

5.06: Public Hearing: Consider Ordinance #19-03 Amending the Definition of Topsoil (Project No. 18-146)

Public Hearing

Chairperson Bauer called the public hearing to order at 10:12 p.m.

Presentation

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report stating in the mid-to-late 2000s, the City adopted a new development requirement, requiring all new construction to establish 4" of premium topsoil. The intent was to reduce the consumption of water related to lawn irrigation. Through several appropriations request to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for additional public wells, the City needed to implement additional water conservation measures due to the high consumption compared to peer communities. A large portion of this consumption was due to lawn irrigation in very sandy soils. While the current standard is quite effective in water conservation, Staff believes it is an appropriate time to evaluate the cost-benefit ratio. The standard has not reduced the amount of development in the community, but the City has received much feedback on the standard.

City Planner Anderson explained for several years now, the City has been receiving feedback on the current topsoil requirement, both in the field and at other forums such as the Contractor's Networking event, hosted by the City. More recently, the City received a written request from Capstone Homes to consider revising the topsoil standard by eliminating the specification for Premium Topsoil Borrow (a now former MnDOT specification). The request identified two negative effects of the current topsoil requirement. First, that the topsoil is doing *too* good of a job in terms of holding water. They acknowledge that many homeowners are likely not adjusting their irrigation systems to account for the topsoil and are actually contributing to the problem. Secondly, they identified price as a concern compared to the cost of 'regular' black dirt.

City Planner Anderson reported staff has had multiple discussions with the EPB regarding this topic. The EPB requested Staff to gather information on what similar peer communities (with similar sandy soils) require and what the purpose of the requirement was (to see if it is an apples-to-apples comparison). Staff looked at the requirements for communities such as Andover, Big Lake, and Blaine, all of which have a topsoil requirement and are growing communities on sandy soils (Elk River was also contacted but due to significant opposition, they did not adopt a topsoil requirement and rather, through their municipal utilities division, implemented a rebate program focused on improving irrigation systems).

Citizen Input

Ben Minks, Capstone Homes, thanked the Commission for their consideration. He commented on the cost of the topsoil material noting he was working to provide a home product that working families could afford. He explained that many of the watering concerns were being created by residents. He encouraged the Commission to consider allowing generic black dirt to be used as topsoil.

Commissioner Surma thanked Capstone for building high quality housing products in Ramsey. He stated he would support Capstone's proposed request.

Motion by Commissioner VanScoy, seconded by Commissioner Surma, to close the public hearing.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners VanScoy, Surma, Anderson, Gengler, and Woestehoff. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Onyambu.

Chairperson Bauer closed the public hearing closed at 10:28 p.m.

Commission Business

Motion by Commissioner Surma, seconded by Commissioner VanScoy, to recommend that City Council adopt Ordinance #19-03 amending the definition of topsoil.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners Surma, VanScoy, Anderson, Gengler, and Woestehoff. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Onyambu.