

**ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY BOARD
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

On Monday, August 17, 2015, the Environmental Policy Board (EPB) met in The COR Conference Room at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive N.W., Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Chairperson Thomas Stodola
 Board Member Bob Bentz
 Board Member Jane Covart
 Board Member Larry Lewis
 Board Member Michael Valentine

Members Absent: Board Member Reid Bernard
 Board Member Michael Hiatt

Also Present: City Planner Chris Anderson
 Community Development Director Timothy Gladhill
 City Council Liaison John LeTourneau

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Stodola called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. CITIZEN INPUT

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Motion by Board Member Valentine and seconded by Board Member Bentz to approve the agenda as submitted.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Stodola, Board Member Valentine, Bentz, Lewis, and Covart. Voting No: None. Absent: Board Members Bernard, and Hiatt.

4. APPROVE MINUTES

4.01: Approve Meeting Minutes Dated June 15, 2015

Motion by Board Member Bentz and seconded by Board Member Lewis to approve the regular meeting minutes dated June 15, 2015.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Stodola, Board Member Bentz, Lewis, Covart, and Valentine. Voting No: None. Absent: Board Members Bernard, and Hiatt.

5. POLICY BOARD BUSINESS

5.01: Revisit the Question to be Asked as Part of the Citizen Engagement Process for the Environmental Protection/Resource Management Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He noted before staff moves forward with the public engagement process regarding the Comprehensive Plan, they wanted to have a conversation with the Board to proceed with the question that had been developed. Specifically, the question of “What value do natural resources and environmental sustainability add to your neighborhood?” has been discussed previously, and he said he is seeking further discussion on it. He pointed out there will be further opportunities to solicit feedback such as at the Draw Concert series, and upcoming Happy Days. The question will also be brought before the City Council before adoption.

Board Member Bentz commented the question sounded good.

Board Member Valentine stated it had come to his attention in the last year that the word “sustainability” had become a bad word. He asked if that word could be removed because it can be a distraction for some people.

Board Member Lewis mentioned he also does not approve of the word “sustainability”. He added the word “environmental” can stay if needed. He suggested the question read “What value do natural resources add to your neighborhood?”

Chairperson Stodola stated he approves of the word “sustainability” and did not think it posed a problem.

Board Member Lewis clarified he did not think it was a very clear word.

Chairperson Stodola said he liked Board Member Lewis' suggested question because it is clearer. He suggested replacing the word “neighborhood” with “community”. He said he thinks the word “community” invites people to think more broadly.

Consensus was reached to use the word “neighborhood” in place of “community”.

City Planner Anderson offered to eliminate the word “sustainability”. He explained he added it in to address one of the discussion items from May to incorporate ‘environment’ into the question. He said people may or may not see it as negative. He concluded the word may come up in workshop discussions and as part of the public process.

Council Member Bentz asked if it is a mandate of a Comprehensive Plan to address sustainability.

City Planner Anderson responded it should be acknowledged and incorporated into a Comp Plan. He said it is not a required element of the Comp Plan.

Board Member Covart commented using the word “sustainability” may make people feel it is something they can do something about. She suggested using the word “renewable”. She said that may bring in the idea of active participation.

City Planner Anderson clarified that what was being suggested was change the word “natural resources” to “renewable resources”.

Board Member Covart said she didn't have a concrete suggestion, and just wanted to suggest the word “renewable” be added.

Councilmember LeTourneau noted he approved of using the words “natural resources” because it makes people think of natural things. We want to raise awareness of water and renewable resources, and he said he would like to have people be brought into a discussion of how we can address the aquifer and other issues. If the word “renewable” helps open up the conversation, then it should be used. He suggested the question read, “What value does environmental and natural and renewable resources add to your community.” He pointed out water is renewable. Trees are somewhat renewable, and compost and recycling is more renewable than natural resources.

Chairperson Stodola stated the word “renewable” was redundant.

Board Member Bentz commented these words are more along the lines of reclaiming rather than renewable. He suggested creating a statement with the words “renewable” and “reclaimable”, as they both fit under the umbrella of “sustainability”. He stated a moderator in a discussion may be able to suggest words that others may not think of. He said preservation is a large part of this subject, and others may not think of this as sustainable.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated he would like to find words that resonate with the public.

Chairperson Stodola noted he had thought over the situation and he would no longer like to keep the word “sustainability” in. He said if the Board is having this much discussion over it, the public could be unsettled.

Board Member Lewis suggested the word “sustainability” be replaced with “conservation”. He stated it may be more to the point. He clarified the question would then read, “What value do natural resources and conservation add to your neighborhood?”

It was the consensus of the Environmental Policy Board to move ahead with the question: “What value do natural resources and conservation add to your community?”

Councilmember LeTourneau asked when this item will come before the Council.

City Planner Anderson replied it will be either the 25th of August or the 8th of September.

Councilmember LeTourneau suggested this question be posted at Happy Days.

City Planner Anderson responded he did plan to have it in place by Happy Days for that reason. He said it would be a great opportunity to get feedback on this, and anything else.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated if there is a lot of confusion over it, the Board can discuss at a future meeting. If people seem to understand it, then we can move forward in discussion of this chapter of the Comp Plan.

Board Member Bentz inquired if dates had been set up for the discussion of the Comp Plan.

City Planner Anderson replied there are no public dates set yet. Some of the other chapters will likely not move forward until 2016. The Comp Plan Update is not actually due until 2018. Our discussions are ahead of the game.

5.02: Discuss Erosion Concerns Along Both Rivers and Consider Potential Prevention/Mitigation Resources

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He noted both the Rum and the Mississippi Rivers are considered waters of the state. He explained any work conducted below the Ordinary High Water elevation would require review by and a permit from the DNR. Any work above the Ordinary High Water elevation is subject to review by the city. Staff is looking for a motion or direction to reach out to the Conservation District to determine what may be needed to extend the shoreline inventory that the ACD completed along the Mississippi River to Ramsey's western limits.

Board Member Bentz questioned why the previous inventory was stopped at Ramsey's eastern border.

City Planner Anderson replied it was dependent on the pool that is created above the dam. The purpose of that study was to assess the condition of the recreational pool of the dam, and that geographically ended before Ramsey.

Board Member Bentz asked if the Army Corps of Engineers could do the work.

City Planner Anderson responded that that may be a possibility, depending on their staff and the funds available to them. He said that is another entity or agency to reach out to, or bring into the conversation.

Councilmember LeTourneau clarified the discussion is not about spending any money yet. It is to discuss the choices available.

City Planner Anderson confirmed this discussion is not to authorize anything.

Board Member Valentine thanked City Planner Anderson for putting the information together to begin a discussion on possible remedies. This discussion is a great need. He also mentioned he just learned about Minnesota Erosion Control Association. He said it seems to be more involved in stormwater management.

City Planner Anderson responded he is aware of MECA. While they do work with stormwater, he said they could be a possible source of funding.

Board Member Valentine mentioned it is quite a task to be involved in anything with waters in Minnesota since there are so many agencies and organization involved.

Board Member Lewis clarified this agenda item is to request endorsement of determining the feasibility of putting together a report to see what needs to be done. He suggested using the word “partners” and identifying who they are so they can be used appropriately as needed.

Board Member Bentz advised this will rely on the cooperation of the landowners along the way.

City Planner Anderson agreed. He noted some previous discussions have been around finding out the condition of the riverbanks and also getting buy-in from the landowners.

Chairperson Stodola noted this work would not mean spending any money, except for the City Planner's time. Since staff came to the board with it, it would seem Staff would think it is worth the time. He suggested contacting the DNR and asking them to be a communication point. If there are calls and concerns from residents, they should be directed to the DNR for further information.

Motion by Board Member Valentine to recommend that Staff explore completing a shoreline inventory to establish a baseline data set of current conditions and use that data to prioritize potential project sites, proactively contact those property owners, and engage other public agencies to discuss development of a comprehensive program to assist riparian land owners with erosion concerns.

Further discussion: Board Member Lewis suggested adding the language of “and identify potential partnerships”.

Motion seconded by Board Member Bentz.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Stodola, Board Member Valentine, Bentz, Lewis, and Covart. Voting No: None. Absent: Board Members Bernard, and Hiatt.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated this will continue to be discussed with the community while being considerate of how it is discussed. The City wants to be part of a solution and not part of a problem, so public perception will be important.

City Planner Anderson reminded the Board that shoreline erosion is a detriment to the river and thus there is a public benefit to assessing the current condition of the riverbank and identifying priority sites for possible stabilization. Also, the DNR is working through potential rule revisions to the river. This could heighten the public's perception of what the City could do and the level of involvement the public would like to have.

5.03: Discuss Potential Policy to Address Buildable Area on Parcels with Floodplains and Wetlands

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He provided an example of a case in which a building permit was issued for a new home that met all zoning standards but was very near to a drainage and utility easement and wetland. Since it met all the standards and criteria, and the City could not deny the permit even though it was evident that a future deck would be problematic due to the proximity to the easement and wetland. Ultimately, the homeowner had to go to several agencies to get permission to put a few holes in the ground for the deck. This type of situation is becoming more common as more challenging and/or less desirable lots are now being built out.

He referred to the agenda and the options listed. He stated he did not want to suggest any specific language, in order to engage the Board in discussion.

Board Member Valentine posed the question at what point does a builder and potential homeowner discover what is on the lot. He added that a designated wetland doesn't always look like a wetland. When the homeowners come in for a building permit, they most likely have already situated a house on property and they may not know about wetlands.

City Planner Anderson responded oftentimes a surveyor is in touch with the City, as they are seeking out plat and grading plans. He said many times, the survey is just the boundary of drainage of utilities. It should indicate wetland as well, but it isn't always the case. That information is gathered as part of the Certificate of Survey. That comes in as part of the building permit application for construction of a new home. He stated most of the time, it is the builder that comes in for the building permit, not the homeowner.

Board Member Lewis stated some of this discussion is occurring too far downstream. These are issues that need to be way further upstream. If a buyer is unaware of what the potential issues are with the lot, the problem lies with the City or the Surveyor. He said this awareness should be available much earlier in the process.

City Planner Anderson stated the builder should know what the land is designed for, and he should know the minimum setbacks. This information should be obtained before the time of building. That is why this issue has come up for the agenda. In the case mentioned earlier, the builder may have known, but the homeowner was not aware.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained the City is trying to create buildable areas when land is subdivided. The City is trying to establish that some of the policies will become effective on a certain date. He agreed the communication issue should be handled further upstream.

Board Member Bentz noted he has known residents that have built outbuildings and then have issues with rain. He explained his mother was a realtor and she made a point to tell people about swamps and wetlands. He asked if this should be part of the consideration as well.

City Planner Anderson pointed out a building should be 20 feet from the perimeter of the drainfield. This is one of the reasons Ramsey has a 2.5 acre lot size in the rural developing district. There must be room for a septic system, as well as room for an alternate site, should the first one fail.

Board Member Bentz stated he was not sure residents are aware of that requirement. Many times, it is unclear where the drainfield is until there is a big event.

City Planner Anderson explained zoning permits and how they can help. The permits must provide a site plan, and must show setbacks. He acknowledged the City could do better at educating the public. This may help to reduce these issues.

Board Member Lewis asked if City Planner Anderson could foresee variances issued on the two options listed in the packet.

City Planner Anderson responded that is always a potential. He noted that for discussion purposes, this applies to the principal structure. The City has in the past approved variances for reduced front yard setbacks to gain a bit more space in the back yard if a drainage pond already exists.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained staff is seeking consensus to develop a setback ordinance. With that, staff will get a sense of what is happening to existing properties and what that may mean for variances.

Motion by Board Member Valentine to begin discussion to establish a minimum principal structure setback from wetlands, floodplains, and storm sewer pipes, and to inform the necessary parties involved of the setback as soon as possible.

Further discussion: Board Member Bentz expressed concern over the subdivision issues and asked if the City has a way to push back on some of the subdivisions and refuse the permit to build a secondary structure. City Planner Anderson responded the City does have the ability to push back to some extent. In the end, if the request meets all standards in City Code, the City cannot withhold a permit.

Seconded by Board Member Lewis.

Further discussion: Board Member Bentz mentioned there are some houses that do not meet the minimums as mentioned. The homes are along Armstrong Boulevard, and north of Bunker Boulevard. City Planner Anderson responded their minimum lot size is less than the 10,800 square feet that is required for a standard sewer and water neighborhood. Those are within The COR and there are some deviations from the standard code. For the zoning of that area, the homes do meet the criteria.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Stodola, Board Member Valentine, Lewis, Bentz, and Covart. Voting No: None. Absent: Board Members Bernard, and Hiatt.

5.04: Discuss Desired Information for EPB Presence at Happy Days

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He offered to circulate a sign up sheet for volunteers. He said he will also take care of the set up and take down.

Board Member Bentz suggested having a slide show.

City Planner Anderson stated he didn't know if there would be access to electricity in the tent yet, but he planned to display some of the more interesting pictures.

It was the consensus of the Environmental Policy Board to sign up for volunteer time slots by email.

5.05: Review Comparison Document of The COR Development Plan and Original Ramsey Town Center Master Plan Prepared by the Planning Commission

Community Development Director Gladhill presented the staff report. He gave an overview of the most current version of The COR Development Plan. He reviewed the original Ramsey Town Center Master Plan. This discussion will focus on the changes between the two in an effort to

ensure all policy makers are on the same page. A broader discussion will be held in September and he wanted to capture and changes to be made ahead of that meeting.

Board Member Bentz stated he would like to look at what has been built, and what is not there. He asked if there are provisions for affordable housing.

Chairperson Stodola responded there has been a plan for lower income apartment housing.

Community Development Director Gladhill noted there are housing goals. The City cannot dictate exactly what types of housing it prefers, but it can work toward goals. Ultimately, it would be best to mix levels of income, and that will start to play out in decision making along the way. He stated sometimes density brings the affordable housing.

Board Member Lewis questioned what kind of opportunities there will be to review this.

Community Development Director Gladhill replied the plan is to get through all the Boards and Committees in August. It has not been determined how the final document will be fabricated. It will become a survey of all these groups, the public and other stakeholders. It could mean a collaboration meeting of interested parties for more discussion.

Councilmember LeTourneau asked if he was looking for input relative to this particular body or input relative to how this fits in the community.

Community Development Director Gladhill responded both. He said the natural resources plan of the Comprehensive Plan is what is more related to this Body.

Board Member Lewis stated he has not seen anything on this document that deviates from the original plan from an environmental standpoint.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated from a natural resources standpoint, one of the features that is different is The Draw and the amphitheater. The amphitheater made a fairly significant change to the natural resources. He pointed out the original plan had a strong parks program, and the current plan has a strong master parks and trail plan. He also noted the drainage system has changed. The area west of Lake Ramsey is lower than it was going to be.

Councilmember LeTourneau mentioned some of the wetland drainage area in the western part of the city is being taken away. He questioned what will be done to mitigate that.

Community Development Director Gladhill replied there have been Wetland Credits purchased, and there are enhancements in other areas. That will need to continue.

Board Member Lewis said he thought there was a discussion about the big box anchor mall on the west side of Armstrong Boulevard.

Community Development Director Gladhill responded the City did publicize this and there was an effort to look at eminent domain. He explained that statute has now changed. However, the zoning is still there for a retail setting. It still could occur.

Councilmember LeTourneau commented he continually hears that people want restaurants. He said some people want the food to be locally produced. Others want chains to come in. He said

his thought process is that it will evolve when there is enough density to support it. So that becomes a marketing issue. He said there is not enough density here for chains like Chipotle. He pointed out the City now has something like 2000 housing units. He questioned what the density needs to be. Once that density is reached, maybe then it would be feasible to revisit the west side of Armstrong Boulevard for the big box retail mall. He asked how the City can play a role in facilitating that.

Board Member Valentine mentioned there are a lot of small malls around the Cities that are empty. He warned the Board to be careful of this. He suggested in the scope of this Board, we should consider the sites as if they are individual sites. There should be some stormwater management before deciding what could go in there. If housing is considered, how does the density affect the impervious area, compared to single homes.

Board Member Lewis pointed out the City would be sacrificing trails and shoulders with the big box potential mall development. The pedestrian orientation from the area west of Zeolite Street became less important and more auto centric. He stated some of the new housing north of Bunker Lake Boulevard may not be interested in looking at a large Kmart type building where the anchor retails was planned.

Community Development Director Gladhill said in discussions with all the Boards, something may come up to make that area more palatable. We can take the best of some neighboring communities and try to come up with something more attractive.

Board Member Lewis commented it would be difficult to get a developer to do an upscale shopping area without the housing to support it.

Board Member Bentz said he was disappointed in the notes in regards to blue stream. He questioned if any of that would be coming forward from the open space discussion.

Community Development Director Gladhill responded staff is working on how to best present that information. Staff is getting feedback in regard to Lake Ramsey Commons being a shared property between the surrounding parcels.

Board Member Bentz suggested planning more with Lake Ramsey and consider whether it could be made a usable lake. He suggested looking at putting in storm draining before it hits the river. He further advised to create a list of all the things we do not want to happen again.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated this could be a good addition to the questions for the other Boards. It would be helpful to solicit input as to what they think the issues have been and ask if this is the right direction aesthetically.

Councilmember LeTourneau went back to the point of the view shed for those homeowners that are now looking at retail buildings. He asked if the original aesthetics are in place, or if they should be revisited. He noted the diameter of the trees was changed, and other designs were left out due to cost. He questioned if design standards have changed.

Board Member Lewis posed the question of which is faster – bringing in big box retailing, or housing.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated this all originated from a joint meeting. One of the questions from that meeting was what is the goal for that development. Sometimes it feels like there are multiple goals. He asked if the development should happen quickly so it can get on the tax role, or if the consensus is to wait for the long term vision to come.

Board Member Bentz commented the issue is with the interchange. People do not like using frontage roads because they are difficult to use. The interchange does not seem welcoming right now. Ramsey has resources to market. If Ramsey wants to attract businesses, we need to look at parking issues when there are events, maybe looking at a water park or other features geared toward families. He said he doesn't see a big box store doing much of anything.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained the Planning Commission is not suggesting the original plan be followed. The Commission acknowledged that was aggressive for the market that is Ramsey. The Commission would like to put together a plan that matches the goals. He said he has hopefully captured some of the additional topics needed for that survey. Each Board has come up with more questions along the way. He said Staff recommends the City Council adopt this document, with the understanding that it will be revised as it goes through the different Boards and Agencies.

Motion by Board Member Lewis and seconded by Board Member Valentine to recommend that the City Council adopt the attached Comparison Document for The COR, including the revisions and questions suggested at this meeting.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Stodola, Board Member Lewis, Valentine, Bentz, and Covart. Voting No: None. Absent: Board Members Bernard, and Hiatt.

6. BOARD / STAFF INPUT

- Receive Presentation from Smart Irrigation Forum

The purpose of this case is simply to provide the Board with a copy of the presentation that was offered at the Smart Irrigation Forum hosted by the Anoka County Water Task Force.

- **Girl Scout Recognition**

Councilmember LeTourneau stated he runs through the north loop frequently. There is a garbage can that the Girl Scouts put up there. He asked if it would be of interest to put a plaque on it recognizing their hard work.

City Planner Anderson noted the City had worked with the Girl Scouts to determine how best to recognize their work. They had asked if they could handle the recognition at one point. He said he would be in touch with them.

Motion by Board Member Lewis and seconded by Board Member Valentine to recommend that the City follow through with the commitment previously made to acknowledge the work the Girl Scouts have done in the north loop.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Stodola, Board Member Lewis, Valentine, Bentz, and Covart. Voting No: None. Absent: Board Members Bernard, and Hiatt.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Board Member Valentine and seconded by Board Member Lewis to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Anderson
City Planner

ATTEST:

JoAnn Shaw
Community Development Secretary

Drafted by Chris Moksnes
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.