THE CITY OF ROCKFORD ILLINOIS, USA

PLANNING & ZONING REPORT

Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting of April 21, 2026

File # 009-26

APPLICANT: Kathryn Whitacre of Nettle Curbside Compost, LLC

LOCATION: 730 Lincoln Park Boulevard

REQUESTED ACTION: A Special Use Permit for a Planned Unit Development consisting of a working farm and education center with pole barns for a community meeting place and equipment storage, two (2) 30' x 90' passive solar greenhouses, a storage shed, a gazebo and a gravel parking area and gravel driveway in an R-1, Single-family Residential Zoning District.

EXISTING USE: Vacant land

PROPOSED USE: A working farm and education center with pole barns for a community meeting place and equipment storage, two (2) 30' x 90' passive solar greenhouses, a storage shed, a gazebo and a gravel parking area and gravel driveway

DIMENSIONS: Exhibit D **SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 7.37 acres

ADJACENT ZONING AND LAND USES:

NORTH:	Winn Co. R-1	Single-family residences, vacant land
EAST:	R-1	Single-family residences, vacant land
SOUTH:	I-2	Free-standing solar array, vacant land
WEST:	RE	Passive parkland, Ingersoll Golf Course and Park

YEAR 2040 PLAN: RL Low Density Residential

SOILS REPORT: SWCD Comments: **#26-43**:

Erosion Concerns

The proposed land use of this site is a planned unit development. It is currently vacant land, with some trees. Soil disturbance will occur as a result of developing the site, which is slightly sloping and susceptible to erosion. The area of disturbance will be greater than one acre, so an EPA NPDES permit may be required; as well as any City/County Permit requirements.

Soil disturbance can create soil erosion which must be properly managed to prevent adverse environmental impacts. Erosion from construction sites is a leading cause of water quality problems in Illinois. Problems caused by this sediment include:

- increased flooding — Sediment build-up lowers the flow capacity of channels causing more frequent flooding in areas that rarely or never flooded before
- Financial burden to taxpayers - Sediment that finds its way into streets, storm sewers, and ditches result in additional maintenance costs for local, state and federal governments

- Water quality impairment - Sediment laden runoff transfers nutrients and other pollutants to downstream lakes and rivers degrading aquatic habitats and increasing costs for water treatment

Simple but effective controls include preserving existing trees and grass where possible, using silt fence to trap sediment on the down slope sides of the area of disturbance, using a gravel drive used by all vehicles to limit tracking of mud onto streets, cleaning up sediment carried off-site by vehicles or storms, installing curb inlet controls, using downspout extenders to prevent roof runoff from eroding exposed soil, locating soil piles away from any roads or waterways, and reseeding or sodding the site as soon as possible. The materials (silt fence, stakes, gravel entrance, inlet controls, and grass seed) are easy to find and relatively inexpensive.

The Illinois Urban Manual is a resource of practices used throughout the State and can be accessed at https://illinoisurbanmanual.org/. The concept of these practices can be carried over to good housekeeping measures after development occurs and buildings are occupied to prevent stormwater runoff from becoming contaminated.

"Active erosion was noted during our site visit. See photo #7 and photo locations**

Surface and Groundwater Contamination from Heavy Equipment and Vehicle Traffic

There will be several vehicles moving on and stored on the site. Most of these vehicles are heavy duty pieces of equipment, with high capacity fuel tanks and large hydraulic oil reservoirs. Due to bedrock being at or near the soil surface, absorbents should be readily available in the event of a spill or leak to promptly contain hazards that would otherwise be environmentally harmful to groundwater recharge areas. Personnel should be properly trained to contain and clean up any spills. They should periodically check for indications of leaks or spills under or around vehicles and fix issues to prevent further contamination.

Properly label, store and dispose of all fluids and other hazardous chemicals to avoid environmental contamination. Keep storage containers off the ground to avoid stormwater contamination. Any fuel storage areas should be properly located away from high traffic areas; and have secondary containment.

Prevent stormwater from washing contaminants off the site in the event of a storm. Contaminants on Impermeable surfaces (concrete, asphalt, rooftops, etc.) will wash off with rain and will eventually make its way into drainage ways which go directly to natural surface water areas (ditch, creek, river, etc.) without treatment. Avoid washing impermeable surfaces off with a hose, but rather use a broom and dispose of waste versus having contaminants wash off the site.

Woodland Information

The Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District encourages preserving as much of the wooded character of this site as possible. Long-term preservation of the trees will require taking certain precautions during and after construction. The ground around each tree to be saved should be flagged or fenced off. Also, it should be protected from heavy machinery. This area should be at least as wide as the area covered by the spread of the tree branches. Soil compaction around the roots of the trees can permanently interfere with the uptake of oxygen, nutrients, and water. This may cause the premature death of the trees. The placement of fill material around the trunks

of trees can have the same adverse effects. Other construction practices to avoid near the trees are: cutting and filling, raising the soil level, and removing neighboring trees. Contractors and construction crews should be informed of all tree preservation efforts.

Rusty Patch Bumble Bee

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the rusty patched bumble bee as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Endangered species are animals and plants that are in danger of becoming extinct. The rusty patch bumble bee is a pollinator that lives in prairies and grasslands which are one of the last species to go into hibernation. They need areas that provide nectar and pollen from flowers, nesting sites (underground), and over-wintering sites for hibernating queens (undisturbed soil).

Many factors have led to the rust patch bumble bee becoming an endangered species. Most of prairies and grasslands of the Upper Midwest and Northeast have been converted to monoculture farms or developed areas, such as cities and roads. Grasslands that remain tend to be small and isolated. Increases in farm size and technology advances improved the operating efficiency of farms but have led to practices that harm bumble bees, including increased use of pesticides, loss of crop diversity which results in flowering crops being available for only a short time, loss of hedgerows and the flowers that grew there, and loss of legume pastures.

There are numerous programs, research, and groups working towards helping the rusty patch bumble bee. Some things you can do to help include having flowering plants, providing natural areas with native plants, and minimize the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizer.

For more information Visit:
https://www.fws.eov/midwest/endangered/insects/rpbb/factsheetrpbb.html

Native Plantings

Native plants like grasses and flowers provide critical habitat for many key species like the Rusty Patch Bumble Bee and Monarch Butterflies. These deep-rooted native species are preferred because of their abilities to enhance soil permeability and pollutant filtering and their reduced needs for fertilizer, herbicides, irrigation, and mowing. Unfortunately, loss and degradation due to the development of the land and an invasion of exotic species is a serious problem in Illinois.

Invasive Species

Honeysuckle & Multiflora rose were the invasive species found on southern end of the property during the site visit.

"What are non-native invasive species? Non-native invasive plants and non-native imported insects are ecologically or economically damaging exotic plants or pests, introduced to areas where they were not found historically. These plants and pests grow with little to no environmental controls to keep their population numbers low, often in part because they are free from the predators and diseases present in their native geography. They continue to increase in abundance until they cause damage by changing the habitat for wildlife and native plants or by negatively impacting forest or agricultural resources.

How can you prevent their spread? The best way to prevent the spread of invasive plants and pests is to avoid introducing them. Do not plant or

introduce invasive plants or pests, and eliminate high risk pathways by not moving firewood. Learn which landscape plants are becoming invasive and avoid using them. Consider removing any existing invasive plants from your landscaping. Also, take care to prevent spreading invasive plants and pests after spending time outdoors; invasive species can hitch a ride by attaching themselves to fabric or clothing, the mud and treads on your shoes or equipment.

What can you do? Control invasive species early, when you first notice new populations, and report unusual species of concern. Be prepared to invest multiple years; control is never a one-time effort. This guide will help by making management recommendations, but always read and follow herbicide and pesticide labels.

The negative impact of invasive plants can be reduced by focused and aggressive use of a combination of mechanical, cultural, and chemical control methods, which will support the restoration of a healthy and diverse natural habitat. Herbicides are a valuable tool, but please use a cautious and conservative approach. applying the minimum amount of the most appropriate chemical to achieve management goals."

HISTORY:

File #003-24: A Special Use Permit for the installation of a solar farm (freestanding solar panel racks and solar panels) in an I-1, Light Industrial Zoning District was approved on March 6, 2024. This property is located directly south of the subject property.

File #047-18: A Zoning Map Amendment from County AG to I-1, Light Industrial Zoning District and a Special Use Permit for the installation of a solar farm (free-standing solar panel racks and solar panels) in an I-1, Light Industrial Zoning District was approved on January 30, 2019. This property is located directly south west of the subject property.

REVIEW COMMENTS: The Applicant, Kathryn Whitacre of Nettle Curbside Compost, LLC, is requesting a Special Use Permit for a Planned Unit Development consisting of a working farm and education center with pole barns for a community meeting place and equipment storage, two (2) 30' x 90' passive solar greenhouses, a storage shed, a gazebo and a gravel parking area and gravel driveway in an R-1, Single-family Residential Zoning District. The subject property is surrounded by mostly residential and vacant uses (Exhibits B & C).

The subject property consists of two (2) parcels that have been subdivided but not platted. There is a total of 7.37 acres of land. The Applicant is desirous of providing education and best practice procedures to build healthy soil, save food waste from the landfill and resilient communities in the Rock River Valley with a working farm and education center. Due to the scope and size of this proposed development, this requires a Special Use Permit for a Planned Unit Development.

The Applicant has requested a Special Use Permit for a Planned Unit Development to meet the standards set forth within the City of Rockford Zoning Ordinance. The PUD provides an administrative procedure and standards to develop new approaches to a more compact, mixed-use living environment through variety in type, design and layout of residential structures, commercial and industrial buildings, transportation systems, and public facilities. The PUD process which, because of unique characteristics,

benefit from a case-by-case review of their compatibility with both the existing and planned land uses in the area.

Exhibit D is the site plan for the proposed working farm and education center. Additionally, Exhibit D shows pole barns for a community meeting place and equipment storage, two (2) 30' x 90' passive solar greenhouses, a storage shed, a gazebo and a gravel parking area and gravel driveway. Furthermore, the applicant is proposing a community pumpkin patch, restored prairie with a trail, production flower and garden field and a native food forest. Finally, Exhibit D shows a native bio swale, demonstration composting beds and a deer fence. Staff does have any issues with the proposed site plan; however, Staff feels that the proposed use of gravel is an issue, as this is a prohibited material for a parking area and driveway. Gravel tends spread with water runoff from rain and form ruts in the surface. It also creates dust on warm, dry days. Staff feels the parking area, driveway and driveway apron should be constructed with chip seal. Chip seal is a cost-effective, textured surface treatment layering liquid asphalt and stone, ideal for low-traffic, rural, or long driveways.

Exhibit E is Narrative submitted by the Applicant for the working farm and education center. The Applicant launched Nettle Curbside Compost, a woman owned business (LLC), formed in September 2024 in Rockford, Illinois (Exhibit E). The mission statement for Nettle Curbside Compost is to work collectively to save food waste from the landfill and to build healthy soil and resilient communities in the Rock River Valley (Exhibit E). The Applicant explains, "as a business, we currently have 147 customers including 8 restaurant subscribers, 2 business, 2 nature centers, 1 community center, and 2 churches (Exhibit E). The Applicant states, "we are diverting between 3 and 5 tons of organic waste from entering the waste stream each month and building healthy soil with the waste to create an organic soil amendment" (Exhibit E).

Additionally, the Applicant explains, "we would like to continue to expand our reach and impact in the Rockford region and to do that we need permission to build infrastructure on our land" (Exhibit E). The Applicant states, "our vision for the land is to create a beautiful space that serves as a working farm and education center for the community where we teach different methods of composting, land restoration and local perennial native edible landscaping" (Exhibit E).

Furthermore, the Applicant explains, "the goals are to build infrastructure on the land to build our reach and impact in the region, diverting organic waste from the landfill so that we reduce greenhouse gases (methane production) and extend the life of the landfill, grow our business so that we can accommodate the increasing demand for commercial composting of large facilities on additional lands and facilities, employ local folks as we grow with a worker owned cooperative, so that employees have the opportunity to become co-owners of the business" (Exhibit E).

Finally, the Applicant explains, "our long term vision is to create high quality compost, potting soil and vermicast for local farmers and gardeners, educating the community about the benefits and how-to's of composting is an essential component of our business. We are currently developing curriculum to teach a 6 week course at Spectrum School and we value collaboration over

competition and are happy to have many partnerships with other organizations in the Rock River Valley" (Exhibit E).

Staff feels that the proposed Planned Unit Development is an appropriate use for this site with the working farm and education center. Staff wants to continue to support unique development that has a green component and the potential to be a good community destination. Staff feels this site will provide hands-on education on the benefits of composting and can help spur environmental education in the community which was the goal of the school district when this former elementary school site was donated to the Land Bank. Staff recommends approval of the Applicant's request.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of Special Use Permit for a Planned Unit Development consisting of a working farm and education center with pole barns for a community meeting place and equipment storage, two (2) 30' x 90' passive solar greenhouses, a storage shed, a gazebo and a chip seal parking area and driveway in an R-1, Single-family Residential Zoning Districts, subject to the following conditions:

1. Must meet all applicable Building and Fire codes.
2. Submittal of a revised site plan showing the parking area, driveway and driveway aprons constructed with chip seal.
3. Must develop site in accordance with the approved revised site plan.
4. Any expansion of the composting area will require a modification of the Special Use Permit.
5. All conditions must be met prior to establishment of use.

SC: DM 04/13/2026 See attached findings of fact

FINDINGS OF FACT FOR APPROVAL OF A SPECIAL USE PERMIT FOR A PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT CONSISTING OF A CONSISTING OF A WORKING FARM AND EDUCATION CENTER WITH POLE BARNS FOR COMMUNITY MEETING PLACE AND EQUIPMENT STORAGE, TWO (2) 30' X 90' PASSIVE SOLAR GREENHOUSES, A STORAGE SHED, A GAZEBO AND A CHIP SEAL PARKING AREA AND DRIVEWAY IN AN R-1, SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL ZONING DISTRICTS LOCATED AT 730 LINCOLN PARK BOULEVARD

Approval of this Special Use Permit is based upon the following findings:

1. The establishment, maintenance or operation of the Special Use Permit will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, morals, comfort or general welfare of the community.

2. The Special Use Permit will not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity for the purposes already permitted, and will not substantially diminish or impair property values within the neighborhood.

3. The establishment of the special use will not impede the normal or orderly development and improvement of the surrounding property for uses permitted in the district.

4. Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage and/or necessary facilities have been, are being, or will be provided.

5. Adequate measures have not been or will be taken to provide ingress or egress so designed as to minimize traffic congestion in the public streets.

6. The special use does conform to the applicable regulations of the R-1 District in which it is located.


Exhibit A
730 Lincoln Park Boulevard
SUP
#009-26
LINCOLN PARK
ALBERTS
SPRINGFIELD
SPRINGFIELD
HUDSON

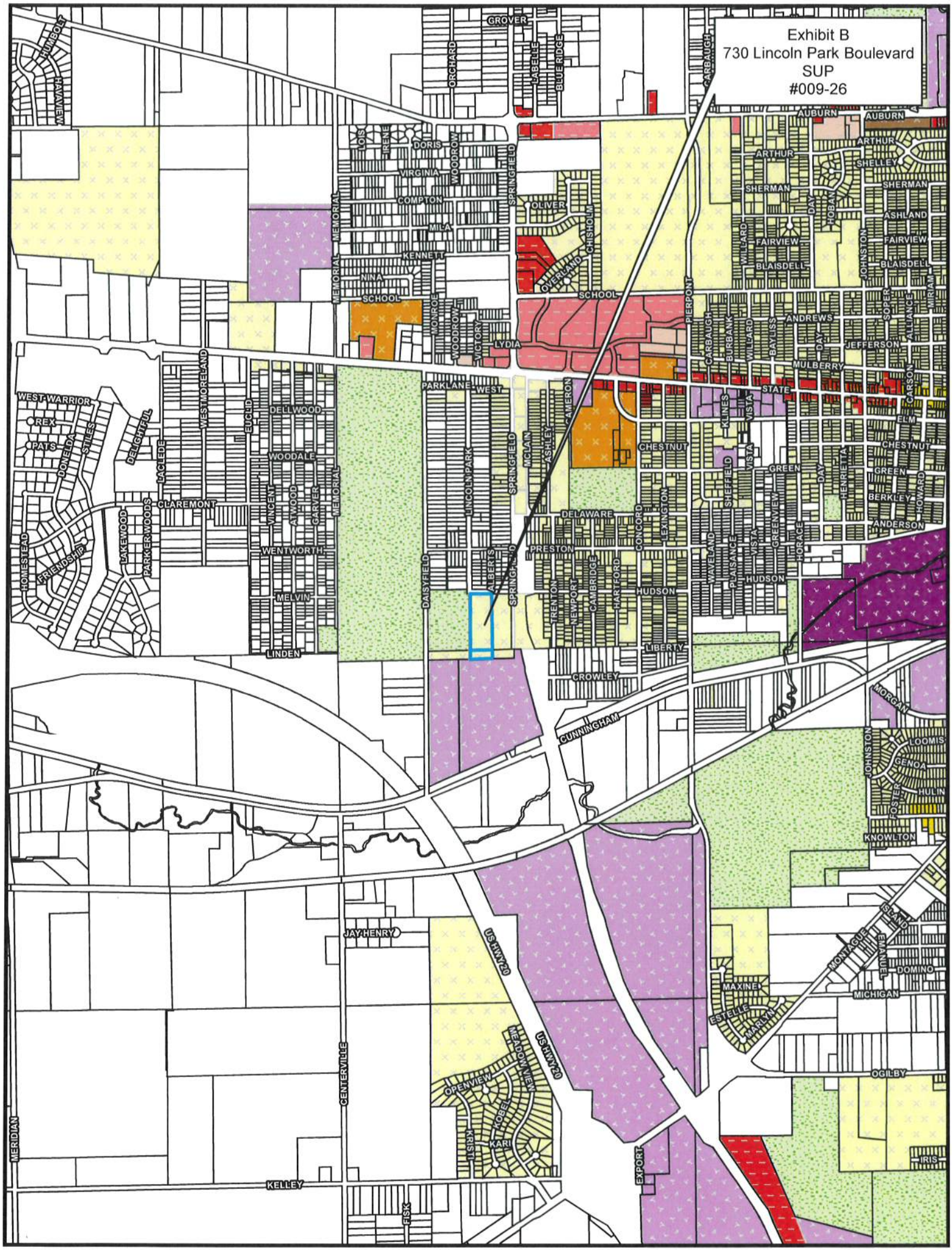


Exhibit B
730 Lincoln Park Boulevard
SUP
#009-26
GROVER
ORCHARD
ISABELLE
BLUE RIDGE
CARBAUGH
AUBURN
ARTHUR
SHELLEY
SHERMAN
DAY
HOBAN
ASHLAND
FAIRVIEW
BLAISDELL
JOHNSTON
SOPER
ALLIANCE
MIRIAM
ANDREWS
JEFFERSON
MULBERRY
STATE
CARSON
ELM
CHESTNUT
GREEN
BERKLEY
HOWARD
ANDERSON
HENRIETTA
KLINES
VISTA
WILLARD
BURBANK
BAYLISS
PIERPONT
HUMBOLDT
MELVIN
LOIS
IRENE
DORIS
VIRGINIA
COMPTON
MILA
KENNETT
NINA
SCHOOL
WOODROW
VICTORIA
LYDIA
OLIVER
SPRINGFIELD
MEMORIAL
CHISHOLM
OVERLAND
PARKLANE WEST
WESTMORELAND
EUCLID
DELLWOOD
WOODALE
CLAREMONT
LINDEN
MELVIN
WENTWORTH
VINCENT
ATWOOD
GARVER
LAGLEDE
DELIGHTFUL
STILES
DONELDA
PATS
REX
WEST WARRIOR
HOMESTEAD
FRIENDSHIP
LAKEWOOD
PARKERWOODS
LINCOLN PARK
MCLAIN
ASHLEY
CAMERON
DAISYFIELD
ALBERTS
PRESTON
DELAWARE
CONCORD
LEXINGTON
SHEFFIELD
GREENVIEW
WAVELAND
PLAISANCE
HORACE
HUDSON
LIBERTY
CROWLEY
CAMBRIDGE
HARTFORD
TRENTON
NEWPORT
GUNNINGHAM
MORGAN
LOOMIS
GENOA
MULIN
FOSTER
KNOWLTON
ISLAND
MONTAGUE
DANIEL
DOMINO
MICHIGAN
MAXINE
ESTELLE
MARILYN
OGILBY
IRIS
EXPORT
US HWY 20
MEADOWVIEW
OPENVIEW
HOBEL
KARI
KRISTI
CENTERVILLE
MERIDIAN
KELLEY
FISK
JAY HENRY

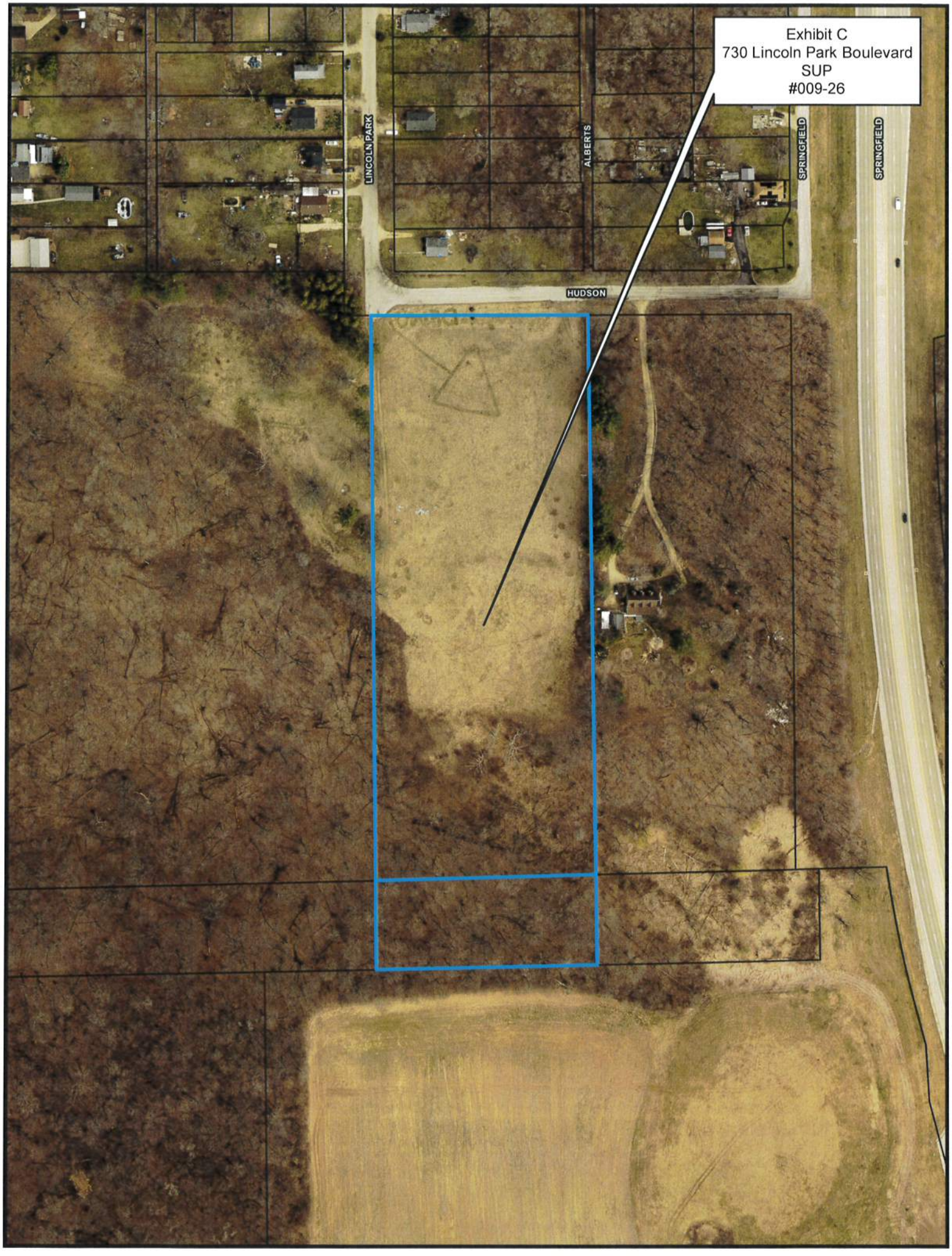
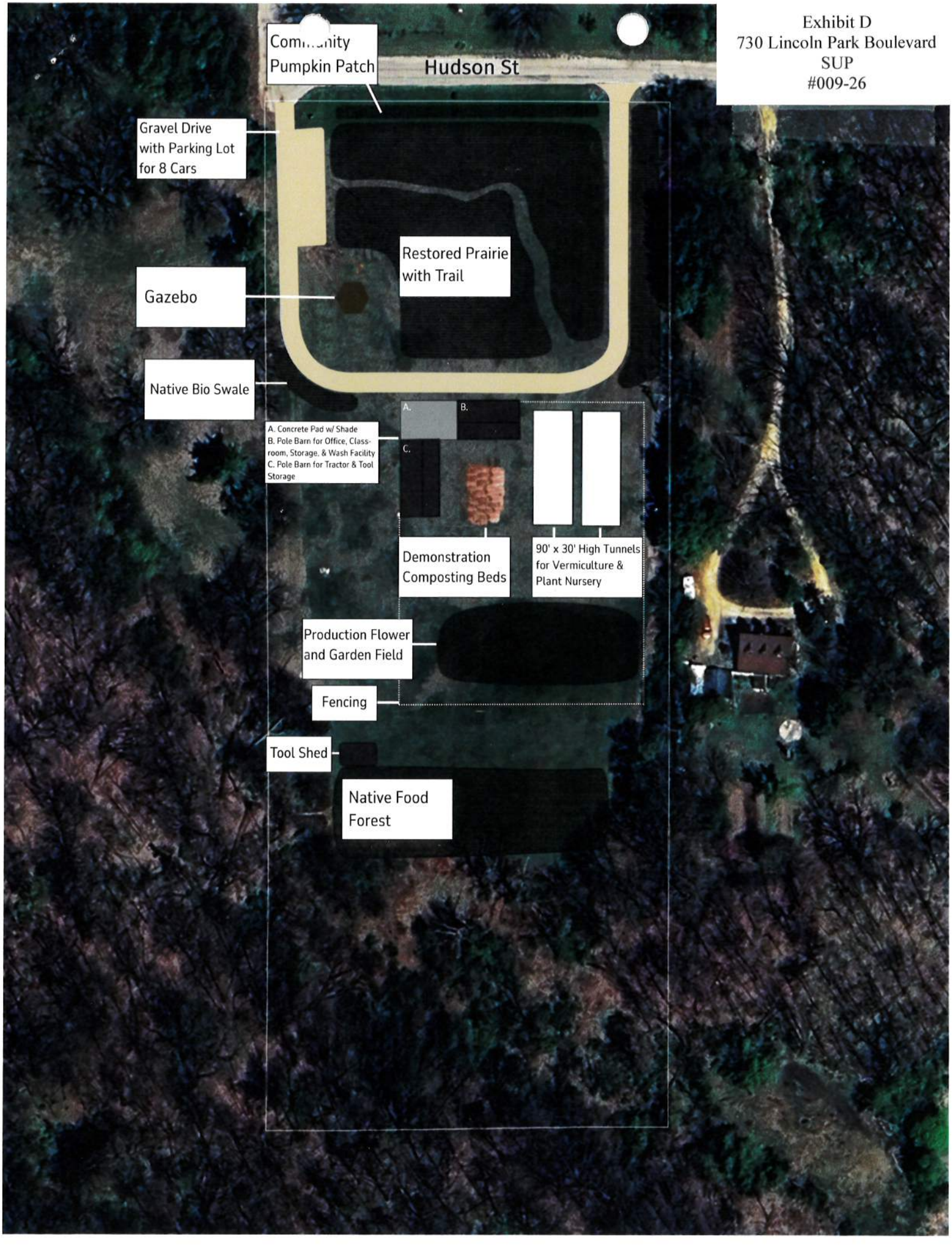


Exhibit C
730 Lincoln Park Boulevard
SUP
#009-26
LINCOLN PARK
ALBERTS
SPRINGFIELD
SPRINGFIELD
HUDSON

Exhibit D
730 Lincoln Park Boulevard
SUP
#009-26



Nettle Curbside Compost
Business address: 2781 Crestdale Circle Physical address: 730 Lincoln Park Blvd
Rockford, IL 61114
(815) 206-8412

Planned Unit Development

10th February 2026

OVERVIEW

Nettle Curbside Compost is a woman owned business (LLC) formed in September 2024 in Rockford Illinois.

Mission statement: To work collectively to save food waste from the landfill and to build healthy soil and resilient communities in the Rock River Valley.

As a business, we currently have 147 customers including 8 restaurant subscribers, 2 business, 2 nature centers, 1 community center, and 2 churches. **We are diverting between 3 and 5 tons of organic waste from entering the waste stream each month and building healthy soil with the waste to create an organic soil amendment.**

We would like to continue to expand our reach and impact in the Rockford region and to do that we need permission to build infrastructure on our land located on the site of the old Dennis School Property at 730 Lincoln Park Blvd which was rezoned as R1 post demolition and donated by the school district to the R1 land bank under the condition that the future tenant would use the land to improve the community and the environment. The R1 selection committee chose our project among several applicants in April of 2024.

Our vision for the land is to create a beautiful space that serves as a working farm and education center for the community where we teach different methods of composting, land restoration and local perennial native edible landscaping. Our site plan includes a ½ acre+ prairie restoration site, a modern pole barn to serve as a community meeting place and equipment storage, two 30 x 90 passive solar greenhouse for worm composting and flower/crop production, a ½ acre field of cut flowers, a free community pumpkin patch, and ¼ acre edible food forest. We are also requesting permission to reconnect to the electrical grid, water grid (piping will be required), build an additional storage shed on the property, a gazebo and a parking area/drive using permeable material, the most desirable choice for the environment, and a deer fence to enclose the space and protect it from pests.

GOALS

1. We would like to attain a PUD so that we can continue to build our reach and impact in the region which requires building infrastructure on the land.
2. We are focused on diverting organic waste from the landfill so that we reduce greenhouse gases (methane production) and extend the life of the landfill. The EPA estimates that over 40% of materials in a landfill could be composted, so increasing the region's composting can have a significant impact on the lifespan of the current landfill.
3. We would like to grow our business so that we can accommodate the increasing demand for commercial composting of large facilities like hospitals, schools, and large event venues. However, it is important to note: as we grow we will purchase additional land and facilities to accommodate the growth because we envision this property to be an educational/outreach center with demonstration gardens and community open space, and not be a large-scale composting site.
4. We want to employ local folks as we grow, and do so as a worker owned cooperative so that employees have the opportunity to become co-owners of the business.
5. Our long term vision is to not only divert waste from the landfill, extending the life of the landfill, but to be able to create high quality compost, potting soil and vermicast for local farmers and gardeners. Compost is not only a natural fertilizer, it also helps to store carbon in the soil thereby mitigating climate change, rebuilds lost topsoil and allows the land to hold more moisture and nutrients thereby reducing the impacts of drought *and* preventing runoff. Thus, creating high quality compost in Rockford will help the community become more environmentally resilient.
6. Educating the community about the benefits and how-tos of composting is an essential component of our business. We have presented at Severson Dells, Nature at the Confluence, Sustain Rockford, Womanspace, The Swedish Historical Society, Keith Country Day School, The Unitarian Universalist Church in Rockford, The Universalist Church of Rockton, 815 day, and Decarbon Dekalb among others. We are currently developing curriculum to teach a 6 week course at Spectrum School this spring and have a presentation at the Rockford Public Library scheduled mid April.
7. We value collaboration over competition and are happy to have many partnerships with other organizations in the Rock River Valley and would like to continue to build these relationships. Current partnerships: Severson Dells Nature Center, Nature at the Confluence, Keep Northern Illinois Beautiful, The Rockford Park District- Joni Denker, Womanspace of Rockford, Real Beautiful You, Rockford Roasting Company, Rockford Art Deli, The Liam Foundation, Emmanuel Lutheran Church of Rockford, The Unitarian Church of Rockford, Tadmore Tailoring and Tadmore Sustainability Institute,

SPECIFICATIONS

See Attached Site Plan..

MILESTONES

Year One- 2026

Priorities: purchase a storage shed and tractor, apply for a USDA cost share grant for a passive solar greenhouse.

Year Two- 2027

Put greenhouse up, add water back onto land (piping/excavation), driveway construction phase one (drive from road to compost piles).

Year Three- 2028

Phase one of building construction (electrical/water/ foundation), driveway expansion to loop, seeding of prairie.

Year Four- 2028

Phase two of construction: erecting the building, phase one planting of edible food forest.

Year Five- 2029

Installation of site wide fencing, begin planting flower field.