentation on progress at last week’s board meeting. Jung has said he would keep the board up-to-date on commission happenings as they unfold.

Certain commission committees – there are eight looking at topics such as agriculture, infrastructure, economic development and water resources – are nearly ready to put pen to paper, Jung said.

“Some of them are getting ready to start putting together ... the text of their information, anyway,” he said. “We’ve got a lot of diverse people. The thing they all said was, ‘We all want to see McHenry County stay McHenry County.’ ”

And Anna Bicanic Moeller, director of the council of governments, said her members were eager to help keep it that way.

“It’s important work,” she said. “It’s laying down the foundation for the next 15, 20 years and it’s important that all stake holders are represented.”

### **What it means**

The McHenry County Regional Planning Commission, the group charged with creating the 2030 land-use plan, is on-time to have the plan finalized within two years. The county Council of Governments has agreed to send a representative to commission meetings to act as a liaison and advisor.