

To: Wright County Northeast Quadrant Task Force

From: Scott Deckert

Re: Wright County NEQ Land Use Plan Task Force Meeting #12 Summary

Date of Event: Monday, February 26, 2007

Location: Wright County Government Center

The following summarizes the 12<sup>th</sup> Task Force meeting for the Wright County Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan; it is not meant to be a complete record of discussions that took place, but rather a summary of the various topics and issues raised and discussed.

**Attendees:**

**Task Force Members:**

Judy Weldele  
Greg Eckblad  
Karen McDougall  
Gordon Weber  
Steve Grittmann  
Shannon Bye  
Franklin Denn  
Don Schmidt  
Angela Schumann  
Nancy Carswell

**Staff:**

Tom Salkowski  
Dan Jochum (SEH)  
Scott Deckert  
Stacy Arp  
Tom Zins

**I. Updated Implementation Section Review**

**Jochum began the discussion with section 5.3: “the 1:20” land use district.**

Salkowski commented that reading it through a second time the section is more negative in tone than intended. He asked if anyone could add any more positive justification for the district. Eckblad thought the 1:20 came up earlier than the first sentence indicated. Weldele and Weber agreed. Jochum thought it would be easy to drop that sentence.

Weber also agreed that it sounded negative. It is not something that needs more study. All the townships want it. Bye said Monticello Township did not agree. Weber conceded that most townships seem to want it. It should start being implemented soon.

Salkowski asked for help regarding the text of this document and why 1:20 is needed. The plan needs to differentiate why 1:20 is appropriate here and perhaps not in other parts of the county. Weldele said it's because we're at the urban end of the county. Weber said it doesn't need to be complicated. This is simply different from the other side of the county. There is pressure for development. Weldele agreed. The farming is different in this part of the county.

Bye is concerned about this part of the plan. Realtors and landowners are already calling her at home thinking it's a done deal. Weber said that when 4:40 came about, they were worried that everything would be developed that way. That never happened. Some will take advantage of it and some will not. 1:20 doesn't even need to be restricted to this side of the County.

Jochum mentioned that early discussions claimed it was becoming more difficult to farm because of the smaller parcels of land. If this were done countywide, doubling the density would create

even more barriers for farmers trying to farm. Weber agreed that it might. Weldele didn't think the whole county should go 1:20. It should depend on the township. McDougall thinks the county can adopt township-specific plans that do not imply countywide.

Salkowski wondered if reacting to pressure was really planning or just reacting. Bye thought doing 1:20 would set a precedent and she doesn't want to see that. Weber said we never defined the term rural. 1:20 doesn't mean it's not rural. Pressure does cause change and causes Planning and Zoning to change policies. As development comes, you have to modify what you're doing. Bye thought that 1:20 is something other than rural. It's something other than farming.

McDougall wondered if the problem with 1:20 was the new district it would need or just the idea of it. Bye wondered where it would go. McDougall said, without 1:20, what is the alternative for development for the townships? Jochum thought in the next 12-18 months, these questions could be answered. Salkowski said the County needs to figure out how it is going to work in practice. It appears now that Buffalo and Rockford want the whole Ag area 1:20. Monticello does not agree. The fear is that we're lighting a fuse. The same kind of pressure that's pushing this will mount elsewhere. We may be able to control it, but we want to make this section of the plan as balanced as possible. Salkowski would like to have more justification than offered so far, to be able to support his decision with valid arguments.

Weber wondered where the argument was lacking. Salkowski would like to have better reasons than "pressure" and retiring farmers wanting to cash in. 1:40 has worked every well. Doubling the density is going to have an impact. Eckblad wondered if the proposal could be viewed on a parcel-by-parcel basis as landowners request it. Salkowski thought we could be accused of playing favorites if it is approved for some but not others. Grittman asked what criteria would be used. In order to be able to back up a decision, it has to be in your plan. Weber suggested some positives: pressure for development, and farmers should have more flexibility for development while keeping it rural. Rockford Township, for example, wanted more development. Salkowski asked for a better definition of the "pressure" driving the need for more housing in the agricultural areas. Weber said the farmers want flexibility.

Zins suggested that the argument for 1:40 is the same on both ends of the county, but for different reasons. On the eastern side, it's to preserve space for efficient urban growth. On the western side, it's to preserve agricultural land. The 1:20 argument should be better developed than we have heard so far. Weber said there should be some flexibility of ownership. We restrict people because it's a vision of a certain segment of our society. The other side doesn't want to be controlled. Bye said the farming community has appreciated the 1:40 control. It's the newer people like the realtors and developers that are causing the push for more dense development. Buchholz thought most of the property owners bought it with the understanding that it was 1:40. Their rights are not being zoned away. If a person bought the property knowing what it was zoned, their rights are not being infringed. Weber agreed, for those individuals. The general issue is different. Denn said that if individual rights are to be observed to that level, we should all go home. Planning and zoning does interfere with some rights, because it is necessary for the good of the community as a whole.

Schmidt said that 1:20 is looked at as it's going to bite us. Salkowski realizes there are certain parts of the county where farming is viewed as no longer important. It is a major issue to say that commercial agriculture is no longer viable in this part of the county. That's a major change from anything that's been said in the past. Eckblad said there used to be 160-acre farms. Now very few people are farming it. It has evolved into something different. The land is being rented to a small handful of farmers that are left. Jochum said that's a nationwide trend.

Weber agreed that Salkowski's statements were accurate. There is a different rural area on the east half of the county. Thirty years from now it will be even more urban. 1:20 is just a logical step along the way. It's not a bad thing. It's what happens. Weldele agrees. She said there used to be farmers on every property. There were dairy herds on every farm. Things change.

Schumann asked if this was to be a zoning district. Salkowski said it would be both a planning district and a zoning district, and one of the reasons we cannot implement it immediately is that there is no zoning district to accommodate it yet. If the concept is approved, the County will reopen this plan for the sole purpose of splitting the Agricultural district into two districts: an Ag district where 1:40 will remain and a "Rural" district with 1:20 as an option, or the entire Ag district in a township could become "Rural". Salkowski and Jochum agreed to rewrite the section on the "1:20" proposal to be certain it is cast in a more positive light.

#### **Jochum moved into section 5.4, Transition Areas.**

Grittmann wanted to clarify that the status quo prevails until something is done. Salkowski said that is correct, and there will be a push for Orderly Annexation Agreements. Denn said that preserving land has always been done as long as planning has been done. We've always had this problem. If reserving land is for the public good, you'll always interfere with some rights.

#### **Jochum moved onto the Resource Lands, Section 5.5.**

The map will be redone on the map to make the colors more distinguishable. The density would remain 1:40 in the Resource Lands districts.

Salkowski did meet with St. Michael and the DNR last week to talk about Pelican Lake. They were very receptive. The county wanted them to complete the map on their side of the lake. The attorney's office is working on a joint powers' agreement with all affected townships and cities, for the protection of Pelican Lake and its surrounding area. There seems to be unanimous agreement that this area is worth saving. Hopefully the agreement will say that every entity needs to agree before any development happens out there.

Weber asked about the Resource Land around Schmidt's Lake. Is there somebody who has 1:5 zoning out there? Salkowski said there is not any 1:5 zoning. On the north side of the lake, there are some pre-existing, smaller lots. Nothing has been zoned to a higher density, but there was an area on the south side of the lake that was designate "Agricultural/Residential" in the old plan. Salkowski said that no zoning is going to change as a result of this plan. Schmidt said it affects some of his property. Even though it is in the plan, he does not have any plans to develop it. However, he is not sure he is in favor of going from Agricultural/Residential to Resource Land. He cannot see protecting a parcel that's been in pasture for 100 years; it is hard to call it Big Woods anymore.

## **Jochum moved on to Section 5.6, Aggregate Resources.**

The plan recommends that a more thorough review should be completed as a follow up to this plan, to determine where these resources actually are located and a more detailed plan for the Aggregate Resources district. Denn said this is an issue that's important to Monticello Township. Schmidt had concerns about the gravel tax. Denn was concerned about the end use. There was a broad-ranging discussion on the gravel tax.

Buchholz said that Hanover required a new gravel pit excavator to pay more money for road repair than what the gravel tax would cover. Schmidt wondered if there could be assessments placed on the property. Salkowski said they have been requiring a bond at \$1000 per acre for reclamation. The County cannot impose additional taxes without authorization from the legislature. The County would like to see more flexibility from the legislature on the use of the gravel tax money already collected, as it is currently limited primarily to roads.

Weber wondered if the issue was the roads or hauling our gravel outside of the County. A general discussion on gravel pits continued, including haul-backs and contaminated soils. Buchholz thought that new language should be added to this section to make sure there are adequate controls to govern gravel pits.

## **Conclusion**

Salkowski said that from here, SEH and County Staff intend to put all this into a package and deliver it to the Planning Commission on March 8<sup>th</sup>. At that time, a hearing date will be set. We're not sure how to highlight any changes to be made as a result of today's meeting, but there will be changes. The tone of the 1:20 section will be more positive. Otherwise, there are no other major changes. We haven't decided if the hearing held by the Planning Commission will be open house style or more of a presentation, but we certainly want people to submit written comments. After the hearing, the Planning Commission will make a recommendation to the County Board, and the Board will ultimately adopt a plan. Because of notice requirements, it may take until April. In the meantime, we may start working on the next corner of the county.

Salkowski thanked all the task force members for their faithful attendance, and for all the comments and the willingness to discuss this plan even through disagreements. Having Cities and Townships sitting at the same table has been helpful and important.

Jochum reiterated Salkowski's comments and appreciated the opportunity for he and SEH to learn about Wright County. Final copies of the plan will be available before the Planning Commission hearing.