



McHenry County
Planning, Environment & Development - Public
Meeting
MINUTES

March 4, 2025, 8:30 AM
County Board Conference Room
Administration Building, 667 Ware Rd., Woodstock, IL 60098

Members Present: Larry Smith, Carolyn Campbell, Joseph Gottemoller, Carl Kamienski, Deena Krieger, Paul Thomas

Members Absent: Jim Kearns

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1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at: 8:30 A.M.

Also present: Scott Hartman, Deputy County Administrator; Adam Wallen, Director of Planning and Development; Elizabeth Kessler, MCCD Executive Director; Alex Wall, County Admin Intern; Renee Hanlon, Deputy Director of P&D; Andy Dylak, MCCD Director of Finance and Administration.

Mover: Kamienski

Second: Thomas

To allow the remote attendance of Mr. Gottemoller.

Aye (5): Smith, Campbell, Kamienski, Krieger, and Thomas

Abstain (1): Gottemoller

Absent (1): Kearns

Recommended (5 to 0)

2. MINUTES APPROVAL

Mover: Campbell

Second: Krieger

Approve previous minutes from the February 4, 2025 meeting.

2.1 Planning, Environment & Development - Public Meeting - Feb 4, 2025 8:30 AM

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

4. MEMBERS' COMMENTS

None.

5. NEW BUSINESS

5.1 8:30 - William Kurnik - Zoning Board of Appeals

5.2 8:40 - Dawn Milarski - Historic Preservation Commission

5.3 Deliberation and Selection for the Zoning Board of Appeals - Alternate Member

Mover: Campbell

Second: Thomas

To recommend the appointment of William Kurnik to the County Board Chairman as an Alternate Member of the Zoning Board of Appeals for a term to expire on September 1, 2028.

Aye (6): Smith, Campbell, Gottemoller, Kamienski, Krieger, and Thomas

Absent (1): Kearns

Recommended (6 to 0)

5.4 Deliberation and Selection for the Historic Preservation Commission

Mover: Campbell

Second: Kamienski

To recommend the appointment of Dawn Milarski to the County Board Chairman for the Historic Preservation Commission with a term to expire November 26, 2026.

Aye (6): Smith, Campbell, Gottemoller, Kamienski, Krieger, and Thomas

Absent (1): Kearns

Recommended (6 to 0)

6. PRESENTATION

None.

7. ROUTINE CONSENT AGENDA

7.1 Resolution Authorizing Ordinance No. 25-1055 of the McHenry County Conservation Districts 2026 Fiscal Year Budget as Provided for in Public Act 91-629 (18)

Elizabeth Kessler, Executive Director of the McHenry County Conservation District, and Andy Dylak, MCCD Director of Finance and Administration, joined the committee for the presentation and resolution.

Ms. Kessler presented the district's budget. She introduced her leadership team and members of the Board of Trustees, which consists of seven non-partisan volunteers serving five-year terms.

Established in 1971 through a county-wide referendum, the McHenry County Conservation District manages over 25,800 acres of natural areas and welcomes more than 1.2 million visitors annually. The district is dedicated to protecting open spaces, preserving wildlife habitats, and promoting environmental education and outdoor recreation. With 35 public sites and over 150 miles of trails, it offers numerous opportunities for outdoor activities. One of its signature programs, *Find Your Wild*, encourages residents to explore nature through digital challenges. With over 1,400 participants and nearly 12,000 photo submissions, the program has received awards for excellence and partners with local libraries and businesses to promote community engagement.

The Board of Trustees approved the district's annual budget on February 25, 2025, following a public hearing on February 20. The district has been recognized for financial stewardship by the Government Finance Officers Association. Its budget process begins in July with goal-setting and workshops, followed by a tentative presentation in January. After a 30-day public review period, the county board must accept the budget before final adoption, a requirement unique to McHenry County due to past general obligation bond approvals.

Total revenue for the fiscal year was \$30.7 million, a 6.4% increase from the previous year. In November 2024, voters approved raising the district's limiting tax rate, generating an additional \$3.6 million in property tax revenue. However, to prevent an additional tax burden, the Board of Trustees abated the debt service levy for 2024. Total expenditures were \$30.2 million, a 1.1% increase from the previous year, maintaining the district's commitment to fiscal responsibility while preserving natural spaces and enhancing community programs.

By the end of fiscal year 2025, the estimated general fund balance was \$3 million, covering approximately three months of operating expenses. The district strategically drew down reserves to fund capital asset management, repairs, and replacements. The general fund primarily relied on property tax revenue, as the district did not receive sales or real estate transfer taxes. Additional revenue came from agricultural leases, interest income, program fees (1.6% of revenue), philanthropy, and other miscellaneous sources.

Historically, the district had not always fully extended its levy, leading to a backlog of deferred maintenance. A major effort aligned the property tax extension with a voter-approved proposition, ensuring that the debt would be paid off without a net impact—resulting in an overall tax reduction. By 2026, all general obligation bonds would be retired, reducing property taxes by 60%, with taxpayers seeing a 45% reduction in 2027. For a \$300,000 home, this equated to a \$94 tax reduction.

The largest expenditure in the general fund was personnel, as the district's services required staff involvement. It employed 75 full-time and 10 part-time employees, along with four grant-funded positions. Over 400 volunteers contributed to operations, though they still required management. The budget included a 3.5% merit and economic adjustment increase, with employee insurance costs managed through an intergovernmental benefits cooperative. Employees were offered HMO, PPO, and HSA plans with cost-sharing measures. Two collective bargaining groups, Local 150 (park rangers and operations) and the Fraternal Order of Police (law enforcement), had negotiated contracts, with Local 150 still in active negotiations.

Despite managing a consistent acreage, staffing levels had decreased by 5.3% since 2013. Compared to neighboring Forest Preserve districts, the district operated with fewer staff per acre. The fiscal year 2026 budget allocated \$583,540 for capital expenditures, a decrease from the prior year. Some funds were reallocated for unanticipated needs to maintain flexibility.

As of March 31, the district had \$28 million in outstanding debt, including \$25.9 million in voter-approved bonds and \$2.3 million in debt certificates used for land acquisition. Several capital projects were in progress, funded through grants, donations, or general fund transfers. These included wetland and

stream bank mitigation engineering at Tish-waukee Mitigation Bank, a partnership with the Montgomery County Division of Transportation, and the Glacial Park wetland and stream restoration project in collaboration with Friends of Habitat and Openlands. Efforts were also underway to restore critical habitats for species such as the rusty-patched bumblebee. The Bolge Bog Conservation Area hydrologic restoration project depended on grant funding, which the district hoped to secure.

The district continued addressing repair backlogs while awaiting funding from the retired debt service. Conservation areas were scheduled for repairs, aligning natural resource projects with infrastructure improvements.

Mover: Thomas

Second: Krieger

To approve the resolution authorizing Ordinance No. 25-1055 of the McHenry County Conservation Districts 2026 Fiscal Year Budget as Provided for in Public Act 91-629.

Aye (6): Smith, Campbell, Gottemoller, Kamienski, Krieger, and Thomas

Absent (1): Kearns

Recommended (6 to 0)

8. OLD BUSINESS

None.

9. DISCUSSION & DIRECTION

Adam Wallen, Director of Planning and Development, and Renee Hanlon, Deputy Director of Planning and Development, joined the committee for the discussions.

Chair Smith started with item 9.3 due to the Sheys being present at the committee meeting.

9.1 Amend the Title 16 and Title 5 of the County Codes as related to Temporary Use Permits

There was discussion about amending Titles 16 and 5 of the County Code to address temporary use permits for film production. Recent projects, including those for Netflix and Chicago-based productions, highlighted the need for clearer regulations. At the time, temporary use permits fell under the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), which required a lengthy 90-day approval process. A phone call from California prompted further discussions, as multiple productions were utilizing local properties, including projects associated with *Chicago Fire* and *Chicago PD* and another on Collins and Franklinville for Netflix. The issue arose when these productions required permits that did not align with existing regulations, leading to confusion and phone calls from affected districts.

Historically, the county had encountered similar challenges. A previous applicant seeking approval for a *Survivor*-style event withdrew their application due to complicated requirements and instead pursued the project in another municipality. Recent applications for film productions faced similar obstacles, particularly with technical requirements and operational duration, leading to community concerns and calls to officials.

As a result, discussions began about formalizing a film production ordinance. Initially, the goal was to move film-related temporary uses into the business licensing section of the County Code rather than handling them through UDO regulations. Over time, it became evident that all temporary uses, not just film production, might benefit from this shift. The change would offer more flexibility for enforcement, potential modifications, and customized penalties without requiring the lengthy 90-day amendment process associated with UDO regulations. Moving these matters to business licensing under Title 5, Chapter 5, would streamline approvals, similar to liquor licenses, making the process more efficient.

Film productions brought substantial economic benefits, with some projects generating up to \$300,000 per day in local spending, including payments for law enforcement, staging, and other expenses. A recent production reportedly covered costs such as deputy overtime and staging, but it also had a significant impact on nearby residents, with some expressing exhaustion due to disruptions. Unlike past projects like *Groundhog Day*, which was filmed within a city, newer productions faced additional hurdles due to updated land use regulations and the Illinois Department of Economic Development's involvement in supporting Netflix and other film applicants.

To address concerns, the proposed changes aimed to ensure the film permitting process was transparent and easily accessible. Future applicants would be able to locate the permit requirements online, submit applications efficiently, and navigate the process without unnecessary delays. The intent was to create a balance—encouraging film production while ensuring appropriate safeguards for residents and property owners.

The proposed ordinance would remain film-specific, ensuring that zoning regulations still governed land use. Certain districts would remain ineligible for filming, with no variance options for restricted areas. However, procedural changes would allow a more streamlined approach, eliminating the need for zoning board hearings in specific cases.

Staff also considered gathering feedback from residents affected by recent film projects to refine the process further. While some neighbors voiced concerns about detours and disruptions, others were excited about the presence of celebrities. Moving forward, the county aimed to support film production while mitigating any negative impacts on the community. The next step involved finalizing a dedicated film permit process, which was expected to be presented for review the following month.

9.2 Create an Overlay Zone for the Bay View on the Fox River Subdivision

The discussion focused on creating an overlay district for specific lots with docks on the channel. The intent was to allow these docks to remain by taking a snapshot of their existing status, making them legal nonconforming structures. This change ensured that if a dock was damaged, it could be replaced within the same footprint, adhering to bulk requirements. The overlay district addressed a long-standing issue where these lots previously did not meet principal use standards, providing a solution that allowed continued use.

There was general agreement that this was a necessary step to assist affected residents. The proposal did not address parking concerns, which remained under the township's jurisdiction. Instead, it focused on permitting and regulation of existing and future accessory structures, such as boat piers, shelters, and covers. Under previous regulations, permits for such structures were not possible unless the lot had an adjacent principal use. This change allowed owners to apply for permits for accessory structures while preventing permanent residences from being built on the lots.

Staff acknowledged that some docks had been sold to non-residents, increasing traffic and raising concerns among the community. However, the county's role was limited to regulating the permits, leaving broader issues like parking enforcement to the township. Moving forward, the proposal would be sent to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) for further review and refinement before returning for final approval. There was consensus on advancing the process to address the issue while ensuring appropriate oversight.

9.3 Approval for Sheys Estates Subdivision Preliminary Plat

It was a preliminary subdivision plan. The Sheys were subdividing their property to build a new house. The project went through the Site Plan Review Committee and met all technical standards required for approval. The next step was to seek approval for Chairman Smith's signature before returning to the Site Plan Review Committee for the final plat.

The purpose of the preliminary plat was to resolve any technical feasibility issues. The final plat would then proceed as a zoning petition and subdivision request before the full County Board.

The property consisted of 5.9 acres, with an existing two-story frame house. The new home was planned for a separate portion of the land. Lot 1 measured just over one acre, while Lot 2, where the new house would be constructed, was slightly over four acres. The subdivision met all required standards. The septic fields and soil tests had been completed and approved.

About a year ago, the property underwent a mapping amendment, changing from A-1 to E-1 zoning. This was a necessary step in the subdivision process for constructing the Sheys' retirement home.

There were no concerns from staff or municipalities regarding density. The process moved forward for final approval and recording. Once completed, the subdivision would return to the County Board for review.

10. REPORTS

10.1 ZBA and Hearing Officer Reports

10.1.a Zoning Applications going before the County Board on March 18, 2025

Renee Hanlon, Deputy Director of Planning and Development, joined the committee for the report.

Ms. Hanlon provided a brief update, noting that there were no controversial items on the agenda. The first case involved a landscape yard with outdoor storage in a remote area, with no opposition. Another item was a simple variation request for a six-foot fence in a front yard, which also faced no opposition. Additionally, there were several residential rezonings to bring properties into compliance with the ordinance, all of which aligned with the land use plan and had no significant impact.

There was a discussion about audio issues at ZBA hearings, where attendees in larger meetings struggled to hear members speaking. Efforts were already underway to improve the situation, with microphones in use, though concerns remained about interference with the recording system. A potential solution involved personal listening devices similar to those used in other counties. Moving forward, adjustments would be made to ensure that all speakers used microphones and setup accommodations would be considered when large attendance was expected.

11. FUTURE TOPICS

None.

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION (AS NECESSARY)

None.

13. ADJOURNMENT

Mover: Kamienski

Second: Krieger

To adjourn the meeting at 9:55 A.M. -TCCazares

Aye (6): Smith, Campbell, Gottemoller, Kamienski, Krieger, and Thomas

Absent (1): Kearns

Recommended (6 to 0)