

Wright County NWQ Aggregate Resources Committee Meeting #4
June 5, 2008

Committee Members: Brad Arntson, John Jones, Ken Scadden, Tommy Thompson, Phyllis Latour, Joe Holthaus

Staff: Tom Zins, Stacy Marquardt, Scott Deckert, Tom Salkowski

Audience: Ralph Douglas, Charlotte Quiggle, Kerry Saxton

Deckert recapped the previous meetings and stated he would like to approach this as a three step process: 1) Policies, 2) Mapping, and 3) Ordinance Amendments.

In regard to questions from the last meeting, Deckert reviewed the assessment of gravel mines. The Assessor reviews property individually; active mines would be valued at a certain rate and depleted areas at a lower rate. Abandoned pits may be receiving AG designations if there is no other use at the time. If abandoned pits were at a higher rate it may be an incentive to clean them up. Currently, the assessor values pits commercially at \$10,000 per acre and depleted pits at \$5,000 per acre. The "Ontario system" established two kinds of pits: long and short term. Around 1993, Wright County created the concept of a temporary mining permit.

New aggregate laws were passed in this legislative session, and Deckert reviewed highlights (see handout). Also noted that the ratio of the road to bridge fund went up along with the amount that goes to the Townships and to the reclamation fund. There are also a number of changes in how we assess values in rural areas especially Ag areas. These new laws will be in effect on January 1, 2009.

Deckert reviewed the definition and policies from the Aggregate Resource District; he asked if there are any changes they would like to make to this language? Brad asked if this is generally how things have been in the past and Tom stated in the past we have never mapped any of these areas. All areas that were zoned Ag qualified for mining. We are now thinking we should limit the areas where development occurs to preserve the aggregate by mapping areas that we know the resource is located. We may want to conduct a study similar to the Maple Grove area to lay this out in more detail. The County Board felt uneasy about the map we presented and had us pull the map until we can define these areas better.

Latour is concerned with the value of development versus aggregate mining. Arntson does not want to get into the developing business but would like to mine to a point where it is still valuable after they are done. Salkowski was asked what the difference it makes if there are lines on a map or not? We could look at defining different rules for inside the lines versus outside the lines. One example would be to have temporary/short term pits on the outside of the lines with tighter regulations versus long term pits inside the lines. Scadden stated you are holding the property owners hostage from doing anything else. Latour said it is a two-edged issue. You know you are in an aggregate zone and so do the neighbors and there will potentially be a gravel pit in the area. But then on the other and you limit what the land owner can do with their land. Deckert asked how this would limit the land owner? Latour stated they could potentially develop the land. Deckert clarified that they have the same restrictions they currently have as Ag., and would not be able to develop intensively on that land anyway. Holthaus noted he has had a pit for five years but only takes some out here and there. He questioned why do we keep opening up all these pits? Why don't we wait until some of the resources are depleted? Deckert stated how can we justify that if a land owner wants a pit on his land? He doesn't own or profit off of your land and he would want to use his own pit. Most agreed preventing competition would be a problem.

Thompson was concerned about pits with 50 foot holes and there is nothing you can do with it when they are done. Arntson stated there are many deeper pits around that have gorgeous developments around them. Deckert interjected when we start mapping how much do we involve these landowners? This will be something we can discuss at a later time. Salkowski stated landowner participation is critical, but we do not want a checker board map as a result. Maybe on the edges we would look at specific property owners' responses but overall we are looking for larger areas to be included and want to avoid a checker board effect if we are going to accomplish anything.

Arnstson asked what type of study might be done in these areas. Salkowski reviewed potential topics, including physical and environmental features, haul routes, economic impacts and a sort of overall environmental assessment. Then we may not have to worry about all these areas every time there is a new pit opened, they would have already been studied. Arnstson stated that if you conduct these studies why wouldn't we have administrative permits over the counter like other counties? Salkowski answered that might be controversial, but make sense in mapped areas that have been thoroughly reviewed.

Deckert interjected and stated he would like to look at the policies and see what the group thinks. Are they fine the way they are or should we add or remove any? Number 6 was identified as one that could be removed or amended since there were state law changes. Deckert asked the group if we should add any of the 1993 aggregate study or the 2000 MN legislative policies?

Latour stated she was concerned with the map that all the aggregate areas go to the lakes. Is there anything that would be done to buffer the lakes and water? Deckert thought that may not be a bad idea but probably would not need to be a blanket rule. Salkowski asked the group what concerns them the most. Quantity of water or quality of water? He is not convinced that mining affects the quality of water. It may affect the surficial water which you would not drink anyway. Jones stated that farming impacts/pollutes water quality more than aggregate operations do. Thompson agreed that the mining process itself does not affect the ground water but what is dumped there to fill it in is the issue, such as what 3M did. Now the filter (the aggregate) is gone so it becomes more susceptible to contamination.

Question: Do we need buffers from lakes? Lots of discussion but no final decisions were made. Deckert went over the maps that were handed out. This will be part of their homework. We would like you to study the map and draw in areas that we might want to have as an aggregate resource area. Some of you may not want to have an aggregate area at all. If there are areas you definitively do not want in the aggregate area then note that as well. We will go over these at the next meeting. The Monticello map was also handed out. You may wish to draw new lines to help us decide if there are areas that we should drop off.

Jones asked if Knife River has boring data for the whole county. He questioned if we should be using his data here? He stated it seems hard to just draw lines on a map when we don't have a clue. Latour stated she did not want us near any lakes and that is where all the gravel is showing. Arnstson stated to get anywhere near an aquifer you have to go very deep. Jones asked if we should buffer the lakes from these pits? Since all the aggregate resources are by the lakes? Salkowski stated that the problem is we can't get much from the experts on this topic. They say that they do not affect the quality unless they are dewatering. Arnstson stated he can get his maps together and show us what he has.

Discussion: Does it really impact property values and the sale of homes? Everyone in the group had varying opinions on this.

Jones again emphasized he would like a buffer from shoreland. It should be X amount off shoreline. We should have a timeline showing reclamation as you go. Open it, take some out, and reclaim and then go to the next area.

Discussion: Timelines and the reclamation process (esp. around lakes)

Salkowski stated we need to present to the Planning Commission and we are asking that you map areas that either you think should be in or maybe areas that absolutely should be out. We want your thoughts so we can construct a map to present. Deckert asked if he should draft some policies and a map and then present it to the group for feedback? See what they think and get their reactions for the next meeting. The group agreed that this might be helpful but was reminded again by Jones and Latour that they would like to see a buffer around shoreline areas.

Next meeting scheduled for July 10, 2008 1:30 pm