

Supervisors OK \$100,000 for soil survey upgrade

By **TIM JAMISON**
Courier Staff Writer

The Board of Supervisors agreed Tuesday to spend more than \$100,000 to upgrade Black Hawk County's soil survey and put the information on a computer mapping system.

Local conservationists, health and safety officials, city and county planners and farmers said the update — which isn't scheduled to begin until spring 1998 — will provide long-range benefits that far outweigh the cost to taxpayers.

"It will be important to our zoning (activities)," said County Engineer Harold Jensen. "We would really be doing an important thing for the farmers of Black Hawk County in the 20th century and beyond."

The survey, which will actually cost about \$400,000, will be conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service. Black

Hawk County and the state of Iowa will each chip in \$101,000 in annual installments over four years, while the federal government would pick up the remaining costs.

Surveyors will take soil samples from throughout the county, which will be recorded on a digital map that could be overlaid on aerial photographs, zoning maps and other geographic information stored on computer.

Jeanette Winegarden, chairwoman of the Black Hawk County Soil & Water Conservation District, urged the supervisors to approve the survey.

"It's merely fine-tuning the survey," she said. "It has to be done sooner or later."

County officials detailed a number of ways the new soil survey can be useful, including:

■ **Septic tank testing and tracking of groundwater pollution problems by county health officials.** Hazardous

material spills can also be tracked and mitigated more efficiently if cleanup crews have accurate information about the type of soil around the spill.

■ **Wildlife and conservation areas can be developed better by county conservation officials, while the local soil conservation service can use the information to advise landowners — especially farmers — on erosion control and groundwater protection.**

■ **Farmers can use the information to govern the type of fertilizer and pesticides to use on certain areas of their land. The information will be key to "precision farming" in conjunction with the county's new computer mapping system, where variable rate application of fertilizers and other chemicals can be applied according to soil needs.**

■ **Local zoning officials can use the information to better map out development in cities and the county.**

The supervisors unanimously approved the project, putting them on a waiting list with other counties in the state. The waiting list accounts for the project's 1998 starting date.

Board chairman Brian Quirk expressed some concerns about the costs involved, since other county obligations are expected to grow in the future.

"I have concerns about fiscal '98," Quirk said. "I hope ... that we have the Farm Bureau's blessing on this."

The county Farm Bureau is traditionally opposed to increased government spending, but its members would be one of the largest groups to benefit from the new survey.

Supervisors Sandra Glenn and Miriam Turnbull suggested that cities in the county — which would be included in the survey — be approached to help foot the bill.

Greg Schellentrager, state soil scien-

tist with the Soil Conservation Service, said any payment by the cities would have to be arranged on the side between the county and the municipalities.

He said Des Moines pitched in a small portion of the cost of a survey conducted in Polk County. On the other hand, Sioux City contributed nothing to the cost of a recent survey in Woodbury County.

"The cities are going to benefit as much as anybody else in the whole project," Schellentrager said.

In other board action, the supervisors voted unanimously to approve a new employment contract with Jensen to serve another year as county engineer.

The contract, retroactive to July 1, gives Jensen a 4 percent pay increase. He will earn \$56,160 this year. Jensen had not received a pay increase since he was hired in August 1992.