

COUNTY FARM LAND ADVANCE PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, September 21, 2010

The County Farm Land Advance Planning Advisory Committee meeting was called to order by Herbert Cornell, Chair at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, September 21, 2010, in the County Board Room of the Vernon County Courthouse Annex.

Members Present: Herbert Cornell, Frank McCoy, A. Richard Brose, Clifford Peterson, Maynard Cox. Others in attendance were Greg Lunde, Doug Avoles, Kelly Jacobs, Thomas Spenner, Jerry Cade, Benjamin Karp, Virgil Hanold, and Tena Fredrickson.

Affirmed proper public notice of meeting.

Introduction of staff: Cornell named those in attendance.

Introduction of UW Capstone Project Senior Thesis candidate: Jacobs started by referring to a grant proposal that was put together for the Long Range Planning Committee regarding the farm property with the intention that in the near future there may be some funds available for use for an available program through UW Madison, being the UW Capstone Project. Jacobs introduced Benjamin Karp, a student at UW Madison, who has agreed to take the project on. Karp stated the Capstone project is a year long project all UW students need to complete in order to receive their diploma. He stated students go thru scoping and analysis of what they intend to implement or design & site planning, and is here today to get an idea what committee members are looking to do with the site.

Jacobs inquired as to a timeline, and Karp stated that he will be gathering information and collecting base data, doing proposal writing analysis, finishing up in December. The following semester, he will be starting on proposal writing, proposing what will occur the following semester, and will be graduating in May.

Next was Discussion of Committee purpose and Duty: Jacobs stated that this committee will serve as a steering committee that will help direct Karp's efforts and provide oversight between committee meetings.

Hanold asked what acreage is out there along the frontage road and whether there were blocks available to view per the County Farm. Avoles gave an overview of parcels and mapping records on the projector. Avoles stated there is roughly 490 acres, including the nursing home area which is 6-10 acres, and does not include right-of-ways. Lunde stated that some of the buildings on the County Farm are used by the tenants to store equipment and also that the mobile home located on the farm is rented out as a residence. Avoles stated it would appear by the design data, that the DOT is planning on terminating portions of Railroad Avenue, and change the main connections. It was asked if it looked as though Cty Hwy BB would actually get on to the bypass, and Avoles stated yes. Lunde stated that what they are aware of is a 4-lane bypass on the west side of the County Farm. Lunde stated next week is when County Board is to discuss the Vernon Electric easement as all the utilities will need to be moved east of the highway. Avoles also stated that as far as where the corporate limits are, the jail is within the city, but he can not find where the deed or annexation is recorded, and there doesn't seem to be a separate parcel within the city for that piece, so would be interested if anyone has information on that, as it must be in the system somewhere, just perhaps coded different, making it hard to find.

Lunde asked why the salt shed is not included as part of county property and Avoles stated that parcel is under a separate deed and the rest is listed under Vernon County hospital. Lunde stated if the salt shed was annexed in, there would be access to city water and sewer, so that should be considered. Jacobs noted it is currently deeded separately to the Highway Department. Cade inquired as to Railroad Avenue and whether it would be closed off at both ends, and Avoles stated according to the bypass, it looks like that is what they would do. Lunde stated they will not allow two access's that close together.

Hanold noted that a possible frontage road, parallel to the bypass, could go up Railroad Avenue and make a frontage road by selling parcels off of it. Spenner stated that one of the things to look at right now are the requirements, including floor plans of the Erlandson building. Lunde stated square footage should be taken from all the county buildings, to have an idea of all current office space used. Spenner agreed, but added that even parking space should be taken into account. Jacobs stated much of that information could be obtained from each department head, asking them to determine their square footage to determine how large a building would be required to be placed on the county farm property. Avoles stated digital aerial photos could be used to determine square footage as well. Spenner stated employee parking is an issue; Lunde agreed, adding that company vehicles require a lot of space as well. Cornell asked if the plan was to put the Highway Department across the road by the salt shed, and members stated yes. Lunde stated it would provide much better access to the bypass.

Lunde asked about a sinkhole appearing on the map, and Jacobs stated yes, it appears to be, and that there are a couple of them in that area. Cornell asked Avoles to put together a rough estimate and Jacobs stated she would follow through with that, and get it to the department heads. Hanold asked the opinions of the future complex and if it would be going up along BB, east of the deer park, and west of the town shop. Jacobs stated there is a heavy drainage way next to the garden that should be avoided if possible, as it goes all the way up to BB. It was stated that once more information is obtained, including how much square footage is required, it can then start to be plugged in and decide what will go where. Jacobs stated she is aware that once upon a time the city wanted to buy property for the industrial park, along Railroad Avenue, north of BB, but also knows there have been discussions since, so an update to that would be good also. Lunde stated his understanding is a 40-50 acre parcel east of the salt shed is what they were looking at, whereby a corner of it will be lost due to the bypass, and if the salt shed was annexed, utilities could be run right down the highway. Cade stated he felt they should annex the other side as well, north of BB while they are at it and do it all at once. And that then for future development it will already be taken care of as neither the county or city pays taxes on it, so what's the difference.

Jacobs stated going through current uses of the county farm would help everyone understand also. She stated county businesses break even except for the county farm which does have some revenue per Jack Vig's last audit. She then asked where the boundary was between the East and West farm and Lunde stated Railroad Avenue with the exception of one little piece north of the salt shed. Jacobs verified that there are two crop grounds each rented out to different individuals, with the West farm having some buildings for Accelerated Genetics, and the East farm having buildings for Solverson, with separate contracts, and also there is a renter having a separate contract for the mobile home. It was stated the West farm contract expires possibly in the spring, and the East farm contract has two years left.

Jacobs asked the committee to decide whether they wanted to keep doing the trailer rental and cropland rental also, and if so, how much acreage? Lunde stated that after the last renter vacated, they were not going to rent the mobile home again, but a good renter came along so it was rented. Cade stated the mobile home rental has been nothing but a headache, and should not be continued. Jacobs stated that revenue could be increased 10 times by managing it a little differently. Cade asked why the county should even be in the rental business, to which Jacobs responded that by being able to obtain revenue from various sources and not relying on one source of revenue benefits land conservation budget in particular, and by diversifying, also relieves dependency on taxpayers.

Hanold said the Highway shop is a large parcel and also would have an acre on Broadway that could be sold to offset the costs of any new structure, but it would require a lot to be usable as it is forever contaminated underneath the gas tanks, down into the bedrock 15' down. Lunde stated there must be over 40 acres between the Viroqua town shop and the road to the Erlandson building. Hanold stated he thought they would be happy with a 40-50 acre parcel south of the town shop; just put some frontage road in and sell acre parcels off, which would require some promotion in order to sell it. Cade stated the city is moving north. Hanold asked how large the cemetery is and Avoles stated roughly 3 acres. Jacobs noted the bypass will cut off access to the cemetery. Lunde stated any farm leases would have to be changed to go North and East. Jacobs stated an alternate access or field road would be needed to access it. Hanold asked if they should think about recommending the sale of a chunk east of the salt shed and get an appraisal or how would a price be determined if so? Cornell stated that's probably the way it will go, but stated they shouldn't get too far ahead of themselves at this point.

Avoles stated the northeast side of the intersection is roughly 6 acres and Lunde stated he didn't think the little chunk north of the road should be sold off because the bypass is so far down the road that should be continued to be farmed. Cade stated the Erlandson building could use a lot of maintenance now and the Highway shop is completely shot. Lunde stated that with one or two exceptions, most everyone would want to move. Jacobs stated she really likes her office, but the lease is due in April and it's costing the county money as it is a 5 year lease that can not be broken. Cade stated he would like to see a new county building out there by the end of next year or else the county will have to spend a lot of money.

Karp stated his base materials are due in November and so will not be getting into the planning stages yet. Lunde stated that by having a meeting by the end of October, his base material deadline, Karp could be provided more information.

The next meeting date was set for Friday, October 22, 2010 at 9:00 am in the County Board Room of the Courthouse Annex.

Motion by Cox/second by McCoy to adjourn the meeting at 10:04 a.m. All in favor. Motion carried.

Minutes respectfully submitted by: Tena M. Fredrickson, Corporation Counsel Administrative Assistant