

# Talking Points

*Illinois  
county news  
& views*



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## **Peoria County goes hybrid**

Peoria County has recently added four Toyota Prius automobiles to its vehicle fleet, the first hybrid vehicles purchased by the county. The Prius is noted for its exceptional fuel efficiency and low emissions. Two of Peoria's County four recently acquired hybrids are assigned to the probation department, one to the county's general motor pool, and one to the highway department. Peoria County plans to continue adding hybrids to its fleet each year.

## **Will County to develop green energy plant**

Will County and Waste Management of Illinois announced a plan to jointly develop a landfill gas-to-energy plant at the Prairie View Recycling and Disposal Facility near Wilmington. The gas-to-energy plant will generate electricity that is distributed over the area's electrical grid. Waste Management will build and operate the facility, which could be in operation by 2010. Will County said it intends to apply for federal economic stimulus funds earmarked for renewable energy projects to help finance the project. Once the process is complete, Will County anticipates putting at least \$1 million in stimulus funds toward the project.

## **Franklin County looks to save on electric service**

The Franklin County Board vice chairman has proposed switching from AmerenCIPS to Direct Energy to provide the county's energy needs. The county would still be billed from AmerenCIPS for usage of the utility poles and lines but the electricity would be provided by Direct Energy. A one year contract would save the county around \$24,000. After one year, if the county decides to return to AmerenCIPS they have to remain with them for twelve months before they can switch providers again.

## **DeKalb wind farm receives approval**

A 151-turbine wind energy plant proposed by Next-Era Energy Resources has received approval from Hearing Officer David Dockus of DeKalb. The proposal was originally denied citing it needed to establish a property value guarantee plan and complaint hotline, among others provisions. Next-Era made revisions to its original proposal and subsequently was approved by Duckus. The DeKalb County Board's Planning and Zoning Committee will discuss the application further at their next meeting.

## **Sangamon County Board proposes pay cut**

A projected \$2.7 million drop in revenue has led the Sangamon County Board to propose cutting their salary by about 10%. Like many counties, Sangamon's projected shortfall in revenue is partially attributed to lower-than-expected returns from state taxes. County officials have already asked department heads to cut their budgets by 10% in any way they can. "We have to lead by example," stated Sangamon County Board member Andy Goleman. The proposal will be voted on during the June meeting and would save the county about \$28,609 annually.

## **LaSalle County looks to streamline**

LaSalle County seeks to streamline their government documents by making them available on their website to both officials and the public. The County Board's Legislative and Rules committee has asked their information technology department to research how document distribution could be either emailed or placed on the county website. Reducing 22 current consolidated committee meetings down to 17 has also been proposed.

## **Sports complex proposed for Fayette County**

A \$300 million sports complex that will include a 9,000 seat arena, restaurants, 400-seat IMAX theater, 300 room hotel and a bicycle manufacturing operation has been proposed for the city of Vandalia in Fayette County. Michigan-based Motown Technology and Sports Facility has been in negotiations with the Vandalia Economic Development Director since January. The complex is expected to draw 55% of its market from out of state and pull people in from cities as far as Chicago, St. Louis, Indianapolis and Louisville. Construction could start as early as Spring 2010 and take 3 years to complete.

## **DuPage cracking down on illegal water/sewer usage**

DuPage County estimates that between 50 and 200 properties are illegally tapped into the county's water and sewage system. The county is undergoing an extensive audit of the water and sewage systems and is proposing a fine for anyone found not paying for service. The policy proposes charging up to seven years of service unless it can be proven that the service has been in place for either a longer or shorter period of time. DuPage County loses about \$10,000 annually because of illegal connections.

## **Recycling is easy in Madison County**

Madison County is initiating several recycling and "green" programs to help reduce environmental decay. These programs include taking back compact fluorescent bulbs, replacing old 18 gallon recycling bins with large easy to move 60 gallon recepticals, a new recycling station, and two free collection events. The collection events focus on household wastes and electronics waste and is in partnership with St. Clair County. "Madison County is proud of the services we provide for our residents, especially our environmental programs and projects," said Chairman Alan Dunstan.

## **New debris site opens in Jackson County**

Jackson County has opened a new debris consolidation site for vegetative materials. The site is located at the Southern Illinois Airport, northwest of Carbondale and is open to residents, private businesses, and governmental units. Only vegetative materials will be allowed. Residents in unincorporated areas of the county are still encouraged to manage vegetative materials on their own property.

## **"Inland Hurricane" in Williamson County**

The "inland hurricane" as dubbed by the National Weather Service ripped through Williamson County causing 35 to 50 injuries and millions of dollars in damage. Winds reached around 106 miles per hour in Carbondale and 86 miles per hour at the Williamson County Airport. County Board Chairwoman Tracey Glenn is wanting the federal government to declare a disaster area so that cost of the cleanup can be recouped. She estimates that recovery costs could be as much as \$16 million in Williamson County alone.

## **Lake County gets creative in reducing personnel costs**

In order to avoid layoffs, the Lake County Board has approved a measure that offers certain employees accelerated retirement options or a reduction in hours. The employees who choose to retire would either not be replaced, or replaced by an entry-level salaried employee. The reduction in hours is not to exceed one full work day and must be approved by a supervisor. Both options are completely voluntary. The early retirements could save the county up to \$500,000 a year.

## **Greene County considers hazard mitigation plan**

The Greene County Highway Department Engineer has proposed developing a hazard mitigation plan in order to prevent loss of life and property damage in the event of a natural disaster. Like many other Illinois counties, Greene County does not have a hazard mitigation plan and therefore is not eligible for some state and federal grants. In April, the county board reviewed a proposed plan offered by a Springfield-based engineering consulting firm which included acquiring buildings and land located in flood plains, retrofitting existing infrastructure, and constructing retention basins to manage storm water. FEMA grants provide 75% of funding for projects with a 25% local match in funds or in-kind services.

## **Morgan County adopts wind turbine ordinance**

Morgan County Commissioners passed an ordinance regulating the siting of wind energy turbines due, in part, to inquiries of local property owners by Global Winds Harvest, of New York, to locate wind turbines on their land. "The ordinance is really for the protection of the private property owners who may be approached by wind energy companies and for the protection of county roads," said Chairman Dick Rawlings. The ordinance also provides for a decommissioning bond for the removal of the facility.

## **Senior exemption now automatic in Edgar County**

A resolution passed by the Edgar County Board puts a measure in place to automatically renew individuals who have previously applied for a senior citizen property tax exemption. "Once they are 65, they don't get any younger," stated Supervisor of Assessments Bev Markey. Under the new plan, once a senior citizen is granted the exemption it is automatically renewed unless they change addresses. The resolution does not impact the owner occupied homestead exemption and it will still need to be filed annually.

## **Champaign County rejects fewer panels**

A plan to reorganize and consolidate committees from six to four was rejected by the Champaign County Board on a vote of 14-11. Earlier this month the policy committee put forth a proposal to combine the highway committee with the facilities committee and the justice-social services with the policy committee. The intent of the proposal was to save money through consolidation of meetings, however, according to County Board Chairman C. Pius Weibel, it became clear that the savings, if at all, would be minimal. The county board will continue to look at other reforms, including reducing the size of the board.

## **County plans for increased animal control needs**

Even with the \$400,000 allocated for a new animal control facility being constructed this year, it is expected that the future needs for animal control services may require additional funding in Grundy County. The county has researched additional funding through grants and other sources to no avail. According to County Administrator Dan Duffy, "The county plans to build based on animal control's current needs. Because of the county's consistently growing use of animal control, the county would like to build for its future needs."

## **Crawford supports coal-fired power plant**

The coal-fired Ameren Energy plant in Hutsonville has come under scrutiny for emissions and the Crawford County Board has sent a letter in support of the plant to Springfield stating what would happen to the community if the plant were forced to close. If emission standards were raised in Illinois it would put the plant at an even further disadvantage to Indiana plants with already lower emission standards. "We need to send a message. We object to new environmental standards on Hutsonville," according to board member David Fulling. Governor Quinn has stated that he is in favor of a nationalized emission standard.

## **Knox County debates courthouse fate**

The Knox County Board Building Committee is debating whether or not to repair existing problems of the courthouse or move the government offices to a new facility. While the cost of the repairs would be significant, moving the offices out of the courthouse would sever a historical relationship and leave the future of an important Galesburg centerpiece in question. According to one architect, to fix the present courthouse and bring it in line with buildings codes could cost up to \$20 million.

## **County approves IMRF levy**

The Jefferson County Board approved a levy which will account for about \$600,000 for county employees who are members of the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF). The action is needed due to a lower return of funds invested by the program. The 2010 optional phase-in rates approved are 9.57% for IMRF, 15.28% for SLEP and 42.25% for ECO.