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VBH BOT FYI Planning

1 message

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Work on unified development ordinance under way in earnest
By KEVIN P. CRAVER – kcraver@nwherald.com
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WOODSTOCK – The firm hired to develop McHenry County's unified development ordinance spent Thursday meeting with county staff to talk about what they would like to see.

Chicago-based Camiros Ltd. is under contract to help update the county's zoning, sign, subdivision and other development-related ordinances and merge them into one to make the rules easier to follow and enforce.

The process is a natural continuation of the 2030 Land Use plan approved last year after three years of work by a Regional Planning Commission and the County Board, board Chairman Ken Koehler, R-Crystal Lake, said.

"This is exactly what we wanted to finally get to. This is where the rubber meets the road," Koehler said. "This is what makes the difference."

The County Board late last year approved paying Camiros up to \$248,000 to help develop the unified development ordinance over 22 months.

Development-related county ordinances have gone for years without significant review.

Minor amendments aside, the county zoning ordinance last was overhauled in 2000, and the subdivision ordinance last was overhauled in 1991, not counting a conservation design ordinance tacked onto it in 2008.

"[A unified development ordinance] will put everything together in one document with consistent terminology, consistent processes, and clearly linking zoning to subdivision decisions," county Planning and Development Director Dennis Sandquist said.

County leaders have said that a unified development ordinance would help enforce the 2030 Plan, a nonbinding template to help guide the county's growth over the next 20 years while balancing it with environmental sustainability.

One of the reasons that county ordinances did not get scrutinized sooner was the failure of the County Board to develop a 2020 Plan. A

commission spent seven years developing it, but a fight between pro-conservation and pro-development factions scuttled the plan in 2006.

Among the topics that came up during Camiros' meeting Thursday with the County Board Planning and Development Committee was reforming the county's practice of issuing conditional-use permits to allow a wide range of special uses, often in agricultural areas.

"We use them as a kind of loophole in the law," said board member Randy Donley, R-Union. "We're using them for all the wrong reasons right now."

Local municipalities that already have unified development ordinances include Crystal Lake, Woodstock and Richmond.

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