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April 2, 2025

TO: Joe Gottemoller, Chairman – Administrative Services Committee
Administrative Services Committee Members
Michael Buehler, Chairman of the County Board

FROM: Peter B. Austin, County Administrator

RE: **County Administrator Self-Evaluation 2024/25**

Notes from Previous Evaluation

The employment agreement for the County Administrator calls for an annual written evaluation at the employment anniversary of each year (May). Last year, the 2023/24 evaluation process was like many evaluations that preceded it. The County Administrator prepared a self-evaluation in April 2024. Later in April of 2024, an evaluation survey was provided to County Board Members. Six County Board members completed the survey, and the results of the survey were presented to the County Administrator in May of 2024. The evaluation found there were no significant concerns with the performance of the County Administrator.

Accomplishments in the Past Year

The County Administrator put forth an initial list of goals to the Administrative Services Committee in May 2024 and the goals were accepted by the Committee in June 2024. The bullet points below note progress on these goals.

- County Administration was requested to revise the new **County Board member orientation program**. Staff revisited the past program with Pam Althoff and developed a new presentation. On November 21, Pam Althoff partnered with Brian Sager, Chairman Buehler, and staff to present an updated orientation program.
- Coordinating an update to the **County Board Rules** was an identified goal for County Administration. This was completed when several revisions to the County Board Rules were approved at the July 2024 County Board meeting. Additionally, a summer intern provided a review of board rules of the 12 largest Illinois counties and drafted a memo with considerations for the County Board the next time the board rules are reviewed.

- Work has continued on the **Drain Tile mapping project**. GIS continues to work with MCDOT and Planning & Development to get additional documents when they are available. A second presentation of the Interactive Drainage District Viewer was provided to the Farm Bureau on February 20, and it was received well.
- The **McHenry County GIS Pilot Program** is close to formalization. An intergovernmental agreement will be finalized by the Village of Wonder Lake in April and a similar agreement will also be approved by the City of Woodstock in April. The program will be a great service to communities – especially smaller communities that likely do not have GIS staff.
- The County and the Village of Algonquin entered into a design agreement for a **regional salt dome** to be constructed at the Algonquin Public Works Yard. This agreement calls for a 50/50 cost share with the Village. Williams Architects developed an initial concept design plan and cost estimate in December. On March 4, a revised plan was presented to the County and Village staff. A final design is anticipated at the end of May. Construction may begin before the end of 2025.
- In July, Metra’s consultant presented two final properties for **Woodstock Railyard** locations. The County worked with the consultant, HDR, to communicate with finalists so HDR received all the information needed for a final site recommendation. A public meeting for the Woodstock Yard Project was held on March 18 at the Woodstock Opera House and the preferred option was shared with the public along with updates on environmental studies, noise studies, traffic analysis, and yard design. The next step is Metra moving ahead with site acquisition.
- Alex Benitez started as the new **Chief County Assessor** in April of 2024 and Suzanne Ziebart was elevated to the **Director of Human Resources** in June. The County Administrator has worked closely with both in their new roles. Year-end evaluations for both new Department Heads were favorable and FY25 Workplans have been developed.
- The role of the County with **MCEDC** was reviewed and a new contract was developed. A new agreement with the MCEDC was entered into at the September County Board meeting.
- The County Administrator worked with the **MCEDC** Board in recruiting and acclimating a new Director. Mark Piekos started in June 2024. The MCEDC staff is now on County payroll and receiving County benefits. County Administration is in very regular communication with the MCEDC Director.
- The County Administrator was tasked with the job of assisting with professionalizing the **McHenry County Enterprise Zone** to ensure redundancy. With the MCEDC administering the Enterprise Zone, the entire MCEDC organization provides support and redundancy. The Enterprise zone had previously been administered by a single individual.

- The County Board asked the County Administrator to advance the **electric vehicle** infrastructure for the County fleet and consider hybrid vehicles as well. The Administration Building parking lot reconstruction plans went out to bid in January of 2025 and the contract was awarded in February. While considering the award, the County Board elected to install the conduit for electric cables that will run to a future site for EV charging stations, but the installation of electric cables and hardware will not be included with the parking lot project. This is likely all the progress that will be made toward electric vehicles in 2025, as EVs are still not available on government bids and remain generally more expensive than gas-powered vehicles.
- Four separate **union contracts** were completed in the past year. FOP III (Sheriff Civilians) was approved in June 2024. FOP II (Corrections) was approved in November 2024. FOP I (Deputies) was also approved in November 2024. AFSCME (Probation Officers) was approved by Chief Judge Feetterer in March of 2025.
- County Administration was asked to coordinate the development of a new four-year **Strategic Plan**. The County Board decided to continue the long-term Strategic Plan relationship with NIU's Center for Governmental Studies and a new contract with NIU was signed in late September. An employee survey was conducted in November and a workshop with Elected Officials and Department Heads took place in January. County Board member interviews took place, by district, in March and the day-long Strategic Planning Workshop is set for April 23 at the Old Courthouse.
- Elevating **Federal lobbying** efforts was a goal set for County Administration. The 2025 Legislative Program was adopted by the County Board in February 2025. Meetings to present Federal legislative requests took place with all four Representatives and both Senators in Washington D.C. on March 4. Given the looming government shutdown at that time, the tenor of the meetings shifted from being focused on the County's requests, to how the County can assist with communicating with residents during this time of transformation and uncertainty in Washington D.C.
- With a considerable amount of residential construction currently occurring in the County, the goal of developing an **improved population estimate** was established. The County partnered with CMAP to create an online development database web tool where municipalities can add information on new developments in real time. The formal launch of the tool will be in April 2025. It is expected that this development database will yield improved, mid-decade population estimates.
- The County Administrator was asked to examine **artificial intelligence** for County Government. A County staff task force met multiple times in 2024 and drafted McHenry County's first Artificial Intelligence Use Policy which was adopted by the County Board in November 2024. The task force continues to meet in 2025 to review AI tools. Recently, six

members of the task force were provided with licenses to Microsoft Co-Pilot and challenged to come back to provide presentations to the group in the coming months describing how they altered how they go about doing their job.

- The County Administrator worked with **Mental Health Board** leadership to develop new County Board communication and budgeting expectations. A new routine was developed with an annual presentation to the County Board in June, with quarterly reports included in the County Board agenda packet thereafter.
- County Administration built on the **municipal collaboration** efforts that have been underway for several years now. The Village Managers continue to meet regularly, and with the leadership of the County Coordinator, the municipal Planners have continued to meet regularly as well. In the past year, the EDGE (Economic Development Growth Experts) Group has been a collaborative effort that brings together municipal development professionals, local chambers of commerce, and workforce development partners. Additionally, the McHenry County Municipal Partnering Initiative coordinates joint purchasing opportunities for the County, municipalities, townships, and park districts. The group plans to expand its membership in 2025 to include school districts and other governmental agencies. A volume discount for police radios is currently being discussed with Motorola. R1 Regional Planning Council assisted several municipalities, including, Spring Grove, Wonder Lake, Harvard, and Marengo with grant writing assistance and research.
- County Administration was directed to monitor *Advance McHenry County* allocations to ensure expenditures will occur by December 2026. A resolution allocated the remaining Advance McHenry County funds into expense categories where their use is a certainty was approved by the County Board on December 17, 2024.
- A non-union **Compensation Study** was undertaken in early 2024 and County Administration was tasked to get the recommendations of the study adopted by the County Board. The County Board ultimately approved the recommendations effective July 1, 2024.
- The County Administrator was asked to work to increase **workforce housing** in the County. Following a year of meetings and study, the Workforce Housing Task Force presented their report at the July 2024 COW. It was then agreed that the MCCG Executive Committee would consider next steps, and this topic first appeared on the MCCG Executive Committee agenda in September of 2024, where it has remained since. In late October of 2024, McHenry County received a presentation from CMAP on CMAP's Housing Readiness pilot program. This program launched in March of 2025, McHenry County expects to be an early and active participant in this pilot program to explore housing opportunities and challenges.

- County Administration was directed to work with the State of Illinois and private fiber companies to move toward **county-wide access to broadband service**. The County has passed resolutions supporting Comcast and Frontier Communications’ applications to the State for the north and west sides of the County. The State Office of Broadband presented a count of unserved and underserved Broadband Serviceable Locations (homes, businesses, farms, etc.) by County, and McHenry County was number 5 on the top ten list with over 5,000 BEAD-eligible Broadband Serviceable Locations, and the single highest number of Community Anchor Institutions (hospitals, police stations, libraries, schools, city halls, etc.) in Illinois. Also, Illinois opened the first wave of BEAD funding, requiring 10% “hard to serve” areas. McHenry County can expect one or two applications in Wave 1 (March), and more in Wave 2 (June), when the 10% “hard to serve” threshold is lifted. Finally, McHenry County has been accepted into the Broadband Breakthrough Cohort 4. This group is made up of representatives from the County, CUSD 200, MCEDC, United Way of Greater McHenry County, Cities of Harvard and Woodstock, Scot Forge, and the McHenry County Council of Governments. This will allow the County to work with the State Broadband Office and the Benton Institute to support the need for expanded Broadband across the County.
- County Administration was asked to clarify and formalize the **program review** process to ensure the Board’s goal of reviewing all programs is accomplished. The FY25 Budget presentations were adjusted to focus on the mandated vs. non-mandated services that the County provides. Similarly, the FY25 Budget, which earned the GFOA budget award, the document noted a clear distinction between mandated vs. non-mandated services.
- County Administration was asked to initiate county-wide **space study**, and this project was included in the FY25 Budget. An initial contract with Kluber for Master Planning Services was deemed to be more than anticipated, both in cost and scope, and a revised contract with Wold Architects will come before the County Board in April.
- A goal was set for the County Administrator to **maintain the fiscal health** of the County. FY25 Budget options were presented to the County Board at a COW meeting on Sept 26. FY25 Budget was developed with significant use of strong fund balance and ultimately adopted using a portion of the allowable property tax increase to keep up with inflation. The agreement to house Lake County inmates in 2024 has been extended into 2025. This revenue has been used for one-time expenses, such as items in the capital program. County Administration is preparing to launch the FY26 budget with a COW meeting in June where project, priorities, and projections will be reviewed. Preliminary audit results show that the County finished FY24 with a 6.5-month reserve in the General Fund. While still strong, this is down from a 7.1 month of reserve at the end of FY23.
- County Administration was asked to **prioritize the County’s carbon footprint study** when making County facility-related decisions. The County Administration Building was

ENERGY STAR certified in 2024 and won an Energy Efficiency Community Block Grant to fund a new, high-efficiency air-handling unit on the County Administration Building. The Unit will be installed in the spring of 2025. Additionally, the Administration parking lot reconstruction also planned for the spring of 2025, will include the installation of conduits for wiring for the future installation of EV charging stations. Finally, the energy savings delivered at the McHenry County Regional Training Center produced a reduction of electrical use by 55% and natural gas by 66%. This is a cost savings of \$38,229 annually with a positive environmental impact of taking 58 cars off the road.

Looking ahead to the next 12 months

The goals for the County Administrator are similar to the past year with some adjustments. I look forward to input and additional goals from the County Board.

- Continue drain tile mapping project
- Continue progress on GIS consortium
- Facilitate progress toward a regional salt dome in Algonquin
- Metra railyard site selection
- Next steps on workforce housing
- Negotiate five union contracts
- Coordinate development of a new four-year Strategic Plan
- Respond to the changes in Federal Government
- Partner with the Village of Wonder Lake on the unsewered committees grant opportunity
- Improve Population Estimates
- Artificial Intelligence for County Government
- Work with Mental Health Board leadership to develop new County Board communication and budgeting expectations
- Build on the municipal collaboration efforts
- Monitor *Advance McHenry County* allocations to ensure expenditures will occur by December 2026
- Maintain the fiscal health of the County
- Work with Sheriff to consider jail healthcare options
- Develop IGA for municipalities and county to share building inspectors