

Avon Hills Initiative

Winter Update 2007

December 2007

ACTION ALERT—MARK YOUR CALENDARS

January 8th Meeting Scheduled Regarding CapX2020 345-kV Electric Transmission Line Proposal

Minnesota's electrical utilities are proposing upgrades in the transmission of electricity across the state. One proposed project is a new line that will run from Monticello to Fargo with stops in St. Cloud and Alexandria. Many of you have received notices and several public meetings have been held.

The first step in the process is to determine if there is a need for this line. Comments are due to the MN Dept of Commerce by January 14. If this line is needed, it will very likely have a big effect on the Avon Hills. This proposed 345kV Monticello - Fargo line is a very large capacity line and the towers would be 120-170 feet tall and spaced about every 900 feet. The right-of-way is 150 feet wide. If built, the proposed route would go east to west somewhere between Cold Spring and Holdingford and includes all the land in the Avon Hills. Our concern is for the resources and the

visual effect of a new line which must be balanced by the need for power which we all use. To learn more go to www.capx2020.com.

Come learn on Jan. 8th: To help residents understand the siting process and the effect of the proposed line, the Avon Hills Initiative is holding an open meeting for anyone wishing to learn more. You are invited to join us on January 8, 2008 at 7 p.m. at Saint John's University Pellegrine Auditorium. Electric utility representatives will be here as well as Beth Soholt of Wind On The Wires. Beth represents a coalition of

environmental groups and wind developers.

This is an excellent opportunity for Avon Hills residents to learn the facts from multiple sources about these proposed improvements to the electric grid. The grid is our interconnected transmission network that delivers electricity to us as end users.

NOTE: We will not discuss specific routes on January 8th as no routes will be set until need is determined. Routes will be officially determined in a public process later.

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300 Families and Organizations Receive the Avon Hills Initiative Newsletter. The newsletter is free. If you know someone who wants to be on the list, have them contact Bill Fahrney at 320.333.5183 or stcldsbi@aol.com or drop us a note. Include your name(s) address, and e-mail if you have one. (Your information will not be shared.) If you want to submit an article or a topic, please let us know.

The Executive Board meets the last Wednesday of the month at 4:45 pm. Anyone is welcome. Contact Bill Fahrney for more info. Minutes are posted at www.csbsju.edu/arboretum/avonhills.

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Avon Hills awarded \$337,000 for conservation work!

The Legislative-Citizen Commission Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) has tentatively awarded funding to advance the work of the Avon Hills Initiative. The funding (primarily from lottery fees) must be approved by the state legislature next year. Saint John's Arboretum applied for the funding and will manage it as the Avon Hills Initiative is a volunteer group.

Three actions to promote conservation are included in the funding:

1. Most of the money will go to establish new conservation easements in Avon Hills. Voluntary conservation easements provide permanent land protection and income tax and property tax benefits to the landowners who donate the

easements. Willing landowners separate the "development rights" from all or part of their undeveloped lands. They can farm, hunt, sell, or pass on their land, but they or following owners cannot develop it as those rights will be held in perpetuity by the MN Land Trust. (Note: The MN Land Trust cannot develop the land as they have only the right to develop, but not the land.) Most of the LCCMR funding will be used to pay the costs of creating the easements. More information will follow next summer after funding is approved, but if you are interested in the topic, please contact an Avon Hills Initiative Executive Board member or Tom Kroll.

2. Community outreach and communication to promote

comprehensive planning and zoning and environmental awareness. Examples include newsletters like this one, conferences, and the Land Heritage Coordinator position.

3. Encourage township, county and city ordinance updates. Funding will be available for local governments to receive free or low cost reviews of their current ordinances by national experts. The purpose is to suggest ways to improve the ordinances to better promote conservation and green space.

Stay tuned for future updates and the final approval by July 2008. Questions can be directed to Tom Kroll at Saint John's Arboretum by phone at 320.363.3126 or tkroll@csbsju.edu.

TNC names Avon Hills as it newest action area

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) recently concluded a conservation action plan for the Avon Hills and will now be even more active in working with residents to promote long-term conservation. TNC has a local office in Paynesville. John Maile, the local TNC conservation staffer, can be reached at jmaile@tnc.org or at (320) 243-7422. John has a historical tie to the Avon Hills. Both sets of grandparents farmed in Collegeville Township.

Stearns County Comprehensive Plan Update

In our fall 2007 newsletter, we reported that the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan update was nearly complete. In November 2007, it was approved by the Stearns County Planning Board and was forwarded to the Stearns County Board of Commissioners.

The final draft is similar to earlier versions except that it excludes St. Wendel and St. Joseph townships from the Avon Hills Natural Resource Policy Area for now. Collegeville and Avon townships are included as a pilot area.

The commissioners will hold a public hearing on January 22, 2008 at 10:05 a.m. in the Stearns County Board Room at 705 Courthouse Square in St. Cloud. The Avon Hills Initiative Executive Board will attend to support the concepts in the plan. Feel free to join us or present your own comments. Information is available on the County's website at www.co.stearns.mn.us/government/4643.htm.

CAPX2020 Continued

However, the potential effects of a power line being routed through the Avon Hills on environmental and human factors should be included in the comments due January 14th.

What you can do: The MN Department of Commerce is soliciting comments until January 14, 2008 for a "Scoping Document/Environmental Report" on the need and environmental effects for the proposed line. The DOC will use the scoping document to frame important human and environmental considerations in the proposed project areas. Based on this document, the DOC commissioner will

issue an order identifying the alternatives to be analyzed, potential impacts to be addressed, the schedule for completion of the environmental report and any other matters that are to be included in the environmental review. The final product, known as an Environmental Report, will be submitted to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission as part of the public record that will be compiled during the Certificate of Need process. The report will help the commission determine whether to grant the CapX 2020 utilities a Certificate of Need for the projects.

In Other News...

County Acquires "Wildwood" Park in the Avon Hills

Chuck Wocken of the Stearns County Parks Department announced in November that Stearns County Parks has acquired the Honer site of 265 acres on the west side of Kraemer Lake, 1/2 mile south of Saint John's. The site contains a maple/basswood forest that is identified on the MN County Biological Survey. The site includes 3/4 mile of lake frontage. The County will encourage the continuation of the maple syrup production with family members. The County granted Mrs. Honer a life estate. \$1.1 million of State grants were obtained to finalize the deal. This is a great addition to open space in the "Avon Hills." The public may use the land and the ski trails. A state ski pass is required.

Avon Area Arts Connection

The Avon Area Arts Connection is working hard to foster appreciation of the arts in the Avon Hills. Upcoming events supported by the Connection include Music at Aunt Annie's Quilt Shop, art exhibits at the Village Bean Coffee Shop and Bookstore, and exhibits in the new Sugarbush Gallery in Avon. For more information on these events, or to get involved with the Connection, visit:

www.avonartsconnection.org. Be sure to sign up to receive the *Front Porch News* by e-mail.

Happy Holidays from the Avon Hills Initiative Executive Board and Staff!

Peter Dwyer

Committee Chair
Avon, MN

Allan Davisson

& Steve Plantenberg
Government Relations Comm.
Cold Spring, MN and Avon, MN

Mike Leedahl

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Cliff Borgerding

Administration Committee
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Jackie Leedahl

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Avon, MN

Will Huston & S. Phyllis Plantenberg, OSB

Non-Governmental Relations
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Avon, MN & St. Joseph, MN

Mark Conway

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Non-voting staff assistance
provided by: John Maile, *The Nature Conservancy*; Rachel Peterson and Tom Kroll, *Saint John's Arboretum*; and Bill Fahrney, Land Heritage Coordinator, *Avon Hills Initiative*

*For questions or directions
call Saint John's
Arboretum at
320.363.3163 or contact:
Avon Hills Initiative
PO Box 377
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AHI Land Heritage Coordinator Hired

Saint John's Arboretum received a \$10,000 grant from the Initiative Foundation in Little Falls to create a new part time position for a Land Heritage Coordinator for the Avon Hills Initiative (AHI). The position is responsible for advancing the goals of the AHI. The position will take direction from the Executive Committee of the Avon Hills Initiative in support of the volunteer efforts of AHI members.

After interviewing five excellent candidates in

November, the Avon Hills Executive Committee selected Bill Fahrney from Colledgeville Township to serve in this position. Bill was chosen because of his background as a registered Minnesota Civil Engineer and his experience and passion for land conservation. Bill has been involved with AHI since its founding and has served as a member of the Avon Hills Executive Committee. Bill is a long-time member of the Colledgeville Township planning board and the Big Watab Lake Association.

Bill lives near Big Watab Lake with his wife Jean and adopted yellow labradoodle puppy Libby.

They look forward to meeting you in the Hills and on the trails. You can phone Bill at 320.333.5183 or e-mail comments to stldsbi@aol.com. He is prepared to meet with individual landowners, small groups, or organizations that are interested in the Avon Hills and want to know more about conservation options for the Avon Hills.

**CapX 2020 Power Line Proposal
Details Inside!**

ACTION ALERT

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