

Wright County NWQ Water Quality/Natural Resources Committee Meeting #9
Thursday, November 20, 2008

Committee Members Present: Lance Lindstrom, Mark Kampa, Rose Thelen, Dave Wagner, Shelly Jonas.

Staff Present: Stacy Marquardt, Tom Salkowski, Scott Deckert, Bill Stephens.

Guest Speaker: Don Adams, Stearns County.

Others: Charlotte Quiggle, Lawrence Bauman, Ralph Douglas, Dave Pederson, Joe Jacobs, Kerry Saxton.

Marquardt showed the latest resource land map proposal. This map will be presented by staff to the Planning Commission for the Committee. Some changes were made from the original map in accord with the results of the open house and review by the Committee. Salkowski mentioned that the 3 cities (Annandale, Clearwater, Maple Lake) have come to an agreement on transition areas, with the surrounding townships, and this was much less controversial than in the NEQ.

Marquardt introduced Don Adams, Environmental Services Director from Stearns County, who presented Stearns County's method for dealing with shoreland alterations.

Adams summarized the history of Stearns' shoreland regulations, going back to 1972. Historically, such permits were heard by the Planning Commission. Stearns now has a separate shoreland review panel, which is the decision maker for all major shoreland alterations. The membership, appointed by the County Board, includes a township officer, a Planning Commission member, a SWCD staff person, and a watershed district representative. It is staffed by the Environmental Services Department. The Board of Adjustment hears appeals from the panel. Most of the projects are retaining walls and fill. There are two classifications of shoreland projects, major and minor. Minor projects are reviewed and permitted administratively, while major ones are reviewed by the panel. Adams summarized Stearns' vegetation standards. They are better defined than state shoreland rules and reference slope, view corridors, soil types etc. These rules came about partly as a result of a development that was built on Lake Louisa that had some extreme vegetation removal.

Salkowski pointed out that these rules are probably most applicable to new developments on previously undeveloped lakeshore and Adams agreed. All of these regulations are adopted in the Stearns' zoning ordinance. Salkowski mentioned the newly proposed DNR shoreland regulations, currently under review. The rules seem to lack a strong position on shoreline protection, partly due to differing opinions from northern counties. Most aspects of the proposed rules are actually less restrictive than current Wright County regulations.

Adams said their panel meets about nine times/year. There are usually 6-10 applications on each meeting. The goal is to preserve the look of the shoreline from the water during leaf-on conditions. Salkowski asked if there are specific standards that the panel can apply. Adams referenced the difference between major and minor alterations. They want to see an engineered solution in most cases. They hold training session every spring for contractors and require if they are doing work within shoreland that they have a license from the county to do so.

Adams summarized the history of county/township relationships in Stearns County. The County only did shoreland zoning until 2000 when they adopted county-wide zoning. They met with each township and designed the township zoning maps, township by township. General agreements were drafted that designated which agency would perform which task, because many townships had programs already in place. Salkowski noted that history in Stearns County is very different than in Wright. Wright has done countywide zoning since the 1960's, and started doing so at the request of Townships. Another major difference is that Wright County has adopted the building code and Stearns has not.

Adams noted that their shoreland alteration rules are different than the standard DNR model because Stearns applied to the DNR for regulatory flexibility. They still have problems with landowners doing their own work illegally. Enforcement is still mainly complaint driven.

Salkowski asked if they have any requirements on the types of plans received for projects. Adams said they do not have specifications for plans, but that might be something they need to do. Fees are higher for after-the-fact requests. Contractors must be licensed, but homeowners are allowed to do their own projects. Salkowski wondered what standards they use for erosion control. Adams said they use Best Management Practices and other technical manuals provided by the SWCD and MPCA.

Wagner asked if Stearns has been involved in the DNR's alternate shoreland standards. Adams said they adopted the alternate standards for resorts a couple years ago, but not otherwise.

Salkowski said that the new Shoreland rules are going public in February, and this committee should talk about that at a later meeting. Most of those rules are already less restrictive than Wright County's zoning regulations.

Salkowski summarized the work of this committee and the Aggregate Committee. Marquardt clarified if the committee members wanted to be involved in looking at the alternate shoreland standards. They seemed in agreement to stay together for this process.

There was discussion on policies already included in the Wright County Land Use Plan. Wagner would like to see more work done on creating "big picture" or guiding policy statements to establish a framework for the County's approach to shoreland areas. Salkowski offered to lead that topic for discussion and review at the next meeting.

The committee set their next meeting for January 12th at 1:30.