

# Avon Hills Initiative

Fall Update 2007

August 2007

## AHI Sponsors Conservation-Based Design Conference

*Tom Kirzeder*

On June 28, over 200 people attended “Choosing Our Future: Conservation-Based Development in Minnesota.” The conference featured Randall Arendt, internationally recognized land use planner, site designer, author and advocate of low-impact conservation subdivisions.

The conference was catered towards builders, city, county and township boards, planning commissions, developers, environmental advocates, land owners, realtors, bankers, natural resource professionals, planning professionals, and other interested citizens.

Throughout the day, Arendt focused on two major issues: (1) the importance of preserving the natural character and resources of rural areas while still providing home sites and (2) assuring green space and outdoor recreation in urban developments. He addressed these issues in a variety of ways, ranging from lectures to hands-on activities, case studies to question and answer sessions.

Arendt pointed out early on how important the topics of conservation-based design and development really are in today’s society. Through several provocative presentations on conservation design for rural and urban, as well as woodland, river, lake, and agricultural areas, Arendt eagerly and sometimes amusingly shared his knowledge with his audience.

With hopes to arouse within people the desire to begin thinking about the consequences of our current methods of urban and rural development, Arendt invited participants to step away from current methodology and begin to focus on the processes and techniques that enable developers and local officials to work to-

gether towards a development plan that preserves natural assets and rural character.

Messages from Arendt’s lectures include:

- We need to stay true to what we really want. If your community has prepared a comprehensive plan that includes a goal of protecting open spaces, as most do, make sure your ordinances work to protect them. Why waste your time drawing it up in the plan if you’re not serious about making it work?

- Don’t become engrained in the ideas of conventional development. Conservation subdivisions are designed around each site’s most sig-

*Conference, continued on page 3*

## Arts of the Area

**Avon Area Arts** is a new organization dedicated to developing an artistic and cultural community within the Avon area which encourages and nurtures the creative spirit. June 8-10, 2007, marked the first Celebration of the Arts featuring pottery, poetry, painting and more. For a calendar of upcoming events and other news, visit [www.avonartsconnection.org](http://www.avonartsconnection.org).

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## Stearns County Comprehensive Plan Update

Stearns County hired a consultant team and began the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan in April 2006. The existing plan was revised in 1998 and an update was initiated last year to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan reflects the current and anticipated future needs of the County.

In order to assure that development occurs in a manner that realizes long-term benefits to the natural environment and local communities, the Comprehensive Plan will be used to coordinate plans and deliver services more efficiently.

Over the course of the past 16 months, the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC), with the assistance of the consultant team, has met regularly to review, develop and guide the Plan update. Allan Davisson and Steve Plan-

tenberg serve the CAC as representatives of the Initiative.

In recent months the CAC has been developing the Land Use Plan Map, which will play a large role in guiding future development within the county. At least one more meeting of the CAC is anticipated to review the written draft of the Plan.

A second series of public open houses was held last spring to share with the public the progress that has been made in the Plan update. The open houses also served as a way to gather input from the public as to the direction of the project thus far. In addition, a second series of Township/City cluster meetings was held throughout the County last spring to gather additional comments from the Townships and Cities in regards to the Land Use Plan Map. The input from

both the open houses and the Township/City cluster meetings has been thoroughly reviewed by the consultants and CAC as the project has moved forward and much of it has been incorporated into the Plan.

Although the open houses have been completed, it is not too late for the public to be involved! Public hearings on the draft Comprehensive Plan will be held this fall. Exact dates have not been set, but notice will be published in local papers and also on the County's website at [www.co.stearns.mn.us/Government/4643.htm](http://www.co.stearns.mn.us/Government/4643.htm).

The Comprehensive Plan Update is scheduled to be completed and approved by the Stearns County Board of Commissioners during the fall of 2007.

### Upper Spunk Lake Association

The **Upper Spunk Lake Association** has been working with the Initiative Foundation to develop a Lake Management Plan, and is also working on a Water Monitoring plan.

For more information, contact Upper Spunk Lake Association President Jeff Johnson via e-mail at [spunklake@yahoo.com](mailto:spunklake@yahoo.com) or visit [www.spunklakes.com/index.htm](http://www.spunklakes.com/index.htm).

## Renovation of "Forgotten Four" creates 126-mile path

Renovation of Lake Wobegon Trail's "Forgotten Four" began in early July and will be completed in August.

The four mile stretch of trail between Sauk Centre and the Todd County Line will connect the Lake Wobegon Trails of Stearns County and Todd County. The Todd County trail then connects to the Central Lakes State Trail in Osakis.

Once the four mile renovation is completed, the connected trails will create a 126 mile path, believed to be the longest of its kind in the nation. The path will

connect 18 cities from St. Joseph to Fergus Falls.

A dedication celebration for the linking of the Lake Wobegon Trail to the Central Lakes State Trail will be held on August 26. Garrison Keillor will be in attendance at the "Pretty Good Trail Connection Celebration" in Osakis. Activities will begin at 11 a.m. and will include a rhubarb pie eating contest, live music, and kayaking and pontoon rides on Lake Osakis. For more information, visit: [www.visitosakis.com](http://www.visitosakis.com).

## Development Conference Continued

nificant natural and cultural resources, with their open space networks being the first element to be protected. This can all be done while keeping the subdivisions generally “density neutral.” So why not do it?

- When developing rural areas, at least 80 percent of the land should be targeted for open space. In urban areas, 30-70 percent should be preserved as open space. Make places more desirable to live in.

- There is strong evidence that the market will support conservation subdivisions. There are multiple economic incentives to this approach including: greater variability in lot size, added value of proximity to green spaces, reduced street costs, reduced site grading costs, and greater attractiveness to buyers. If it will save money and look better... why not?

- Make piano key development the conditional use, and make conservation subdivisions the standard.

By following these take-home messages and steps to conserva-

tion development, we can help to ensure that despite the future pressures for development, we can conserve our special open spaces and natural resources and at the same time achieve our development objectives.

Sponsors for this event included: Avon Hills Initiative, Bush Foundation, City of St. Cloud, College of Saint Benedict, CR Planning, Inc., The Initiative Foundation, Lumber One, The Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, MN Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Forest Resources Council, The Mississippi River Renaissance Corridor, The Nature Conservancy, Saint John’s Abbey, Saint John’s Arboretum, Saint John’s University, Stearns County Dairy Advising Committee, Stearns County Environmental Services, and St. Rosa Lumber, Inc.

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*Tom Kirzeder is a senior environmental studies major at CSB/SJU. He is an intern at Minnesota Forest Resource Council.*

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## *If A Road Runs Through It: The Story of the Hills*

A documentary on the Avon Hills will be broadcast this fall. *If a Road Runs Through It* covers issues about “land use in the area and the difficulties surrounding the choices that are before us as the population expands this way,” according to Executive Producer Mark Conway.

“The documentary springs from the work of the Avon Hills Initiative, following almost exactly some of the questions raised by the Initiative,” Conway said.

Executive Producer Nick Hayes anticipates a broadcast of *If a Road Runs Through It* on Twin Cities Public Television in September or October of 2007.

## Avon Hills Executive Committee

**Peter Dwyer**  
Committee Chair  
Avon, MN

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

**Mike Leedahl**  
Fundraising Committee  
Avon, MN

**Lowell Rushmeyer**  
Land Stewardship/Biological  
Sciences Committee  
Albany, MN

**Bill Fahrney  
& Cliff Borgerding**  
Administration Committee  
Cold Spring, MN and Avon, MN

**Jackie Leedahl**  
Cultural History/  
Sense of Place Committee  
Avon, MN

**S. Phyllis Plantenberg, OSB**  
Non-Governmental Relations  
Committee  
St. Joseph, MN

**Mark Conway**  
Education & PR Committee  
Avon, MN

Non-voting staff assistance provided by: John Maile, *The Nature Conservancy*; Rachel Peterson and Tom Kroll, *Saint John’s Arboretum*

*If you are interested in any of these topics, want to get involved, or just want more information, call any of the committee members or contact Saint John's Arboretum at 320.363.3163.*

## AHI Job Opening: Land Heritage Coordinator

Saint John's Arboretum received a grant from the Initiative Foundation to create a new part-time, one year position for a Land Heritage Coordinator for the Avon Hills Initiative. The position is responsible for advancing the goals of the Avon Hills Initiative.

The position will take direction from the Executive Committee of the Avon Hills Initiative in support of the volunteer efforts of Avon Hills Initiative members. Duties and responsibilities of the position include:

- Assisting Avon Hills Initiative representatives, township, city, and county officials in their work on the comprehensive land-use plan for Stearns County and Collegeville Township and coordinate with Avon, St. Joseph, St. Wendell, and Farming Townships and cities within

those townships.

- Attending meetings of the Avon Hills Initiative, public comment meetings for the Stearns County Comprehensive Land-Use Plan Update, local planning board meetings, and related organizations

- Researching and synthesizing literature from libraries, internet and other sources to obtain existing land-use policies, biological and ecological information relevant to site conservation planning and make this research readily available to local planning boards and the Avon Hills Initiative; organizing and leading community information and training sessions on conservation overlay district zoning, useful ordinances, and other alternative land use and zoning patterns and market these concepts.

- Assisting in the develop-

ment and promotion of a conservation overlay district for the Avon Hills in the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan. Incorporate nationwide research, community input, and advice from township and county officials. This information is to be made readily available and accessible to the public as an end product.

- Expanding general knowledge and appreciation of the Avon Hills area and the goals of the Avon Hills Initiative to landowners in the Avon Hills, officials, media, and interested parties.

For a more detailed job description, visit [www.csbsju.edu/arboretum/avonhills/default.htm](http://www.csbsju.edu/arboretum/avonhills/default.htm). To apply, send letter of interest and resume to Human Resources, Saint John's University, Collegeville, MN 56321 by **September 5, 2007**.

**Details Inside!**

**Avon Hills Initiative Position opening:  
Land Heritage Coordinator**

**Avon Hills Initiative**