

# NORTHWEST HERALD

*Local News and Video for McHenry County, Illinois*

## **New group seeks land plan**

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McHenry County has taken its first step toward replacing a land-use plan approved more than a decade ago and overcoming the debacle of the previous attempt.

The new 2030 Plan Commission met this month for the first time, embarking on a goal of creating a workable land-use plan in 18 to 24 months agreeable to developers and conservationists alike. County Board liaison John Jung, R-Woodstock, said the 13 voting members were a good cross-section of residents and their concerns.

“It seemed like there was a common thread – whether they lived here all of their lives or five years, they’re here because they like McHenry County, they like the quality of life, and they’d like to see it preserved,” Jung said.

Commission member Jim Coughlin, a Crystal Lake homebuilder and lifelong county resident, said his goal was to create a plan that addressed concerns of the developed eastern half of the county and the largely rural west.

“I absolutely believe that open space and development can coexist,” Coughlin said. “I think the County Board and their Planning and Development Committee have done an excellent job of creating a very diverse group to sit on this commission, and I look forward to working on it.”

Coexistence, or lack thereof, between pro-development and pro-environmental factions killed the 2020 plan this year after seven years of work.

The first draft of the 2020 plan, unveiled in September 2004, was hailed for essentially keeping the western half of the county agricultural, as well as forcing developers to annex and build closer to cities and their existing infrastructure. But developers said the plan was too strict and ignored property rights.

County Board members and staff members created a second version that was more growth-friendly. Conservationists and farmers called it a license for developers to sprawl. At an emotionally charged meeting spanning five hours in March, the County Board did not approve either plan, agreeing to go back to the plat map and start a 2030 plan.

The county still uses its 2010 plan, which it ratified in 1993. A Northwest Herald analysis in June showed that the board since 1995 has overruled the plan 78 percent of the time

when developers requested zoning changes.

The McHenry County Defenders, which lauded the first version and opposed the second, plans to watch the process with great interest, said program membership coordinator Lynn Rotunno.

“They basically rewrote the plan, especially the map, and opened up thousands of acres to development without county input. We want to avoid that this time,” Rotunno said.

The group will get input through Nancy Schietzelt, a member and retired Cary Junior High School teacher who was picked for the commission. She said groundwater conservation and open space would be her top priorities.

“I had a great desire to be able to give something back to the community,” Schietzelt said. “I felt it was an opportunity for me to help preserve some beauty and open spaces I feel we still have before it completely disappears.”

### **What it means**

The 2030 Plan Commission has met for the first time to create a 2030 land-use plan. The McHenry County Board wants the plan to be finished in 18 to 24 months. The proposed 2020 plan took seven years to develop, and both versions were rejected by the board this year.