

Many steps ahead for possible 'enterprise zone' designation

County municipalities weigh applying for business incentive designation

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DeKALB – Municipalities in DeKalb County are showing interest in a possible enterprise zone to see how it could benefit the county economically.

The DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation held an informational meeting for county municipalities Wednesday to inform them about the enterprise zone application the economic development corporation and the County Board have been considering. An enterprise zone offers businesses tax breaks to move or expand within its boundaries.

The County Board hired Craig Coil, principal at The Development Consortium, as the consultant for the county's efforts to apply for an enterprise zone. There are currently 97 enterprise zones throughout the state, and DeKalb County has never had one. Roger Hopkins, economic development consultant for DeKalb, said there have been missed opportunities because of this.

“This is a tremendous opportunity,” Hopkins said. “We’ve lost projects to other enterprise zones. [Having an enterprise zone] gives us the opportunity to pursue small, medium and large business opportunities.”

Hopkins said enterprise zones could attract industrial development and possibly shopping center buildings. He said he will soon report to DeKalb's city manager and city staff and see what he can do to gain the city's endorsement of a designation for an enterprise zone.

Coil said the next steps in applying to be an enterprise zone include holding a public hearing to gather input. The hearing would provide a transcript of information as part of the application process. He said designating ordinances would need to be passed, to legally define areas as an enterprise zone, and an intergovernmental agreement with all involved entities would need to be approved.

Paul Borek, executive director of the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, said he will follow up with each municipality in the coming weeks to get reactions and determine a schedule for information collection. Information about poverty, vacant structures, large-scale business closings and more is needed as part of ten initiatives reviewed by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Applications for new enterprise zones are due by Dec. 31.

“We’re eager to learn more about this,” said Jim Teckenbrock, executive director for Sandwich’s Economic Development Corporation. “We’re going to see what we can do to be a part of it, and see if it makes sense for us.”

Sycamore city treasurer Adam Orton said Sycamore has been part of the discussion about enterprise zones and said the city is interested.

County Board member Mark Pietrowski, D-Cortland, a member of the economic development committee, said he hopes the county can introduce even more economic development ideas over the next year.

"It's vital to be competitive as a county to get one of these enterprise zones," he said.