

## County officials OK railport pledge

**By Jason Nevel**

Herald Staff Writer

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— CLINTON — The Clinton County Board of Supervisors gave the thumbs up Tuesday for the county's \$6 million pledge to help finance the construction of the Lincolnway Railport. The board voted 2-1 to move forward with proceedings to issue up to \$6.2 million in bonds. Supervisor Jill Davisson, a Republican, was the lone "no" vote. Before voting, each member discussed their position on investing tax dollars for the construction of the railport.

John Staszewski, Democrat, said he's always backed the project and the county was taking a short-term risk for a long-term gain.

Dennis Starling, Democrat, added by potentially creating new, high-paying jobs in Clinton, it would give young people a reason to stay in town.

Davisson said she believed the project itself could be positive but thought voters should decide through a referendum how to spend tax dollars.

With the county on board, Clinton Regional Development Corp. President Steve Ames said completing the \$20.8 million project is now more of a reality in the eyes of businesses looking to locate in Clinton.

Tuesday's much anticipated public hearing brought out about 50 people, mostly supporters, who weighed in with their opinions before the Supervisors voted.

Proponents said building the railport was an economic opportunity Clinton County would be foolish to pass up while opponents argued the project was too expensive and voters, not board members, should decide if they wanted to use tax dollars on something that wasn't a sure thing. Connor Anderson, of Clinton, urged the board to vote "yes" because he said the project capitalized on the advantages Clinton offered, such as its proximity to the Mississippi River and rail lines running through town.

"It's up to you to seize those advantages," said Anderson, who was one of six supporters applauded after their remarks. "No major economic development doesn't happen without cooperation from government and private business."

Marty Ray, of Clinton, said voters should decide, not the board, because taxpayers can't afford the extra expense to fund the project that may never produce a heavy manufacturer. "We don't have the money," said Ray, who was one of three vocal opponents. "I urge one of you to make a motion to put this up for a referendum."

No motion was made by board members to put the issue up for referendum.

Other money in the game is \$5 million from city of Clinton, \$2 million from CRDC, a \$2 million federal stimulus grant is still available and \$200,000 from the Clinton County Community Development Association.

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