

Avon Hills Initiative Executive Board Meeting
March 25, 2009, 4:45 p.m.
Room 150, New Science Center, Saint John's University

MINUTES

Board members present: Steve Plantenberg, Mike Leedahl, Karen Bobeldyk, Lowell Rushmeyer, Allan Davisson, Peter Dwyer

Staff present: Bill Fahrney, Tom Kroll, Jenny Kutter

Guests: Angie Berg, Brian Ross, Chris Butters, Kimberly Thielen-Cremers

With the number of guests new to the Avon Hills Initiative present, introductions were made by and for all.

Stearns County Zoning Ordinance update—Angie Berg (Stearns Co.) and Brian Ross (CR Planning)

- A Stearns County Ordinance Advisory Committee has met during the past 6-8 months to develop a new county zoning ordinance that is consistent with the newly passed comprehensive plan: the zoning ordinance is a tool to implement the comprehensive plan.
- Status Update:
 - o The goal is to maintain the existing structure of the code, eliminate redundant language, modify cluster development standards to protect agriculture
 - o Working on the implementation of 2 new districts in the county:
 - Agriculture conservation overlay—specifically for A40 zoning district with the purpose of protecting agriculture while allowing some development flexibility
 - Natural resources conservation overlay—requested for the Avon Hills area, but county would like to have it developed so it can be used in other areas of the county to protect natural resources
- Definitions—for clarity:
 - o Zoning district: a geographical designation that regulates types of land use, i.e. residential, agricultural, industrial; works to identify desired density and intensity of land use throughout the county
 - o Overlay district: sits on top of zoning district, does not replace; a second layer of regulation/review standards for the designated area within the overlay, i.e. shoreland overlay; generally the more restrictive standards between zoning/overlay apply
- Conservation Overlay decisions/questions so far:
 - o Agriculture overlay—specifically for A40 district with the purpose of protecting agriculture yet allowing for development flexibility
 - Set standards for eligibility
 - Density bonus available—at most 4 per 40
 - LESA score: a quantitative measure of the quality of the soil for farming. A threshold is set to separate higher/lower quality farmland for development-related decisions

- New development must be at least ½ mile from any existing animal agriculture
- Natural Resources overlay—overlay has to be a township based process. To help remain consistent with the comprehensive plan, designation must initiate with the township rather than by landowner request.
 - Process of designation: must identify priority natural resources based on scientific data
 - A large area of the overlay currently lies in Collegeville township—the townships are going to need some help and direction to address the complexities of implementing the overlay and to facilitate a growth plan that is consistent with the overlay.
 - What process can townships use to be sure the growth/no-growth areas are designated fairly?
 - Need room to allow people economic gains, i.e. transfer development rights while still protecting sensitive areas
 - Need to establish a solid checklist of standards for developers to follow to be sure they can develop while still following the intent of the overlay
 - What kind of incentives can we have for people not to build at all?
 - Dakota County example: the county initiated a development rights purchasing program with federal matching dollars, to buy development rights from landowners—they had more landowners interested than they had money
 - It's a bigger incentive than donating development rights (i.e. MN Land Trust)
 - Designate areas where development rights cannot be used, but could be sold
 - Similar approach used in Europe
 - Forces landowners to cooperate and plan together
 - Standards: need to identify resources we're trying to protect, then define how we're going to protect them (i.e. building next to a wetland? Meet these standards.)
 - An inventory of resources is a big advantage in setting standards and priorities
 - There is an AHI resolution from 2004 on file stating the desire to protect 80% open space.
 - Advantage: 80% is egalitarian—every land owner would need to protect 80% open/green space
 - From a long-term planning perspective, selecting a more specific “theme” to protect is highly recommended
 - Can we tell developers—you pick a conservation them/goal?

- Standards need to be defined in such a way to prevent “bad” conservation design. What is being protected—rural character? Viewshed? Forestland?
- The process for developing these standards?
 - An ongoing process, needs more conversations with more people
 - Township supervisors may be able to/need to meet with county to hash out more details

Update on current Minnesota House proposed legislation 1035 (author: Larry Hosch)

- As written, this proposal would essentially eliminate county and township control of zoning and growth, giving the control to the city centers—could result in lesser communication between cities/townships/counties
- Designed as a “climate change” bill to concentrate development near cities—prevent excess driving
- AHI has focused significantly on intergovernmental cooperation and has worked hard to make sure there are positive relationships between government entities
 - Need to get more information from Larry Hosch about this proposal
 - Contact environmental groups that support this bill for the climate change issue and let them know there is another side that they may not have considered
 - Is there a senate companion? How serious is this proposal?
- Invite Larry Hosch to next meeting (WHO WILL INVITE?):
 - Thanks for all his good work
 - Get more info/communicate about this current proposal

Next meeting: Wednesday, April 29, 4:45 p.m., New Science 150.