

WRIGHT COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Meeting of: December 14, 2017

M I N U T E S – (Informational)

The Wright County Planning Commission met December 14, 2017 in the County Commissioners Board Room at the Wright County Government Center, Buffalo, Minnesota. Chairman, Dan Mol, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. with the following Board members present: Mol, Charlie Borrell, Jan Thompson, Ken Felger, Dave Thompson and Dan Bravinder. Absent was Dave Pederson. Sean Riley, Planning & Zoning Administrator, represented the Staff; Greg Kryzer, Assistant County Attorney, was legal counsel present.

JANE GOODALL ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES ACADEMY, Jackie Longhenry–Cont. from 11/16/17

Petitions the Wright County Planning Commission for an amendment to modify **Section 155.048 to allow Schools with 150 students or less as a Conditional Use in the AG General Agriculture district.**

Present: Tom Colburn, Jackie Longhenry, Ed Straucke & George Walker

- A. Riley the hearing was continued to allow Staff to develop language that better defined and restricted schools in a township setting. Kryzer and PZ staff helped develop the language based on the last hearing, the document was provided to the Commission. New language is underlined. This would allow public schools as a Conditional Use in the AG zone.
- B. Longhenry in reviewing the draft they are in full support. They have a strong environmental focus which makes it important to be in the rural area, the school is under 150 students and they are located at the existing group facility who they partner with. They have had strong support from the community, some educators, the Camp and parents, some are present.
- C. Kryzer – the proposed draft Ordinance 17-3, Section 1 he noted the first definition they struck 120.03, subd. 2; and the preceding 120.A (05) is a new addition that should be underlined. The previous MN Statute had some outdated language and should be removed.
- D. Borrell stated the hearing is not to address education standards. He noted there was reference to test scores and they are not addressing this particular school, but whether a school can be located County wide.
- E. Bravinder read that Buffalo Township had stated these should be treated on a "case by case basis", questioned why they cannot. Kryzer it is an Ordinance amendment that would be applied County-wide. Mol – noted they do need to address each with a Conditional Use.
- F. Mark Redemski – Sup't of Maple Lake Schools – attended a meeting here a few years ago when they were faced with the same Ordinance change. One concern are the public schools are hooked up to municipal services. A Charter school is a public school. As pointed out by Sup't George Ladd of the Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted at that time, their new high school had to run city sewer/water a long way out to where the new school was built. He asked why a school of under 150 students should get a pass on this, they are looking at fairness. Public schools required to hook up to city sewer and water is at a high cost to the tax payers. The property outside of the cities are more available and affordable. The County would not be looking at allowing a factory without city services. He wonders what the Lake Association thinks of this. Other Superintendents present are Scott Thielman, of the Buffalo-Montrose-Hanover School District; along with Tim Prom – Annandale Schools, although there are things the schools often compete on, he felt they would hear the same concerns from his colleagues.

- G. Scott Thielman – Sup’t of Buffalo-Montrose-Hanover school district – noted as other school districts look to expand, they will come forward with the same request. There would be more than 150 people on site when you count all the support staff and teachers. His district has a school with 265 students; they serve 150 square miles and looking for property outside of cities would be more palatable and less expensive for the tax payers. The Ordinance allows churches with a CUP, but specifically restricts schools. They are in opposition.
- H. Bob DeBoer – as the co-founder of this school, along with a number of other people in Wright County had come up against the same zoning issues and proposed a zoning change that was turned down. In that process he learned why that was; that it was to maintain the agricultural land and not having schools or clinics pop up around the County. The need for municipal services and police protection were reasons. They took a different approach through a purchase of land donated to the DNR who do not have to go through local zoning laws, just meet the State regulations. They had informed the County they would donate the 100 acres to the DNR and the school “Chance to Grow” would build on that land. The 2012 Annandale paper shows the County Commissioners voted in favor to support the school. There were several who partnered in this including DNR and the University of MN. They started the school, had a lease with Camp Courage for the first three years until they could build the school. In the first year, he became aware of the kids on the property in the woods unsupervised. Parents were calling saying that their children’s civil rights were being violated and were sued by parents and MDE approved that suite/position. He has experience running other Charter schools for 15 years without these issues. He brought these issues to the Board and went back to talk to the partners and he could no longer be involved and withdrew. Because he felt it was a dangerous situation and did not want to be associated for those reasons, reported these issues to the DNR and University of MN. Some of the parents who had issues with the school are not going to come up and testify. Keep this in mind when considering what they want for schools in Wright County. Felger asked about the alternative school. DeBoer explained the school had been planned on DNR land and they were going to donate the land to the DNR and would not have needed the County zoning approval. It was a long negotiations, working with the DNR and University was a slow process.
- I. Melissa Shelton – a parent of a student at the school. Felt the CUP is appropriate as a business owner in the County and has a CUP on her property. It is interesting the schools in opposition are going to save money in costs of municipal services. It is interesting that they would oppose to save money. Asked a show of hands in the audience who want to see the school located here. She found her children experience at this school is wonderful compared to DC. Likes the opportunity to be in a natural environment. The reason is to save money, why as tax payers would they not want to support that in their school options.
- J. Greg Sarkinen – have 10 children, some in the Buffalo School District and two in the Jane Goodall School. This school is providing an environment that other school districts are not. He sees the potential brought out of these students. Partnerships that have been formed with Camp Courage and the DNR. The school is an asset to the County, students and businesses.
- K. DeBoer – his experience in Charter and traditional public schools for the past 20 years and knows the financing of Charter schools; it costs more, the home school district gets billed for special ed costs; and is not a tax savings, more neutral or a little more for local districts.
- L. Kyle Faegen – relayed his son’s experience in the public school and has grown significantly at the Jane Goodall Environmental School. The school handles things well.
- M. Karen Martin – of her 12 children, three students attend this school, some at the Buffalo Public schools, some are in college and some children she hopes will go to the Jane Goodall School. She noted this is a zoning issue and can be an emotional issue, but is felt they have all the bases covered and can consider these on a case by case. She has children in different schools

from her intense studies over seven years on different methods of learning. Issue should be brought back to the zoning issue.

- N. Chris Klein – asked what would keep the public school systems from locating out in the rural areas with satellite schools. Asked if that would be possible in this change. Mol – they would look at each through a CUP and under the Ordinance and read the definition and would have to be an existing facility that has been permitted. He noted properties such as Camp Friendship or the facilities at the Grayco property in Rockford Twp. might fit.
- O. Riley – suggested they discuss the language and determine which direction the Commission wants to go. Borrell – a former school board member, noted the Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Superintendent is present and recalled Deep Portage, a nature school that schools send their students for a week. He asked if a school like that could be established in Wright County. D. Thompson asked if that is not more like a camp. Borrell –teachers are there and classroom experience and then go outside, not sure if they are licensed. Longhenry – understood that is an environmental learning center. Kryzer – the language drafted is a public school and regulated by the Commissioner of Education.
- P. Bravinder – it is unfortunate they put schools in the same box. He was unsure on the Ordinance amendment; but knowing they can deal with each on a case by case basis as a CUP, he is more comfortable. Limiting the use of an existing facility that was developed for this many people, he has no problem with it. One Town Board did not support, others have supported it. His own Township did not take a position. Read a statement in the record that Karla Heeter, former County Commissioner, felt it was a wonderful opportunity.... He felt she was dealing with the same situation they are today and allowed them to look at each case and make a decision.
- Q. Mol – pointed out that this is an Ordinance amendment and the CUP will be governed by Corinna Town Board and not this Board.
- R. J. Thompson – relayed her experience in a small country school that included a special needs student. She appreciates the country school and know the reasons why they disappeared were to consolidate them and give all students a uniform education. Her concerns was from a safety standpoint, however, given it much consideration since the last meeting. Because it is a public school licensed by the State of MN and the Ordinance will give them flexibility she could support this. The decision is strictly on an amendment to the Ordinance and would agree under certain circumstances a country school is a good idea as long as they know the students and teachers are safe.
- S. Riley reminded the Planning Commission this is a recommendation to the County Board.
- T. D. Thompson – difficult decision, was not at the last meeting. Regulations are set in the interest of the students. Are there similar situations in other Counties or States?
- U. Longhenry there are other similar schools such as in Henderson; but that might be in City limits. She knows one in Wisconsin, one in Bemidji not on City sewer. DeBoer added there are about 154 Charter schools in the State, most in the metro area. The model they used came from the Henderson Charter School served by City services. He cannot think of many charter schools that are not on city services for other reasons such as bussing too.
- V. Mol – asked D. Thompson if the condition that it has to be attached to a large camp facility addresses his concern. He noted if it is established camp it is built to serve large groups of people. After talking to a number of people, this would also give other public schools to come out onto a large parcel and provide an alternative school experience. His daughter's experience in Annandale was a positive experience. But, they may need to think outside of

the "box", maybe not the Jane Goodall School, but some other opportunities which are not available in the Ordinance. Understand the Superintendents saying not on private sewer, but where there are those facilities it might open up other opportunities.

- W. Borrell - asked about the accessory use to "non-profit organization" and questioned why they have that in the Ordinance? Kryzer - that was in response to a request by the Commission at the last meeting. Borrell - if someone wanted to start something up they could not start a camp. Riley - the County does not have open lakeshore areas, they are already established. Don't allow new private campgrounds. Borrell if someone wanted a nature area it would not necessarily have anything to do with a lake. Riley - this came up at the last meeting to limit where it can go, often changes start more conservative. This change was put forth by this applicant. Borrell asked about the ministry on a large parcel in Rockford Township. Riley - possible if they meet the definition. The first proposal on DNR property was not going to be serviced by city sewer and water. Borrell - this is a beginning and are looking where there are existing sanitary facilities, if it works well they can look at the Ordinance again. J. Thompson there are many things they cannot answer, water suppression is important asked what Dave Thompson's concerns were.
- X. D. Thompson - there are minimum standards now, they have been applying and Otsego is requiring that schools be on city sewer and water. The schools have been built and hooked up to facilities; but then another school could come in and build on 80 acres. Borrell - this has to meet code and State standards. Noted the County Compost facility has a fire suppression at great costs and they would have to provide that. Riley - made it clear that this Ordinance would not apply to Otsego because it is a City. The condition is existing facilities.
- Y. Felger the reason for the Ordinance change is the applicant's desire to continue in the present location. Asked the applicant that the school caters to "special needs" and how they describe those needs. Longhenry - stated they are not catering to it but they do have about 48% that are. She said there is a mix of different needs. Walker- there is a large scale of autism and many of these kids have a problem in the big schools. In time, they see the behaviors go away. Felger the type of students is not the issue, but asked if they turn away students with certain needs. Longhenry - they have open enrollment and do not turn away students, if there are spots available they have a lottery. Felger - a child with no special needs could go to this school. Longhenry - yes everyone can enroll and they have hot spots where they have bus pickup. Walker stated the school emphasis is on environmental science, just so happens the percentage of special needs students is 46-48%.
- Z. Mol read Section (C) and noted the County has a procedure if they are in violation to correct the violation or revoke a conditional use permit.
- AA. Bravinder moved to recommend to the County Board of Commissioners approval of the proposed amendment as prepared. Felger seconded the motion.

*DISCUSSION: D. Thompson asked if #6 is included. Bravinder responded yes. D. Thompson suggested the word **of** be inserted in the last line of Ordinance.*

VOTE: CARRIE DUNANIMOUSLY

- BB. Thompson moved to close the public hearing for oral and written comments. Bravinder seconded the motion.

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY