

CITY OF BRAIDWOOD**City Council
Special Meeting****Tuesday, October 18, 2011, 7:00 p.m.****City Council Chambers****Call to Order**

Mayor Bill Rulien called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by everyone present.

Roll Call

Elected officials present: Mayor Rulien, Commissioner of Public Property Jim Hutton, Commissioner of Streets and Public Improvements Danny Graf, Commissioner of Public Health and Safety Eric Tessler, and Commissioner of Accounts and Finances Elena Hibler.

Appointed officials present: Chief of Police Rich Girot, Fire Chief Ken Heberer, City Planner Jim Testin, and Deputy City Clerk Danielle Godar

Mayor's report

Mayor Rulien announced that the meeting would proceed in the following order:

1. Presentation on the planned High Speed Rail siding in Braidwood by George Weber, IDOT (Illinois Department of Transportation).
2. Response by Mayor Rulien
3. Response by City Council members
4. Response by the City Planner
5. Response by the Chief of Police
6. Response by the Fire Chief
7. Response by audience members

10/19/2011 12:59:00 AM

City: High speed rail siding is recipe for disaster

Braidwood Journal

Marney Simon
Staff writer

Due diligence.

It's what the Illinois Department of Transportation said they did when coming up with a plan to run two miles of side track just north of Braidwood's Main Street crossing as part of a proposed plan for high speed rail. But to the more than 60 people who showed up for a meeting on Oct. 18 at Braidwood's City Hall, that due diligence was simply not enough.

Residents from both Braidwood and Wilmington came to the meeting on Tuesday to voice their displeasure with the plan to place a 2.1 mile siding just north of downtown Braidwood. The siding is essentially a second track, used so a slower train can turn off the main line while a faster train moves past.

The siding is part of an overall plan to add high speed rail service along the Union Pacific line between Chicago and St. Louis, a plan that would essentially cut 45 minutes off of the current train travel time via the Amtrak and add additional service for travelers. Proponents of the high speed rail system say that adding the service could help ease congestion on the roads and airways between the cities by offering an alternate form of travel.

Folks at the meeting this week were not overly opposed to high speed rail, but rather, to a change in the original proposal which places the siding about 800 feet to the north of Braidwood's Main Street crossing, running from that point more than two miles up to Coal City Road.

George Weber, chief of IDOT's Bureau of Railroads, told the crowd that the plan for the Braidwood siding was the result a meeting held earlier this year.

"That meeting resulted in us changing [the plans for the siding] because people from the [Exelon Braidwood Station] nuclear facility made their comments on the project, that it was number one, going to tie up the crossing going into the facility," Weber explained. "So the process worked in that aspect, we were able to go back to the drawing board and come up with a different location."

The Braidwood siding was proposed as an alternate siding location in a document issued by IDOT on March 29, 20 days after the last public hearing was held.

IDOT said that the trains using the siding would be primarily Amtrak trains, which would be moving to the side to make way for the high speed trains.

Weber did say that the concerns of the public would be taken seriously. At the conclusion of the meeting, Weber said that he would take the concerns laid out and see if there is a way to tweak the plans to reduce the impact on Braidwood.

"Give me the opportunity," Weber said. "I came out here to talk to you about it, give me the opportunity to go back and look at it."

However, Weber noted that if an alternate siding could not be found, the only remedy residents would have would be to contact their state representatives and lodge their complaints that way.

The high speed rail project would involve track and infrastructure improvements to the existing line, which would allow for high speed train travel up to 110 miles per hour. Funding for the high speed rail will come from both the federal government and the state. Illinois received a \$1.2 billion federal award as part of the high speed rail program, a component of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Illinois Capitol Bill also appropriated \$400 million for high-speed rail.

Residents can sign up to be added to IDOT's mailing list and to receive newsletters and fact sheets about the project.

More information on IDOT's high speed rail Chicago to St. Louis program and sign up forms for that information are available online at www.idothsr.org.

IDOT has now begun the second round of meetings on the project. This next round is for the Tier I EIS (Environmental Impact Statement), and the purpose of these meetings is to present the alternative routes that have been developed for accommodating higher speeds and additional daily round trips between Chicago and St. Louis. Criteria for evaluating the various alternatives and deciding which ones advance for further study will also be shown.

The criteria include: residential and commercial impacts; travel time reductions; safety; construction costs; and environmental impacts such as effects on threatened and endangered species, noise and vibration, wetlands and floodplains, and historic structures.

The public is invited to attend an open house to learn more and provide comments on the study. An open house will be held from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 25, at the Jacob Henry Mansion in Joliet.