

AGRICULTURE AND EXTENSION EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
 LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMITTEE  
 PLANNING AND ZONING COMMITTEE  
 FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN PUBLIC HEARING/JOINT MEETING MINUTES  
 Conference Rooms 1&2, County Annex  
 1462 Strongs Avenue, Stevens Point, WI 54481  
 September 29, 2016

Members present: Roger Bacon, Marion "Bud" Flood, Bob Gifford, Charles Gussel, Barry Jacowski, Matt Jacowski, Julie Morrow, Larry Raikowski, Jerry Walters, Gerry Zastrow

Members excused: Dale O'Brien, Larry Raikowski, Jerry Walters

Others present: Nathan Sandwick and Ken Schroeder, UW-Extension; Jeff Schuler, Steve Bradley and Patty Benedict, Planning and Zoning Department; John Jazdzewski and Ron Hensler, Farmland Preservation Ad-Hoc Steering Committee; Patty Dreier, County Executive; Patrick Martin, Jenny Larsen, Helen Klimowicz.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Planning and Zoning Committee Chair B. Jacowski.

Jacowski announced that Item #3 under the Business Meeting portion of the agenda will take place at this time while a quorum of all of the committees is present.

B. Jacowski read the Public Notice statement: Members of the public who wish to address the Committee on specific agenda items must register their request at this time, with such comments subject to the reasonable control of the Committee Chair as set forth in Robert's Rules of Order.

3. Discussion/Possible Action – Approval of the Minutes of the July 26, 2016 Joint Meeting of the Agriculture and Extension Education (Ag/Ext Ed), Land and Water Conservation (LWCC), and Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Committees

Agriculture and Extension Education Committee - Motion by M. Jacowski, second by Gussel to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried by voice vote, all ayes.

Land and Water Conservation Committee – Motion by B. Jacowski, second by Bacon to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried by voice vote, all ayes.

Planning and Zoning Committee – Motion by B. Jacowski, second by Morrow to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried by voice vote, all ayes.

PUBLIC HEARING – Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP)

Motion by Zastrow, second by M. Jacowski to open the Public Hearing. Motion carried by voice vote, all ayes.

Schuler gave an overview of the FPP process to this point. The State requires every county to have a FPP. Portage County's original FPP was adopted in the mid 1980s. In 2009, changes were made to State Statutes Chapter 91, Farmland Preservation. One of the focus areas of Chapter 91 is tax credits, which are available for agricultural landowners identified as being in a farmland preservation area and having exclusive agriculture zoning. All counties were required to update their FPP. A grant was received by Portage County from the State to assist with some of the costs. In 2013, the County Board passed a resolution to proceed with updating the FPP. Advertisements were published in the newspaper and other outlets to attract a group of citizens to form an Ad Hoc Steering Committee to complete the update. Chapter 91 lists all of the FPP requirements. Over a period of two years, the Ad Hoc Steering Committee held approximately 16 meetings to go through the different sections of the plan, identify background information, and be as specific as possible about agriculture in the County. The Ad Hoc Steering Committee considered significant trends;

important things that have happened in regard to agriculture over time. The information was formed into a series of issues/concerns.

Schuler explained the Statute requires creating a map indicating areas in the County to preserve for agriculture. The Ad-Hoc Steering Committee considered a number of criteria, such as exclusive agricultural zoning, irrigated agriculture, town land use plans, and the Drainage District as areas for active agriculture over the next 20 years. The criteria were included on a map, which will be refined town by town as they select where they would like to identify preservation areas.

A second component of the FPP is to formulate goals, objectives, and policies that the County will put in place to encourage and support the agriculture industry. Background information was compiled over a 10 year period, to give a sense of the types of agriculture taking place within the County. There was a lot of discussion about impacts on resources, irrigation technology, agri-chemical technology, and what has happened over time to make better sense of how agriculture is accomplished in the county.

In January 2016, a community discussion took place at Sentry Theatre to talk about different aspects of agriculture within the county. The Ad Hoc Steering Committee completed its work on a preliminary FPP a couple of months ago and recommended it for consideration by three county committees: Agriculture and Extension Education, Land and Water Conservation, and Planning and Zoning.

The next step after the public hearing is the State's review of the FPP. Any public feedback and/or recommendations from the State will be incorporated into the plan and the three committees will meet at a future date to finalize the plan. Ultimately, it will go to the Portage County Board for adoption.

As chair of the Ad Hoc Steering Committee, B. Jacowski thanked Schuler, Bradley, Sandwick, and Schroeder, and for their time working on the FPP. He noted the Ad Hoc Steering Committee consisted of representatives from agriculture lending, food processing, and all types of farming - organic, farm to table, dairy, etc. Meetings began approximately 18 months ago. There were changes in staffing, which resulted in delays, as well as taking a break from meeting during the planting and growing season. He believes this is a plan we can live with, noting the FPP is a fluid document and the committees will do everything in their power to make sure it works for everyone in the County. He welcomed input and suggestions for changes while it is in the hands of the committees.

County Executive Dreier pointed out the community discussion held in January was well attended. Comments made by the public were incorporated into the FPP. B. Jacowski added many town officials attended to gather information regarding their role to allow landowners the ability to qualify for Farmland Preservation tax credits. He feels town officials have been kept informed and staff will assist them in working through the process.

The audience was asked for comments, questions, or concerns.

Pat Martin, representing Onland Lake Association and a resident on Springville Pond, Jenny Larson and Helen Klimowicz, representing Sunset Lake, were in attendance.

Martin said one of the main concerns is water preservation. He understands the importance of agriculture; however, he asked how much emphasis was placed on water quality in the FPP. He also asked whether UWSP faculty were involved with discussions. A lot of studies have been conducted on local lakes, tracking water quality, depth, etc. trying to maintain the lakes and wildlife they support. He said high capacity wells are coming into their area. He was told by a DNR representative that they consider impacts individually with new high capacity wells. He believes the overall impact high capacity wells have on lakes should be considered. He feels agriculture and science can work together to monitor the lakes and water quality to minimize issues in drought or other conditions in the future.

(M. Jacowski and Flood left the meeting at 6:48 p.m.)

B. Jacowski said the Ad Hoc Steering Committee was not charged with looking at high capacity wells; however it came into many of the conversations. He noted the FPP will be coordinated with the Groundwater Management Plan (GMP). He suggested Martin voice his concerns about high capacity well issues to the Groundwater Citizens Advisory Committee (GCAC). GCAC is currently putting final touches on the GMP.

Schuler agreed that the focus of the FPP could not be specifically on high capacity wells; however, one of the requirements for the FPP is to describe what the County is doing in terms of resource management or preservation with regard to agriculture. He said there is a strong connection, not from a regulatory sense with high capacity wells, as most of the details on water use and impact to resources are in the GMP and would be redundant in the FPP. In the FPP, there are concerns, goals, and policy related statements that deal with sustainability of the resource and coordination with stakeholders across the County to make sure that water is safeguarded and protected. The Ad Hoc Steering Committee acknowledged it is an ongoing topic.

In the 1980s, the FPP was a stand-alone plan. Now it is going to be made part of the County's Comprehensive Plan, along with the GMP. These plans have to be consistent with one other. Schuler said we live in a County with abundant natural resources. In all of its written documents since the 1960s, the County has been very mindful of resource protection. The agriculture industry relies upon the use of natural resources, and at the same time, the County's support of agriculture has to make certain the resources are available for everybody. Schuler reiterated the high capacity well topic is not addressed specifically, because the Attorney General ruled that the DNR cannot take into consideration cumulative impacts. What is there left to talk about locally?

Martin said that is where he thinks local government can do something positive. He acknowledges that many farmers have been stewards of the land for a long time. He suggests using information that has been collected on overall effects, monitor the lakes, and during a drought season, communicate with the farming community for some kind of compromise. Without taking away their livelihood, is there a way to scale back watering?

Schuler pointed out there are portions, in the goals and policies section of the FPP, that call for the agriculture community to keep the County Board aware of new technologies, or ways that conservation and use of inputs in agriculture is as mindful of the environment as it can be. It addresses working across those types of lines to monitor the groundwater situation. You will find that in the GMP as well. The basic responsibility of the County will be to educate the public as much as possible on topics such as irrigation, water use, water conservation, or quality of water, and get stakeholders together to have recurring conversations. Part of the groundwater planning is how do you monitor across the County, whether quantity or quality, to have some understanding you can draw conclusions from.

Schuler encouraged Martin to review the FPP, and if he has any questions or concerns, let staff or the committees know.

Hensler said there are strong statements in the FPP about protection of land, water, air, and wildlife resources. Another major component is education and communication. As new methods and technologies emerge, UW-Extension and a wide range of stakeholders will communicate with each other and hold meetings to keep everyone abreast so information is kept fresh in everybody's mind on a continuing basis. Communication and education is a big part of the goals.

B. Jacowski feels Portage County has been a driving force regarding communication of groundwater issues. We are fortunate have the UWSP doing diligent work on groundwater as well as the UW-Extension, both locally and in coordination with the State Extension office. In the past, there have been some polarized meetings when it comes to groundwater. We need to work together on the groundwater situation as the GCAC has worked in the last eight months. Conversations are once again taking place, working toward common ground. Martin agreed. He understands the importance and livelihood of agriculture. There are

good people on both sides. There has to be common ground where we can work together to be successful. Portage County as a whole is made great people with strong roots.

B. Jacowski said he is a member of the agriculture community. He does not own or rent any land with high capacity wells; however, he knows many farmers that do. He believes it is important to educate the public that farmers have spent billions of dollars upgrading their irrigation systems to variable rate irrigation. A lot of effort has been spent on the agriculture side to reduce water use. They do not want to run out of water for their families or their crop. He said the Committees are doing everything they can to make sure that both parties have a platform and voice their concerns. The Planning and Zoning Department and Land and Water Conservation have worked closely with the Water Resources Specialist and the GCAC. The GCAC has worked very hard to put together a GMP that everyone can live with. There has been a lot of effort put in it and a lot of good people have been able to find common ground.

B. Jacowski expressed appreciation to Martin for voicing his concerns.

Zastrow suggested that Martin form a relationship with his agriculture neighbors, voicing his concerns and allowing them to voice theirs. He told Martin that GCAC meeting dates are on the Portage County website calendar. Schuler noted meetings are usually held the third Thursday every other month; however meetings have been more frequent during the GMP process.

Hearing no further comments, motion by B. Gifford, second by Bacon to close the public hearing. Motion carried by voice vote, no nays. The public hearing closed at 7:10 p.m.

#### BUSINESS MEETING

##### 4. Discussion/Possible Action – Farmland Preservation Plan

B. Jacowski stated there will be no action taken at this meeting. Schuler said the next step is to forward the FPP to the State for their review. Upon hearing back from them, the three committees will meet to discuss any response from the State and move forward to the County Board for adoption. The purpose of this meeting was to take new questions or feedback to incorporate into the FPP. The State's review will be based on statutory requirements.

B. Jacowski encouraged attendees to read the FPP and GMP. Schuler noted the documents can be accessed on the Planning and Zoning Department's website.

##### 5. Next Meeting Date(s)

The next meeting will be Thursday, October 27 at approximately 6:30 pm, following adjournment of the Planning and Zoning Committee and Land and Water Conservation Committee meetings.

##### 6. Adjournment

Motion by Zastrow, second by Bacon to adjourn. Motion carried by voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/Patty Benedict/  
Patty Benedict, Recording Secretary

Minutes approved at the October 27, 2016 joint Agriculture and Extension Education, Land and Water Conservation and Planning and Zoning Committees meeting.

/Barry Jacowski/  
Barry Jacowski, Planning and Zoning Committee Chair