PLANNING FRAMEWORK

PREFACE

On August 4th, 2010, the Kane County Regional Planning Commission adopted and forwarded to the Kane County Board a 2040 Conceptual Land Use Strategy Report. This report provided the Board with some background regarding the Commissions previously recommended comprehensive plans; reviewed the conceptual planning strategy and the challenges and opportunities for the future of the county; and made 12 recommendations for proceeding with the preparation, review and adoption of the 2040 Land Resource Management Plan (2040 Plan). The twelfth of these recommendations was that the county’s next plan, the 2040 Plan be titled, Then (1840), Now (2010), and Tomorrow (2040): 200 Years of Settlement, Development, Preservation and Planning for a Safe and Healthy, Liveable Kane County, Illinois.

This Planning Framework section of the 2040 Plan relates the THEN, the early years of the county based on the 1840 Census; describes the NOW, the current 2010 population and conditions according to the recent 2010 Census; and projects the TOMORROW, what Kane County could be like in 2040, 200 years after the early settlement and first census.

THEN

1840 Kane County

The earliest recorded settler in Kane County, Christopher Payne, crossed the prairie heading west from Naperville and passed the north end of the “big woods” to establish his home just east of the present City of Batavia in 1833. A large boulder with a plaque on the north side of Wilson Street, just west of Kirk Road identifies the site of his first cabin. The History of Kane County records the first permanent settlers in Aurora and Geneva also arrived in 1833. The following year, 1834, witnessed settlers in Blackberry, Dundee, St. Charles and Sugar Grove, followed by the first permanent settlers in Big Rock, Burlington, Campton, Elgin, Kaneville, Plato and Rutland in 1835. By 1836, the first immigrants arrived in the last townships to be settled, Hampshire and Virgil.

By 1836, enough settlers had arrived in the area for the Illinois legislature to establish Kane County. The County was created on January 16, 1836, and was named after Elias Kent Kane (1794-1835) who was Illinois’ first Secretary of State (1818-1822), a United States Senator (1825-1835), and prime mover in achieving Statehood for Illinois (K.C.Dev.Dept., 1989; Historic Preservation Plan, p.3). Shortly thereafter, Herrington’s Tavern and Inn on the banks of the Fox River in Geneva was selected to serve as the first Kane County seat and courthouse because it was also the site of the only post
The new residents of Kane County then elected their first officials, three commissioners, a sheriff, a coroner, a surveyor, and a recorder of deeds, on June 4, 1836.

The early settlers found abundant hardwood forests, a flowing river to harness for waterpower, fertile lands to farm, springs of pure drinking water, and stone outcroppings for foundations and homes. Forests of oak and other trees bordered the Fox River while the areas west of the river were composed of woodlands and prairies. The wooded areas covered approximately one quarter of the County. The prairie consisted primarily of tall, tough grasses often growing ten to fifteen feet high. The soil below the grass was often wet and swampy and the grass roots were tangled and tough, making the land difficult to plough. The land was largely black soil with some clay, sand and gravel. Extensive tracts of low, marshy lands also covered portions of the County. Wildlife in the area consisted of deer, wildcats, lynx, wolves, wild pigeons, ducks and geese, quail, crows, robins, other small birds, and abundant fish. A variety of nuts and berries were also found here by early settlers.

Settlement of the area escalated after 1836, when the Native Americans were forced to relocate west of the Mississippi River. Increased settlement of the central and western sections of the County had begun by 1840. The beginnings of the urban area along the river were already established. Most of the desirable timbered land along the river was claimed. New settlers looked toward the groves of trees out on the prairies to the west as locations for their homes and farms. The names of these early settlement areas reflect the homesteaders’ reliance on wood: Sugar Grove, Pingree Grove, Pigeon Woods (Hampshire Township), Lone Grove (Kaneville Township), Ohio Grove (Virgil Township), and Lances’ Grove (Blackberry Township). Two important inventions, John Deere’s Moldboard Plow (1837) and McCormick’s Virginia Reaper (introduced in Kane County in 1846), enabled the settlers to expand their farming to the surrounding prairies.

The 1840 Landscape Map is a composite of the original township plats of survey prepared by Surveyors James Thompson, John P. Thompson, James Galloway, Eli S. Prescott, and Ignatius Sprigg, between 1839 and 1842. The surveyors walked and measured section lines and recorded information about the land as they went. Their records were sometimes generalized and some physical and environmental features were missed, but, nevertheless, these surveys represent the first comprehensive inventory of the resources of Kane County.

In 1840, the County landscape was still mostly native timber and prairie. Many of the early fields were along the Fox River or on the edge or closely located to the woodlands. Today’s Nelson Lake, labeled as “mud lake”, appears west of what would be Batavia, and the Waubonsee “swamp” south of Aurora, the Clanyard marsh in Rutland, the Rob Roy “slough” in Sugar Grove, and other major wetlands appear on the map. An area of “27 ancient mounds” is shown in what is now Sleepy Hollow, Dundee Township along the bluffs of the old oxbow bend of the Fox River. Ten dams and their mills and saw mills are located along the Fox River. Today’s Montgomery dam is not
identified but two dams between Aurora and North Aurora are shown which don’t exist today. Associated with most of the dams are the earliest towns, Dundee, Elgin, Charleston (St. Charles), Geneva, Batavia and Aurora.

Figure:

Linking these early settlements, towns and fields to each other and to counties and towns outside the Fox Valley is a network of trails and roads. For example the survey identifies: in Dundee Township, “a road from Ottawa to Dundee”; in Elgin, “a road from Elgin to Chicago”; east from Geneva (IL Rt. 38) “a road to Chicago”; from Batavia (Wilson Street today) is “a road to Warenville” west from Geneva extending along what is Kaneville and Fabyan; and on into Blackberry Township is “a road to Orange”, apparently a settlement west of Kane County. In Aurora Township, paralleling what is now Montgomery Road, is “a road to Chicago”; and crossing the township east to west and extending into Sugar Grove Township is “a road to Galena”. Also, in Sugar Grove is a route called a “road from Dixon to Aurora”. Heading northwest across Plato, Burlington, Rutland and Hampshire are two roads “from Chicago to Galena” which are
today’s Burlington Road, Big Timber Road, Reinking Road and U.S Route 20. Another road crossing Plato is identified as “a road from Charleston (St. Charles) to Belvedere”.

Some of the 1840 roads are still in existence, many times in the same location as the roads and highways of today. There is a fork in a trail in Campton Township close to the Garfield Farm and Tavern which is now the general route of IL 38 heading west across Virgil Township and Campton Hills Road. Portions of Jericho and Granart Roads in Sugar Grove and Big Rock were already trails in 1840. A fork in the 1840 road South of Bald Mound in Blackberry Township is today where Fabyan, Main Street and Bliss Roads intersect. These early road and trails of a fledgling transportation system linked the growing towns, brought people and goods to expanding markets, provided opportunities for early commerce and manufacturing, and gave access for more farmers and settlers.

1840 Census

By 1840, a still young nation, the United States of America, was conducting its Sixth Census as required every ten years by the Constitution. Kane County, as one of Illinois newest counties, was included in that 1840 Census which today gives us a first glimpse at the settlement and growth of the county in the first 5 or 6 years. The Compendium of the Sixth Census, Recapitulation of the Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons within the District of Illinois, By Counties and Principal Towns, records a total of 6,501 persons residing in Kane County (see attached, Compendium of the Sixth Census, pp. 84-87). The Census records 3,530, Free White Males, 586 who were under age 5, 814 over 20 and under 30, and 71 between 60 and 70. It recorded 2,967 Free White Females, 588 under age 5, 4 over 80 but under 90, and 562 between the ages of 20 and 30. There were 6 males and 4 females older than 80. The battle over slavery still lay ahead of America, so the 1840 Census recorded 4 “Free Colored Persons”, 3 males and 1 female. There are no “Slaves” documented in the 1840 Census of Kane County although it records that in the entire state of Illinois there were 168 male slaves and 163 female slaves. The compendium also indicates that there were 3 pensioners for revolutionary or military services residing in the County.

In 1840, Kane County’s population of 6,501 was greater than the 4,476 residents of Chicago, exceeded the 3,535 citizens of DuPage County, and of all the current Chicago metropolitan counties, only Cook and Will, 10,201 and 10,167 respectively, had a greater population. Kendall County did not yet exist and was still included in LaSalle County. DeKalb and McHenry had populations if 1,697 and 2,578. The most populace counties in Illinois were downstate and included St. Clair, (13,631) Sangamon, (14,716) Pike, (11,728) Morgan, (19,547) Madison, (14,433) Greene, (11,951) Gallatin, (10,760) Fulton, (13,142) and Adams (14,476) Counties. These were central and southern Illinois counties that were settled even before Statehood was granted to Illinois in 1818.

The Sixth Census reveals that Kane County’s residents were already hard at work with settlement and development. The vast majority, 1,239 persons were engaged in agriculture, 40 employed in commerce, 317 in manufactures and trades and 49 citizens
worked as learned professionals and engineers. A fledging educational system was already in place with 39 primary and common schools educating 1,153 early scholars. While most adults apparently had some education, the record indicates there were 10 white people over 20 years of age who could not read or write.

On the farms there were 1,658 horses and mules, 7,858 neat cattle, 1,262 sheep, an amazing 17,279 swine (pigs), and the estimated value of all kinds of poultry was $2,811.00. The rich, fertile farmland was already producing 150,110 bushels of wheat, 5,980 bushels of barley and 167,468 bushels of oats. The soybeans of today are not listed as a crop in 1840 but 151,310 bushels of Indian corn were harvested along with 1,363 and 737 bushels of rye and buckwheat. Various other crops included 1,961 pounds of wool, 77372 bushels of potatoes and 6,592 tons of hay, much of it went to feed the dairy cattle that produced $18,788 worth of milk and cream.

In the early cities and villages commerce was active. There were already 16 retail dry goods, grocery and other stores with a capital investment of $60,746. There were 15 men employed making bricks and lime that had a value of $2,530.00. Smaller manufacturing operations were lumber products, flax operations, hat, cap, and bonnet manufacturing, and leather, tanneries and saddleries. Two distilleries produced 18,000 gallons of distilled and fermented liquors and two men were employed making carriages and wagons. The 6 grist mills and 22 saw mills along the Fox River employed 59 men, produced goods worth $22,360 and represented $106,600 of investment. Additionally, 9 men were employed making furniture, and 7 brick or stone houses and 29 wooden houses were built with the value of constructing or building estimated at $36,910.

In a few short years, the settlement and development of Kane County was well underway. Damming the river, cutting the woodlands, plowing the prairie and draining the wetlands was changing the 1840 landscape from the natural toward what exists today. The pods above the dams on the Fox River, the early trails and roads and the first platting of the towns has influenced the forms of today’s cities and villages. And the boundaries of the townships, sections and quarter sections created by the original surveys remain on the landscape as fence lines, civil borders, highways, and other physical features.

The 1840 population grew and prospered during subsequent decades. By 1850, the population had increased by more than 10,000 to 16,703, a change of 156.93%. The next decade brought the first 2 railroads to the Fox Valley, heading west from Geneva and Elgin, bringing new commerce and industry, and a 1860 population count of 25,906. Steady growth through the remainder of the century expanded the population to 78,629 by 1900. By 1950 the population had doubled again to 150,388. During the second half of the 20th Century, there was double digit percent change in population every decade. The construction of the interstate highway system and suburban growth westward from Chicago into the Fox Valley contributed to a population of 404,119 by the year 2000.