

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

On Monday, June 15, 2015, the Environmental Policy Board (EPB) met in the COR 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 Michael Hiatt
 Board Member Michael Valentine

Members Absent: Board Member Larry Lewis
 Board Member Reid Bernard

Also Present: City Planner Chris Anderson

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Stodola called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

2. CITIZEN INPUT

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

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

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

4. APPROVE MINUTES

4.01: Approve Meeting Minutes Dated April 20, 2015

Motion by Board Member Valentine and seconded by Board Member Hiatt to approve the regular meeting minutes dated May 19, 2015.

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

5. POLICY BOARD BUSINESS

5.01: Consider Request for a Variance to Minimum Lot Size Requirement to Pursue a Minor Subdivision on the Property Located at 16520 Germanium St NW; Case of Paul and Mary Johnson

City Planner Anderson stated that this request is not one the Board would normally review but there are a couple of natural resource aspects to this request. He stated that the lot is 4.4 acres in size and is located in an R-1 Residential (Rural Developing) district. The request is for a simple lot split to create an additional buildable lot. Most of the parcels are about 1 acre in size up to 1.5 acres. The proposed split would result in a lot size of approximately 1.9 acres. Other neighborhood lot sizes are under the 2.5 minimum threshold because of a different lot standard at the time of development. This proposed lot split would result in one parcel being twice the size of some of the neighboring lots. That lot would meet the 2.5 minimum threshold but the other lot would be slightly less. He stated that there would be enough road frontage. He stated the reason Staff is routing this request through the EPB is because portions of the property are part of the national wetland inventory and it has a 100-year and 500-year floodplain zone. He stated that there are no prohibitions for the 500-year flood zone. The applicant has worked with the Anoka Conservation District (ACD), but an official wetland delineation has not been conducted. A site visit was conducted by a wetland specialist who identified about 0.65 acres of contiguous upland within the area proposed to be subdivided into a separate, buildable lot. If the variance is approved to allow for a lesser lot size, Staff would recommend it being contingent upon completion of a wetland delineation and survey work to verify that there is sufficient buildable area to construct a new single family home.

Board Member Hiatt asked City Planner Anderson to explain what was done versus a wetland delineation.

City Planner Anderson stated that a wetland specialist has visited the site and walked the property and then used available contour information to make a general determination of a non-wetland area, which may be approximately 28,000 square feet. He stated that a wetland delineation would involve a more detailed report and it would be certified by the Lower Rum River Water Management Organization, which has authority over wetlands. If the on-site visit is on par with what the delineation would show, there would be sufficient area to accommodate a single family home on the lot. It does not look like it would have any direct impact on the wetland areas with the exception of a driveway. If there is no other way to access the upland area, the applicant would need to find ways to minimize the impact on the wetlands. He stated that City code does not have a minimum buildable area requirement just lot size requirements.

Board Member Hiatt asked about the smaller neighborhood lot sizes.

City Planner Anderson stated that the City's current lot size requirement was not in place when the subdivision was approved. He does not know why this lot was left as such as a large piece. He stated that the applicant is trying to determine if it is possible to deviate from the minimum lot size requirement on one lot before he incurs costs related to a minor plat.

Board Member Hiatt asked if part of the applicant's argument is that other lots are the same size so his should be treated similarly.

City Planner Anderson stated he thinks that that is part of the equation and listed some of the criteria the City uses to address variances such as if it is compatible with the neighborhood, if it is reasonable use and if it is going to alter the essential character of the neighborhood. He stated that even the smaller lot is larger than the surrounding lots. He talked about the national wetland inventory and how it is used to determine the need to have a wetland delineation done. He stated that there would likely be tree loss in order to fit the home on the land.

Board Member Bentz asked if fill would be brought in because of the low lot elevations.

Board Member Covart stated that she lives in the area and the drain tile was just upgraded two summers ago to increase drainage throughout the golf course.

City Planner Anderson stated that the City's engineering and public works staff conducted a storm water project through portions of the Rum River Hills Golf Course to improve drainage. He does not have details on whether they will bring in fill or not. He stated that FEMA is updating the flood maps for the entire state and that Anoka County has been in the works since 2011. They are waiting for notice of final determination and once that is received, the City will have 6-9 months to adopt an updated flood plain map. He stated that there is enough buildable area under current maps and there would be more buildable area based on the updates, but until the updates become effective, they have to operate on what is currently in place. He stated that depending on the results of the wetland delineation, there appears to be a sufficient area for a house pad with no impact to wetland and it would be outside the boundaries of the flood plain. He stated that he wanted to route this request for a variance to the Board to see if there were any comments before going forward to the Planning Commission.

Board Member Bentz asked for an explanation of why this is different from the 4 and 40.

City Planner Anderson explained that the 4 and 40 designation required a minimum lot size of 10 acres. He stated that the designation no longer exists. The City has simplified its single-family residential zoning districts to include a MUSA (Metropolitan Urban Service Area) district and an R-1 Residential (Rural Developing) district. The rural developing districts are areas serviced by private well and septic.

Board Member Hiatt asked if the property would be well and septic.

City Planner Anderson answered affirmatively.

Board Member Hiatt stated that he would like to go on record as supporting Staff's recommendation, because the other lot sizes are similar, but would want the wetland delineation and other reports to be the deciding factor.

City Planner Anderson stated that Staff's recommendation would be that the variance be contingent on the wetland delineation.

Board Member Hiatt stated that he would support it.

Board Member Valentine asked if a motion was needed.

Board Member Covart stated that at one time she would have wanted to clear the trees out to have a view of the golf course, but would not want to do that now. She believes the value of the lot would be higher if they could see the golf course. She asked if that was the applicant's intention, could they do that.

City Planner Anderson explained the City's tree preservation ordinance. He stated that the property owner has stated his reason for splitting the lot is to create a single level home that he can transition to and that tree preservation would be part of the review. He stated that the tree preservation ordinance does not limit what an individual homeowner can do in the future with trees on the property with the exception of certain overlay districts along the river. He stated that he does not have any specific details but does not think this is the property owner's intention.

Board Member Valentine stated his agreement with Staff's position on this variance.

Chairperson Stodola and Board Member Covart also agreed.

5.02: Consider Outline for Public Education on Groundwater

City Planner Anderson stated that this case is a follow up on last month's discussion regarding an educational campaign that would start with a focus on ground water and also working towards developing a timeline. He stated that he has completed a draft outline and pointed out the City's standard mechanisms to convey messages to residents. He stated that a direct mailing could be done but that it would add costs. He stated that Staff is trying to hit the ground running with the timeline calling for immediate webpage development. He stated that there is already a great deal of existing information on ground water that people can be directed to and recommended placing an article on ground water basics and concerns in the August/September newsletter issue. He talked about using the focus on the environment column, cycling in articles and creating a running series regarding consumption information, rates, conservation practices, impacts of aquifer depletion, and review of current standards to reduce pressure on aquifers such as sprinkling restrictions and topsoil requirements. He talked about a utility bill insert that could go out in the second quarter billing of 2016 that would serve as a reminder heading into next year's irrigation season about the importance of conservation practices. He stated that he would like a board member to be part of an educational video. This would take place late fall, early winter 2015. He would work with QCTV on when it would make sense to air the video and Staff would put together a script that would include graphics. He thinks this is an underutilized communication tool that the city could use.

Board Member Hiatt asked about the electric bill consumption comparison. He stated that it has prompted consumption change in his home. He asked if there was a possibility to do this with water consumption and stated that it could be tricky because a greater amount of residents are on well and septic.

City Planner Anderson stated that there is a pretty even split right now between residents receiving municipal services and residents on private well and septic.

Board Member Hiatt stated that he assumed it is possible to implement consumption comparisons for those residents receiving municipal services.

City Planner Anderson asked how the comparison information is displayed.

Board Member Hiatt stated that it is a graphic displaying your consumption and that of your immediate neighbor who is not specifically identified.

City Planner Anderson stated that he has had conversations with the City's finance staff. A finance staff member is meeting with the City's utility billing contractor and will explore the feasibility of a water consumption comparison. He stated that this comparison would most likely require intense database building to have it provide the information the Board is looking for.

Board Member Valentine stated it would be interesting to learn what Connexus uses as its criteria. He stated it is amazing how much competition the comparison stimulates because people want to do better.

Board Member Hiatt stated that it drives changes because you do not want to be the one consuming above the neighbors. He suggested possibly comparing individual consumption to a city average and asked if there were statistics on how water consumption has changed over the last 5-10 years. He suggested that this would be good information to put in the newsletter to get people to look at percentage of consumption. His assumption is that the City is consuming a greater percentage of water than its population growth.

City Planner Anderson stated that the City may be able to get data on water usage and can track the general growth of the City based on new construction home permits. It may not be completely accurate because of when the home is actually occupied, but the permits could provide some good analysis. He stated that there is no way of tracking water usage on private wells. He will update the Board on information he obtains after finance staff meets with the City's utility billing contractor.

Board Member Bentz stated that the comparison information from Connexus does not go to everyone and not sending a water comparison to every resident would make it a more manageable task.

Board Member Valentine stated that the comparison is a separate mailing.

Chairperson Stodola suggested that Connexus may be sending the comparisons out on a rotating basis because he has not gotten one for a couple of years.

Board Member Hiatt stated that he was not aware they weren't doing it for everyone.

Board Member Valentine stated that this is a different program. He stated that this is a visual graphic with a line for your use and a line for use of homes similar to yours and then a general sample size line. It is different than comparing usage from one year to the next.

Board Member Bentz stated he would be curious if the City's website would post their consumption statistics once a month to lead the way. He stated that the DNR does have the numbers for the water permits for at least 10 years and that the City is number one over the permit.

Board Member Valentine stated that the City has a permit for each well.

Board Member Bentz stated that the DNR tracks this and the information is on their website. He suggested doing a comparison piece with the wells that are drying up in Southwest Minnesota and California and the consequences. He stated that the neighbors he has talked to want no part of odd/even sprinkling restrictions on rural wells.

Board Member Valentine stated that the DNR is under tremendous pressure to limit well drilling and volumes. They have been extremely liberal in the past about approving large user wells, but are now under pressure to limit them and this will eventually impact cities that are drawing on wells now.

City Planner Anderson stated that the issue was a big part of the City developing a topsoil requirement. The City was told by the DNR that it needed to start implementing conservation practices right away. He stated that some of the City's watering restriction time limits appear to be more restrictive than other communities. The conversations with the DNR also led the City to do a pilot study of a surface water treatment plant to pull water from the Mississippi River as a potential future drinking water source. This has a huge price tag. He stated there are serious ramifications if we are not cautious about what we do with the ground water that is being used. He stated that he tried to touch on these sorts of implications in the outline and to lay down the foundation of understanding of what ground water is and what happens if we just stay the course. He would wrap up with conservation practices currently in place and what business and residents can do. He stated that he was not looking at developing the consumption comparison as part of the education piece because there is a need to research the feasibility. If it is possible, the results could be put on the website for promotion.

Board Member Valentine asked if metering private wells for the purpose of gathering information on usage has ever been brought up by Staff.

City Planner Anderson replied that it has not come up to his knowledge.

Board Member Valentine stated he felt that eventually this would have to be looked at for purposes of understanding what is happening with the aquifer.

Chairperson Stodola expressed his opinion that it comes down to not recharging the aquifers because of the storm water issue. We are sending water into the river by excessive paving and nothing is going back to the aquifers.

Board Member Valentine stated we have reduced the recharge and increased the usage.

City Planner Anderson spoke about a pyramid document presented at their last meeting that indicated water resources, water supply and then filtered down into subtopics. He stated that the consensus of the Board was to hone in on one topic for education with the understanding that they are all tied together. He stated that there is a generalized outline on storm water education included in the agenda materials. He stated he does think there is a connection between greater impervious area and the declining recharge rate and that the issues are all interconnected. He does not want to lose sight of that and the Board can look at a right time to ramp up the storm water education piece.

Chairperson Stodola stated that trying to get more rainwater to go back into the ground is the responsibility of those creating the infrastructure.

Board Member Bentz mentioned rain gardens and pervious paver options.

City Planner Anderson stated that the Lower Rum River WMO Third Generation Plan requires the first one inch of rainfall to be infiltrated on the site.

Chairperson Stodola asked what types of buildings would have this requirement.

City Planner Anderson replied that this has been a requirement for several years for development projects. A WMO review is triggered when there is a permit request for an acre or more of land disturbance. He stated that there are innovative techniques coming out that are geared towards promoting infiltration.

Board Member Valentine stated management of this aspect of the issue is more manageable than slowing down the alarming growth in the use of ground water.

Board Member Hiatt talked about what White Bear Lake is currently doing. He stated that they are promoting 60-gallon rain barrels and providing a chart indicating the current level of the lake. He stated that from an education standpoint they are offering alternatives and then keeping the issue in front of residents.

City Planner Anderson stated that the City did partner with a couple of Anoka County communities within the last few years to promote a rain barrel and compost bin sale. The City could look at partnering again. He stated his preference to partner with an established program.

Board Member Hiatt stated that he was not aware of the program but agreed with it wholeheartedly.

City Planner Anderson stated that moving forward he could do a better job promoting the program through the City's newsletter.

Board Member Hiatt asked if the rain barrel has the ability to link to an irrigation system.

City Planner Anderson stated that it would probably not link to an in-ground system because there would not be enough pressure, but it could be used with a soaker hose or in the garden.

Board Member Valentine stated they have used their rain barrel as a soaker system.

Board Member Bentz stated that the compost bins were really popular.

Board Member Bentz talked about the ideal weather we have been having but he still sees people watering every day or every other day. He stated that going from the rain sensors to soil moisture sensors on commercial lots would make a huge difference.

Chairperson Stodola asked if the systems can be retrofitted.

City Planner Anderson answered that depending on the age of the system, it could be retrofitted, but it would be more cost efficient to install the sensor at the time of construction. He stated that there are other technologies that can manage the need for water versus a timer.

Board Member Valentine stated he felt that City Planner Anderson did a very nice job in laying the information out.

City Planner Anderson asked if he should proceed with drafting a ground water article for the next issue of the newsletter.

Members of the Board answered affirmatively.

City Planner Anderson talked about a publication entitled *Ground Water Digest* that he will use for building the website. The digest is available electronically.

Board Member Valentine stated that there is an amazing number of government organizations involved in ground water issue.

City Planner Anderson stated he will proceed with getting something together on the basics on ground water for the August/September issue of newsletter and look at current information on the website and at consolidating to a single page for water issues.

Board Member Bentz suggested an aquifer map for the Happy Days event.

City Planner Anderson stated that something about water makes a lot of sense for the Happy Days event. He also talked about a *Storm Water Reuse Guide* that is available electronically through the Met Council and can be used as a tool when providing storm water information. He stated that there are certainly areas for improvement and how we can boost the recharge. He also stated that the City is one of the recharge areas of the metropolitan area based on its soil composition.

Chairperson Stodola stated that he would be willing to be part of the educational video that will air on QCTV.

City Planner Anderson stated that the video will probably be worked on later this year. He will work on the newsletter, the website and then put together a script for the video.

6. BOARD / STAFF INPUT

City Planner Anderson stated that the Board's July 20th meeting will need to be rescheduled. He would like to reschedule to July 13th. Chairperson Stodola stated that he may not be able to make it on the 13th.

Board Member Bentz asked what the City did for Arbor Day this year.

City Planner Anderson stated that the Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent and the Boy Scouts planted trees at a park. He stated that he plans to put a larger emphasis on Arbor Day in the future.

Board Member Bentz asked if the apple trees were protected.

City Planner Anderson stated that he did not know.

7. ADJOURNMENT

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

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Anderson
City Planner

ATTEST:

JoAnn Shaw
Community Development Assistant

Drafted by Denise Bosch
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.