

29 April 2009

Supervisor Steve Burgmeier
Jefferson County Board of Supervisors
Jefferson County Courthouse
51 East Briggs Avenue
Fairfield, IA 52556

Dear Supervisor Burgmeier:

I write relating to the third and final reading of the updated "Subdivision Ordinance" of Jefferson County, Iowa, which I understand to be scheduled for Monday, May 4 at 9.00 am. I commend the Board of Supervisors for giving the Subdivision Ordinance the attention such an important, affecting document deserves. The Jefferson County Board of Supervisors is entrusted with a greater responsibility relating to orderly and efficient development in the county than many of its contemporary boards in other counties as a consequence of Jefferson County's choice to forego formal zoning regulation. This makes the Subdivision Ordinance perhaps one of the most important levers of county control, a fact which necessarily introduces the ordinance to perhaps more scrutiny than any other decree under your jurisdiction.

The Fairfield Economic Development Association [FEDA] has grave concern relating to Section 5, subsection C in the draft ordinance, which reads

Protection of Agricultural Land. Jefferson County considers any land with a corn suitability rating (CSR) of 50 or higher to be productive agricultural soil. There exists a rebuttable presumption that land with a CSR value of 50 or higher should be preserved for agricultural use.

We understand that at the Board of Supervisors April 27 meeting the proposed CSR rating limitation was amended from 50 to 55. This, though a motion in the right direction, does not begin to address our concerns.

As you may be aware, FEDA recently conducted an in-depth study of the condition and future of the Jefferson County economy called the Fairfield Existing Business Initiative. The results of the Initiative paint a positive picture for the near-term economic growth of the county, estimating commercial expansion capital investment reaching \$77,500,000 in the next three years with a project average of \$3,214,286. In those same three years, an estimated 491,000 additional square feet of commercial space is projected to be created along with 361 new direct jobs (excluding multipliers like construction jobs), simply from existing industry expansion.

In order for this exciting growth to occur, however, land to develop upon must remain available in the county. The proposed CSR limitation has the potential to endanger not only a number of these projects, but to severely restrict future business attraction efforts in an increasingly competitive arena due to its unprecedented predilection toward agriculture.

To be clear: we recognize and endorse the impetus behind the CSR limitation idea. Land plainly appropriate for agricultural use and agricultural use only should be standardized and regulated at the county level. Our concern with the extraordinary CSR limitation approach relates to its likely negative impact on the orderly

development of the 2-mile “extraterritorial zone,” or radius, surrounding the City of Fairfield. The CSR limitation possesses the potential to be destructive and obstructionist both to the growth and prosperity of the Jefferson County economy and its derivative quality of life given its strong potential to endanger future development efforts near Fairfield, where the potential for commercial and multi-parcel residential growth is quite strong.

Too, the narrowing impact of a CSR rating so low (55) serving as the baseline obstacle to non-farm use is of concern. We understand through communication with the Iowa State University Extension Service that land bearing a CSR of 60 or lower is considered to be marginal for crop use, which indicates that suitable, flat development ground is likely to bear a much higher CSR than the 55 limitation being considered. We are currently researching CSRs in the two-mile zone and hope to have the opportunity to provide you with our findings at a near-future date.

We ask that the Board of Supervisors at its May 4 meeting consider tabling the vote on the third and final reading of this critical ordinance to allow for the opportunity of a joint meeting including but not limited to FEDA, City of Fairfield officials and the Board of Supervisors to discuss CSR ratings near Fairfield and the limitation’s potential impact on economic development in the area and further discuss ways to both protect future uses of agricultural land and provide for the territorial development integrity of Fairfield.

Should a tabling of the vote not be amenable to the Board, we request here that the Board of Supervisors exempt the two-mile extra-territorial zone around Fairfield from land regulated under the proposed Section 5, subsection C component of the Subdivision Ordinance. The grounds of this area are fertile for crops but must not be limited to them in the interest of the future growth of the tax base and economy in Jefferson County.

We write to you with grave concern for the growth of our community and yours. FEDA will be represented at the May 4 meeting and we look forward to addressing our ideas and your questions at that time and in the future.

Thank you for your consideration and service to our community.

Very sincerely yours,

Brent M. Willett, Executive Director
Fairfield Economic Development Association

C: Supervisor Dick Reed
Supervisor Lee Dimmitt
Mayor Ed Malloy
Pat McAvan, Assistant County Attorney
John Brown, Administrator, City of Fairfield
Pat Doyle, Fairfield Economic Development Association
Tammy Dunbar, Fairfield Area Chamber of Commerce