MINUTES, AS AMENDED AND APPROVED

Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) Update Committee

DATE: Wednesday, September 7, 2011
TIME: 6:32 p.m.
PLACE: Brookens Administrative Center
        John Dimit Conference Room
        1776 E. Washington St., Urbana, Illinois

Voting Members Present: Kevin Donoho, Debra Griest, Liz Jones, Kyle Krapf, Steve Moser, Pattsi Petrie, Bruce Stikkers

Voting Members Absent: Steve Stierwalt

Non-Voting Member Present: John Hall

Others Present: Pius Weibel, Jon Schroeder, Norm Stenzel

CCRPC Facilitator: Susan Monte

Minutes

1. Call to Order and Roll Call
   Ms. Monte called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. The roll was taken by written record and a quorum was declared present.

2. Approval of Agenda
   Ms. Petrie introduced a motion to approve the agenda and Ms. Jones seconded the motion. Upon vote, the motion carried unanimously.

3. Public Participation
   Mr. Norman Stenzel acknowledged the Committee’s hard work and encouraged members to consider how the updated LESA will fit into the decision-making of the County. He believes the Site Assessment portion is key and just as important as the Land Evaluation portion.

3. Approval of Minutes
   Ms. Petrie introduced a motion to approve the minutes of the July 27, 2011 meeting and Mr. Krapf seconded the motion. Ms. Griest requested a correction to page 3, line 51 to add the word ‘year’ to describe 25. Mr. Donoho said on page 6, line 26, the word ‘be’ should be removed. Mr. Hall said on page 3, line 46 he suggested a correction as follows “Champaign County is considered similar to DeKalb County with regard to soils.” Mr. Donoho said that he believed this was a statement he made and that the suggested correction is okay with him. Upon vote, the motion to make these corrections carried unanimously. Upon vote, the motion to approve the minutes, as amended, carried unanimously.
Ms. Jones introduced a motion to approve the minutes of the August 10, 2011 meeting and Ms. Griest seconded the motion. Upon vote, the motion to approve the minutes carried unanimously.

4. New Business

Mr. Krapf introduced a motion to approve assigning a chair to the LESA Update Committee and Ms. Jones seconded the motion. Ms. Monte explained the rationale for the request was essentially to provide guidance as necessary to keep the Committee on track. Mr. Moser said he thinks Deb Griest, with her knowledge of the zoning ordinance and all of the zoning cases she has presided over in her 10 years on the ZBA, would be the logical person to chair this Committee. Mr. Moser nominated Deb Griest as chair, and Mr. Krapf seconded the nomination.

Mr. Stikkers would agree with Mr. Moser and he believes Deb has the talent to keep the meetings moving. He thinks that a chair would help the Committee achieve its objective in a timely and orderly fashion.

Ms. Griest said that if the Committee so desired, she would be honored to accept the role of chair.

Upon vote, the motion to approve the nomination of Deb Griest as chair of the LESA Update Committee carried unanimously. Upon vote, the motion to approve assigning Deb Griest as chair of the LESA Update Committee carried unanimously.

Ms. Griest assumed running the meeting, and our target for completion of the meeting is 8:00 p.m.

5. Unfinished Business

With regard to the Land Evaluation update, Ms. Monte said that a Version A and Version B of LE update has already been distributed to the Committee, and now staff is in process of developing other LE update versions that are weighted, for the Committee’s review. Ms. Monte said that those additional versions were not available to distribute this evening, as their development was interrupted with other projects. She requested that members comment regarding the possible usefulness of these additional weighted LE update versions.

Mr. Moser asked what the difference is between the “Important Farmland Classification” and the “Optimum Soils Productivity Index”. Ms. Monte said that there are four types of soils classification systems that are most typically used to develop the Land Evaluation score. She said that the versions of the proposed LE update that the Committee has reviewed so far (Version A and Version B) included three of these four soils classifications systems. She said that some Land Evaluation scoring systems that she has seen are based on only one soil classification system (e.g., the ‘soils productivity index’), but that it seems the majority of the updated Illinois County LESA systems that she has reviewed have included three types of soils classification systems as the basis for the LE scoring portion.

Ms. Griest asked about how the planned weighting of the 2nd and third soils classifications systems of the additional LE versions would be specifically applied, and Ms. Monte indicated she hadn’t yet worked that out.

Mr. Donohoo suggested that if the basis for the LE portion will be the Optimum Soils Productivity Index, that a sliding scale of weighted percentages be applied to the other two soils classification systems.

Mr. Moser said that in the 1970’s and 1980’s there was a soils association system that divided all County soils into three classes.
Mr. Moser said that the County Tax Assessor office assesses farmland taxes based on the soils series, soils productivity index, by the percentage of the different soil types on a parcel, and different classifications, and provides average ‘productivity index’ for soils on a particular parcel. He said the Committee should consider doing the LE calculation based on the same mapping data used by the Tax Assessor office.

Ms. Monte said that the CCGIS Consortium is the originator of the databases used by both the County Tax Assessor and by the Regional Planning Commission.

Mr. Krapf said that he is able to obtain Soils Productivity index for a particular soil at a website, where he can also separate out a portion of a parcel and get average Soils Productivity Index.

Mr. Stikkers said that the Soil and Water Conservation District could refer to either the Bulletin 810 or Bulletin 811 soil productivity index information for the LE calculation, which is a weighted average based on the acres of soil types.

Ms. Griest said she would assume the records for tax assessment would be most current and accurate, since the landowner would be aware of those records in order to be sure that they are being appropriately taxed.

Ms. Monte said she would followup regarding the option of using the same database used by the Assessor’s office for calculating the LE score.

Ms. Petrie said regarding the original question regarding asking for direction, she said this LE update seems to have gotten complex and she would like to see it simplified. She would like the Committee to consider whether a more simplified approach, as indicated in the attachments she provided, or whether the suggested approach by Brad Uken has merit, if using the same LE scoring system used by McLean County, or using what is morphing through our conversations, and bracketing what we are trying to accomplish here. Ms. Petrie clarified that she would like the LE scoring to be easy to understand and not overly complicated.

Ms. Griest asked whether the Committee is of the singular objective that we end up with a single number for the LE in a manner that is as easy and straight forward to understand as possible for all users. Additional discussion regarding this objective occurred. She said that the action item for staff is to report back regarding use of the same database and tools used by the Assessor's office.

Mr. Moser said he would like to see a break between B and C. He said there is a big difference between Elliot and Bryce and Swygert soils. He said there is not enough Bryce/Swygert in this County to be concerned about it.

Ms. Griest said we had previously talked about, that once we determine the tool, then there needs to be a better method than what we currently use to differentiate those best soils that deserve protection and those others that would afford some opportunities for development.

Ms. Jones asked how the LE score is calculated in the current LESA. Discussion about how the current LE scores are calculated occurred.

Mr. Moser said that Best Prime Farmland will need to be redefined with the update to the LE portion of LESA. He said he thinks that very little of the soils in the CR District are prime farmland. He thinks the LE for identifying Best Prime Farmland will need to be higher than it is now.
Ms. Petrie said that the LE scoring should be simplified if possible. Mr. Hall said that it may not be possible to further simplify the method for scoring LE any more than it currently is. He said that using the same database on which taxes are calculated could serve to simplify the LE scoring. Discussion about the need to re-define Best Prime Farmland occurred.

Mr. Moser suggested townships and general moraine areas within the County to consider for LESA testing.

With regard to the site assessment factor update, Ms. Monte reviewed the outstanding concerns regarding the group of 12 draft site assessment factors.

Regarding draft site assessment factor #1, percentage of agricultural uses within either 1 mile or within 1-1/2 miles of the subject site, Ms. Monte agrees with the Committee’s comments that considering agricultural uses within 1 mile of the subject site is sufficient.

Regarding draft site assessment factor #2, Ms. Monte noted that to measure the proportion of adjacent land use in non-agricultural use makes much more sense than to indicate whether 1, 2, 3 or all sides of a subject site is in production agriculture, especially when more than one parcel or land use is adjacent to one side of a subject site.

Regarding draft site assessment factor #3, Ms. Monte noted the Committee had considered a factor used by DeKalb County to assess the features that exist on a subject site to make it suitable for farming (e.g., trees, slope, and internal barriers such as drainage ditches or rocks, buried foundations). Ms. Monte said that in order to find a way to consistently measure this type of factor, the definition of ‘suitable’ would need to be made less subjective and that scoring this factor would be difficult and would likely require a site visit or more. She said that at the August meeting, the Committee had discussed an alternate version of this type of factor, based on a Kendall County LESA site assessment factor, which could be easier to apply. She said that factor #3 is modeled based on that Kendall County factor. She said that the draft factor #3 presently is to measure the percentage of a site in agricultural production in any of the past 5 years, which potentially could be measurable based on available digital aerial photography.

Mr. Donoho said he likes the simplicity of draft factor #3. He said that it allows for considering possible recent changes in land use while still giving weight to preservation of farmland even that has changed its current land use, making that window 5 years. Ms. Griest said that this factor could capture changes from row crop to forestry type production, and Mr. Donoho agreed that this could apply regardless of what the current land use is.

Mr. Hall said that he cannot rationalize this because this could be a free pass to a lower LE if a property owner leaves a site out of production for 5 years.

Mr. Moser said this cannot be rationalized because if you have a FSA number and you are assessed as farmland, that land will be farmed. He said that there are lots of 5 acre tracts with 3 acres being farmed on it and only the house part of the site not assessed as farmland. He said those landowners are completing what they have to do to keep their FSA number and have that land assessed as farmland.

Ms. Jones asked whether the County has access to annual aerial photography for the whole County. Ms. Petrie asked how often the aerial photography is updated. Ms. Monte said that the Champaign County GIS Consortium obtains digital aerial photography every 3 years. Mr. Stikkers said the Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District has access to annually updated digital aerial photography and that annually updates are available through a FSA website for a cost. Discussion regarding this factor occurred.
Regarding draft site assessment factor #4, Ms. Monte said that the Committee had considered this factor as ineffective as previously drafted. She said the factor now reads as measuring the percentage of land zoned AG-1 Agriculture or AG-2 Agriculture within 1 mile of subject site. Mr. Moser noted that the zoning map was drawn in 1972 and is out of date. Ms. Griest requested clarification regarding whether a rural residential overlay land use could be zoned as AG-1 or AG-2 and whether any differentiation exists.

Mr. Hall said that that CR district needs to be included in draft factor #4 since it is as much an agriculture district as the AG-1 and AG-2 districts, and that the rural residential overlay areas should not be excluded since their underlying zoning remains AG-1, AG-2 or CR. He said that much of the CR district is wooded but that most of it is not wooded. He said the CR district includes best prime farmland areas. He said the LRMP rural agricultural land use policies apply to the CR district. He requested that CR be added back into draft factor #4. Discussion regarding re-adding CR and retaining the RRO areas followed.

Regarding draft site assessment factor #5 , Ms. Monte said the Committee had previously considered modifying the distance measured to 1 mile outward from the subject site. Ms. Petrie asked whether the area of the land considered in the two options of measuring outward 1 mile verses 1-1/2 mile could be provided so as to better understand the effect of changing from 1-1/2 miles to 1 mile outward. Ms. Monte said that the question related more to draft factor #1 and agreed to provide the requested information.

Regarding draft site assessment factor #6, Ms. Monte described the correction made to draft factor #6 based on previous feedback received regarding the inadequacy of the factor as drafted. She said the factor now includes a component that accounts for public sanitary facilities outside of municipal limits of towns with no adopted comprehensive land use plan. The Committee considered revising the added portion of this factor from ‘served by’ to ‘could be served by’.

Mr. Hall asked whether places exist for which the added component would apply to today. Discussion occurred regarding annexation agreements and how a development can access public sewer.

Regarding draft site assessment factor #7, Ms. Petrie said that she has concerns regarding the measurability of this factor and questioned its value.

Mr. Donoho asked how 50 was selected. He said that he reviewed the information he found on the USEPA website regarding how many animal units it takes to be considered a confined animal facility. The animal units are similar, however the actual number of animals varied a lot by species. He said that ‘confined’ is basically defined as animals in an area for a period of 45 days or more during the growing season when there is no vegetation in the area. Mr. Weibel noted that the potential impacts of a confined animal facility would likely be less on a larger site than on a smaller site.

Ms. Petrie said that her concerns were regarding counting of the animal units since often the presence of animals may not be apparent. Ms. Monte said the number of animal units would be based on the animal capacity noted on the permit for a facility.

Mr. Krapf noted that permit and maximum capacity information is not available for smaller animal operations.

Ms. Petrie said that if we don’t have sufficient data, then this factor should be dropped.

Mr. Moser said he did not think this factor is relevant to this county, since it would be so difficult and nearly impossible to approve a permit.
Ms. Griest acknowledged that there are many smaller operations that are not permitted. She said that our goal here should be to protect their livestock operation from the intrusion of residential development adjacent to their parcels. She said that if we don’t have a mechanism for it, then at least identifying their location or letting the Zoning Board know that they need to do get more information regarding nearby or adjacent facilities, or else we are underserving that portion of the farming community with animals. Discussion regarding this factor occurred.

Ms. Jones said that this question is about acknowledging livestock operations as a part of agricultural activity. Mr. Stikkers agreed this is a difficult factor to measure.

Ms. Griest requested that staff review this factor and recommend any possible improvements to it.

Regarding draft site assessment factor #8, Ms. Griest said she does not think township offices are intended as a regular public assembly land use. They are used for voting and hold public assemblies that are necessary in rural areas, and they should not result in lessening farmland preservation.

With regard to draft site assessment factor #11, Ms. Petrie said GIS maps provided that indicated the relative numbers of different sized parcels were helpful. She would like to have a discussion regarding changing the top scoring of factor #11 to be more inclusive and to be “35 acres or more” instead of “40 acres or more”. Ms. Monte pointed out the ‘non-farm dwellings’ are based on 35 acres, so that this request makes sense. No member disagreed with the proposed change.

With regard to draft site assessment factor #12, Mr. Hall said that since we now understand that referring to an LE of 85 will not be useful, so that this factor should just refer to best prime farmland. Ms. Griest added that if the definition of best prime farmland would happen to change over time, then this factor would be less likely to require revision. Discussion followed and no member disagreed with the proposed change.

With regard to the next meeting, Ms. Griest said that we will tentatively set the next meeting as September 28, with the time to be determined.

6. Adjournment
There being no further business, Ms. Griest adjourned the meeting at 8:12 p.m.
SA RATIONAL

There are a number of conceptual foundations included in the construction of this questionnaire. It is worthwhile to include statements that will serve to ground the approach and the items in this version of the Site Assessment Questionnaire.

The first conceptual foundation is that one purpose of the whole process is to preserve farmland. Farmland is not a renewable resource. Once converted to nonagricultural purpose it is most likely lost and no longer possible to return it to its original productivity. For example, even if the purpose is that of constructing an asphalt parking lot an attempt to restore the ground under the surfacing will face the fact that many of the living soil processes have been destroyed resulting in land of poor productive quality. Any restoration of the soil will take many years.

The second conceptual foundation is that another purpose of the process is to assure the viability of agriculture. For row crop agriculture, viability as affording livelihood is not just confined to the physical bounds of the proposed site. Rather, it is inevitably related to the link between that site and a number of others at different locations. With modern farming equipment, a single farmer can cultivate many acres and small tracts can easily be included among these acres. In addition, when considering the breadth of agricultural endeavors even tracts as small as an acre or less can be a viable setting for vineyard, orchard and vegetable cultivation.

The third conceptual foundation is just that. The breadth of viable agriculture possible on the soils of Champaign County now and in the future should be taken into account in the application of the SA questionnaire. The definition of agriculture devised by the county includes much of the versions of cultivation that have been here included in this rationale.

The fourth conceptual foundation is that it is wise and prudent to keep in mind the County’s policy that the “highest and best” use of the special soils of the county is agriculture. While nearsighted claims for the necessity of a conversion may seem to be justifiable, the importance of locally produced agricultural products for local, national and international consumption bears such weight that the burden of support for conversion should be difficult to achieve.
The site assessment questionnaire is set up to begin with a given number of points assigned to a site that is proposed for conversion based on the designated quality of the soils in the LE section of LESA. Also included is consideration of the actual productivity of a site. These questions are Part A, number 1; Part C, numbers 2 and 3. The higher the actual, not estimated, productivity the higher the initial points assigned. A comparison is made between the productivity of “lesser” soils and the productivity of soils that are LE85 and above. Actual productivity is related to the viability of farming the land.

Yet it should be remembered that the total output of a row crop producer is not likely to be derived from a single site while other forms of production could more heavily depend on that site alone. Live stock pasture, orchards, or other crops may have different relationship to the size of a site and the quality of soils.

For soils with an LE95 or above, there is no question that it would have value for preservation and that any conversion should represent the most justifiable factors applicable. Part B, numbers 1 and 2 are based on the principle that conversion should be compact and contiguous (directly tangent) to the built environment of a municipality/village/town. Part B number 3 suggests that conversions supportive of agriculture could be considered. And item B4 suggests that conversions should not be used as justification for future conversions.

For soils less than the LE85 standard these 4 items as well as 4 additional considerations are to be undertaken. Agricultural infrastructure should be protected--drainage systems, surface water management, and traffic considerations are included in part D numbers 5, 6 and 7. Item D number 8 suggests that there is a health and safety consideration to be made that could change the agricultural character of rural environments.
SITE ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: This questionnaire is divided into different sections designated by letters of the alphabet. No site will require answering all of the questions in each of the sections; therefore begin with question A1 and follow the directions to answer the appropriate number of questions that will follow.

Part A.
1. Is the soil of the site under consideration LE 85 or greater?
   a. YES. Place 200 points for this item on the Score Sheet and proceed to Part B of this questionnaire.
   b. NO. Go to Part C of this questionnaire.

Part B.
1. Is the site under consideration contiguous and tangent to a municipal/village/town built environment?
   a. YES. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. NO. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.

2. Does the site have immediate access to municipal/village/town water and sewerage?
   a. YES. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. NO. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.

3. Will the proposed conversion of the site support the viability of existing agriculture efforts in the county?
   a. YES. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. NO. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.

4. Will the conversion of this site to nonagricultural purposes be likely to set precedent for further conversions of land with LE 85 or greater quality?
   a. NO. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. Yes. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.

Part C.
1. Is the average agricultural productivity (as measured by...) of the site within 10% of the average agricultural productivity of 3 LE85 sites with comparable practice in the county?
   a. YES. Enter 190 points for this item on the Score Sheet then proceed to Part D.
   b. NO. Proceed to item 2.

2. Is the average agricultural productivity (as measured by...) of the site within 20% of the average agricultural productivity of 3 LE85 sites with comparable practice in the county?
a. YES. Enter 180 points for this item on the Score Sheet then proceed to Part D.
b. NO. Proceed to item 3.

3. Is the average agricultural productivity (as measured by...) of the site less than 20% of the average agricultural productivity of 3 LE85 sites with comparable practice in the county?
   a. YES. Enter 170 points for this item on the Score Sheet then proceed to Part D.
   b. NO comparison possible. Enter 160 points on the Score Sheet then proceed to Part D.

Part D.

1. Is the site under consideration contiguous and tangent to a municipal/village/town built environment?
   a. YES. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. NO. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.

2. Does the site have immediate access to municipal/village/town water and sewerage?
   a. YES. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. NO. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.

3. Will the proposed conversion of the site support the viability of existing agriculture efforts in the county?
   a. YES. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. NO. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.

4. Will the conversion of this site to nonagricultural purposes be likely to set precedent for further conversions of land with LE 85 or greater quality?
   a. NO. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. Yes. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.

5. Does the site to be converted contain elements of the agricultural drainage system (field tile, grass waterways, drainage ditches)?
   a. NO. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. Yes. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.

6. Will the conversion of the site add to surface runoff to neighboring properties?
   a. NO. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. Yes. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
7. Will the conversion of the site significantly increase the total daily flow of traffic past other agricultural locations?
   a. NO. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. Yes. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.

8. Is the site served within reasonable standards for fire and ambulance services?
   a. Yes. Enter 10 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
   b. NO. Enter 0 points for this item on the Score Sheet.
**SCORE SHEET**  
**Instructions:** Enter the scores from the Site Assessment questionnaire in the proper column below and follow directions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLUMN 1</th>
<th>COLUMN 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part A.</strong> 1a Points=________</td>
<td><strong>Part C.</strong> 1a Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a Points=________</td>
<td>2a Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a Points=________</td>
<td>3a Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3c Points=________</td>
<td>3c Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part B Item</strong> 1a Points=________</td>
<td><strong>Part D.</strong> 1a Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a Points=________</td>
<td>2a Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a Points=________</td>
<td>3a Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a Points=________</td>
<td>4a Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a Points=________</td>
<td>5a Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a Points=________</td>
<td>6a Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a Points=________</td>
<td>7a Points=________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a Points=________</td>
<td>8a Points=________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Points for Part B=________  Total Points for Part D=________

Subtract Part B from Part A =  _________  Subtract Part D from Part C =  _________

Final Score  
Column 1  
Final Score  
Column 2