



BOARD MINUTES
BOARD OF WRIGHT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
JANUARY 26, 2021

Christine Husom	District 1
Darek Vetsch	District 2
Mark Daleiden	District 3
Mary Wetter	District 4
Michael Kaczmarek	District 5

DATE APPROVED: FEBRUARY 2, 2021

The Wright County Board met in regular session at 9:00 A.M. with Husom, Vetsch, Daleiden, Wetter, and Kaczmarek present.

COUNTY BOARD MINUTES 1-19-21 MEETING

Commissioner Husom moved to approve the minutes with the one adjustment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wetter and carried 5-0.

AGENDA

Commissioner Vetsch moved to approve the Agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kaczmarek and carried 5-0.

CONSENT AGENDA

Kaczmarek requested to have item B. under Attorney be removed from the Consent Agenda for clarification.

Vetsch moved to approve the Consent Agenda with the removal of Item B. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0.

A. ADMINISTRATION – FINANCE

1. Acknowledge Warrants Issued between January 13, 2021 and January 19, 2021
2. Approve Renewal of Seasonal On-Sale Liquor License for Whispering Pines Golf Club
3. Motion to Approve Disbursing Money from the County Relief Funding Program as Follows:
Disbursing Money for Small Businesses and Nonprofits in the Amount of \$392,662.50 of the \$2,733,983.57 Received from Account Number 01-099-484.6814 COVID-Economic Development Pending All Necessary Signatures and Audit Requirements

C. HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

1. Refer to Personnel Committee
 - A. Temporarily Reclassify Social Worker III to Social Worker II
 - B. Reclassify Social Worker I to Social Worker II

D. PLANNING & ZONING

1. Accept the Findings and Recommendation of the Planning Commission for the Following Requests to Rezone:
 - A. JAMES H. PREUSSE – (Monticello Twp.) Unanimously Recommend Approval of the Request to Rezone Approximately 104.2 Acres from AG General Agriculture and Part S-2 to A/R Agriculture-Residential and Part S-2
 - B. JOE B. BOLLANT – (maple Lake Twp.) – Unanimously Recommend Approval of the Request to Rezone Approximately 3 Acres from R-2a Suburban-Residential to AG General Agriculture

E. SHERIFF'S OFFICE

1. Position Backfill:
 - A. One Deputy FTW Due to a Leave of Absence
 - B. Renewal of the Federal Equitable Sharing Agreement

ITEMS PULLED FROM CONSENT AGENDA TO BE DISCUSSED

B. ATTORNEY

1. Request Chief of Civil Division Job Description be placed on the next Personnel Committee Agenda

Kaczmarek asked County Attorney Brian Lutes who came up with the job description for the position. Lutes stated it was him, Attorney Brian Asleson, and Attorney Greg Kryzer. Lutes advised that his predecessor, County Attorney Tom Kelly

started this process in planning meetings with some Commissioners involvement. He said once the resolution was adopted appointing him as County Attorney he asked Asleson and Kryzer for help and forwarded the job descriptions to County Administrator Lee Kelly, and Human Resource Director Schawn Johnson. Lutes stated he was directed to either the Personnel Committee or the Committee of The Whole. He said he waited until he was officially the County Attorney and then asked for it to be put on the Consent Agenda. Lutes stated he views this position in the preliminary stages.

Johnson stated Human Resources will review the position, but no action will be taken until it goes before the Personnel Committee. As a new position, it must be approved by the Commissioner's before Human Resources can proceed which is why it is recommended to go to the Personnel Committee first. Then, the next step is going through the job description and have the Attorney's Office complete a PAQ (Position Analysis Questionnaire) which is required by Baker Tilly. Once there is a completed draft of the job description it will be forwarded to Baker Tilly for pointing and further review.

Husom asked to clarify when this will go to the Personnel Committee. Kelly stated it will be brought before the Personnel Committee in February.

Kaczmarek said that Baker Tilly was approved by the board and paid before he started serving on the board. He said after the \$140,000 was spent on the Baker Tilly classifications/reclassification study, he has noticed a lot of proposals from office heads asking to reclassify or rename different positions in some cases resulting in very large pay increases. Kaczmarek asked where they are headed in the future with these types of proposals that had been classified only a year ago.

Kaczmarek moved to approve the Request Chief of Civil Division Job Description be placed on the next Personnel Committee Agenda in February. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0.

TIMED AGENDA ITEMS

VIRGIL HAWKINS, HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

Set Transportation Committee of The Whole (TCOTW) Meeting to discuss transportation issues. Suggested dates for Meeting: Monday, February 15th (PM); Tuesday, Feb. 16th (PM); Wed. Feb. 17th; Thurs. Feb. 18, 2021

Virgil Hawkins, Highway Department, stated there are 4 items for a potential agenda. They are updating the board on the Highway 19 project in St. Michael that is planned for construction next year, County Road 118 reconstruction update, the local option sales tax program, with possibly setting a hearing in the spring, and lastly an update on MNDOT's Northwest Metro Mississippi River crossing.

Vetsch moved to set a Transportation Committee of The Whole meeting on February 16, 2021 at 10:30 a.m. in the County Board Room. The motion was seconded by Wetter and carried 5-0.

Approval of Resolution to Authorize Preparation of Highway Right of Way Plat by County Surveyor for CR 118, CP 086-118-191

Hawkins said after the Surveyor's Office does their part, they will then use that to acquire right of way along the corridor.

Vetsch moved to approve the Resolution to Authorize Preparation of Highway Right of Way Plat by County Surveyor. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0 on a roll call.

Approve Resolution Regarding Spring Load Restrictions on the Wright County Highway System. Minnesota State Statutes (169.87) Provides Local Authorities, With Respect to Highways Under their Jurisdiction, to Designate Seasonal Load Restrictions

Hawkins stated this is done every year to protect the investments made to the County's highway system during the Spring thaw. The moisture content and gravel under the pavement is high which weakens the pavement. There are restrictions put on the highway system every year to preserve the life of the pavement. It usually starts in late February, early March and typically lasts 8 weeks.

Vetsch moved to approve the Resolution Regarding Spring Load Restrictions on the Wright County Highway System. The motion was seconded by Kaczmarek carried 5-0 on a roll call.

Approve Memo of Understanding (MOU) with the Cities of Albertville, Cokato, Waverly; and Cokato Township for the storage and/or purchase of salt for the 2020/2021 Winter Season. This is the annual renewal for each agency.

Hawkins said this MOU helps the cities out. Kaczmarek asked if all the cities and townships pay the same amount. Hawkins stated they do not, it depends on the distance for hauling and what the County pays to get it to the shop.

Kaczmarek moved to approve the Memo of Understanding (MOU) with the Cities of Albertville, Cokato, Waverly; and Cokato Township for the storage and/or purchase of salt for the 2020/2021 Winter Season. The motion was seconded by Wetter and carried 5-0.

ADMINISTRATION

Introduction of Lindsey Meyer, Finance Director

Lindsey Meyer, the new Finance Director, introduced herself to the board. Meyer said she started her career as an Auditor and then moved on to County Government stating she had the “Wright Experience” and is now back with Wright County.

Kelly stated she may look familiar to some because of her previous time with the County. He said they are getting Meyer up to speed with everything that is happening in the County and they are happy to have her on board.

PUBLIC HEARING ON INTERIM ORDINANCE FOR PROPOSED SOLAR FARM MORATORIUM

Approve Resolution Adopting an Emergency Interim Zoning Ordinance Institution an Emergency Moratorium on Solar Energy Farms

Kryzer stated pursuant to the Boards directive at the Workshop Meeting, staff drafted and published a notice for an Emergency Moratorium or Interim Ordinance pursuant to MN §394.34. Staff also drafted a proposed resolution for the Board to review today that was put on the Agenda. Kryzer stated on page 3 of 4, it listed the restrictions for the temporary emergency ordinance. In Section 1, the Board would be placing a Moratorium and a hold on all pending applications and any new applications. Section 2 would be a moratorium on having staff negotiating any developer agreements with any previously approved conditional use permits “CUP’s” that are out there. Kryzer stated they are currently negotiating one on an approved CUP.

Commissioner Daleiden went over the rules of the public hearing for the Proposed Solar Farm Moratorium. Daleiden opened the meeting to public comment and residents took turns speaking.

JEFF YOUNG, MONTICELLO TOWNSHIP

Young stated he is a resident of Monticello Township and is very concerned regarding the amount of Agricultural Land that is being taken over for use of Solar Farms. He stated there are a few Solar Farms pending in Monticello Township. He said he’s excited for what the County Board is doing because it needs to be kept as Agricultural Land. He also stated there are a lot of residents attending the Township Boards with their concerns about Solar Farms. He said the companies come in but don’t take care of the vegetation and there have been issues with water running onto other properties. He again said he appreciates what the Board is doing.

EVAN CARLSON, IPS SOLAR

Carlson said he was here about 4 years ago when he was involved with a project before the last moratorium. He said he was on the committee for a year as they scrutinized the ordinance and helped make it, one of the most, if not the most restrictive ordinances that he’s seen. He explained the ordinance has a requirement that there is a developer agreement between the developer and the county, which basically gives all the power to the county. He went on to say it’s already a very restrictive ordinance and a great deal of care went into crafting it. Carlson said there was a committee assembled consisting of Township members, Planning Commission and members of the Board. Carlson said they have another project pending and it seems very unreasonable to make them go through the whole process again. Carlson went on saying there were things they didn’t agree with, but they managed to find a site that satisfies the ordinance and they would like to follow through with the project. Carlson requested the board not approve a moratorium and if they do to be sympathetic to developers that have pending applications because a lot of work has gone into complying with the existing ordinance.

Carlson said everything that happened in the review period was in the Townships. When they were having discussions

amending the ordinance to its current form. He went on to say the controversy is north in an area around Monticello. If Townships want to do a more restrictive ordinance they can. Carlson questioned the Board why there is an emergency all the sudden.

Daleiden asked what township the solar project that he is working on is pending in. Carlson stated there is one in Stockholm Township, but they do their own zoning and one south of Howard Lake. Carlson said it's a scavenger hunt to find sites that will work for solar farms. Not only due to land use and permitting but also due to electric grid capacity.

JAKE HAY, SOUTH HAVEN TOWNSHIP

Hay also works for IPS Solar, as an independent contractor and is a resident of South Haven. He stated his family has owned property in the County for 34 years and they have no plans of leaving. Hay stated solar farms are nothing new to the County. He asked the board, why now and what's going on after all this time. He stated they follow and work within the ordinance with the County to make sure everything is adequate. Hay said a moratorium will slow solar growth, but the companies will recover and go someplace else. He said he is the one effected by this because it's his career. Hay said he takes care of his landowners and does everything he can to get the solar farms built and make everyone happy regarding where they are built and everything that goes with it. Hay questioned what damage is there to the County when they are being built on private land of Wright County residents. He stated the Stockholm Township project is his and said they will follow whatever the County does. Hay stated this has a trickle-down effect.

BRIAN KEENAN, IPS SOLAR

Keenan works for IPS Solar. He stated, the board may think of solar developers as deep pocketed companies; however, a lot of them are small including IPS Solar. He stated they hire a lot of small local contractors like, landscapers, fence installers, cement masons, and excavators. Keenan stated a lot of those businesses rely on projects they are putting together in Wright County. Keenan said small businesses in this current market can't wait 12 months. Keenan stated with the current pandemic, one bright spot has been with the solar companies and the jobs that have been created and investments that are happening. He went on to say if the Board votes for a moratorium they are killing those investments and jobs. Keenan said they work with farmers and landowners with big space and they are only using a small portion of their land which allows them to have economic security. It helps keep the family farm running through ups and downs of the market.

Keenan stated a farmer from Cokato in Stockholm Township wrote a letter to Kaczmarek. He summarized the letter saying, "the program offered through Excel Energy is very important to those of us participating. We are willing to make a portion of our agricultural real estate available for a worthy cause of renewable energy, please help us stay on our current timeline and prevent any delays which may be unnecessary by either voting no, or please come up with a less invasive solution."

RENEE CARDARELLE, ANNANDALE

Cardarelle is a property owner in Annandale. She stated she has been exploring solar energy and there are several counties across Minnesota that have embraced solar farms. Cardarelle stated in Minnesota nearly a hundred million dollars in property tax revenue has been generated in counties that offset property taxes since 2004. Cardarelle said she feels as though Wright County is missing out on a huge opportunity to supplement property taxes to pay for county services by not embracing solar energy and not looking at how it can help Wright County move forward to provide economic stability. Cardarelle stated solar energy is providing jobs, income and property taxes. Cardarelle stated there are best practices for what to do under the solar panels. If they are done properly you can create a more abundant wildlife.

ROB SCHULTZ, BUFFALO

Schultz works for Minnesota Native Landscapes and lives in Buffalo. He said as Minnesota developer, a Minnesota contractor on the vegetation and soil health side of this issue it is crucial to the expansion of these projects. Schultz said there are concerns about the acreage that is going from agriculture to solar farms; however, a lot of developments have been using native grass and pollinator friendly solar. He said there has been a shift in agrivoltaics which is utilizing the lands. Schultz said his company grazes on these sites which in turn gives a meat/protein product from it. Schultz asked to take into consideration what solar energy could do for Wright County.

TERRY WEESE, BUFFALO TOWNSHIP

Weise lives in Buffalo Township and is on the Township Board. He said he supports the moratorium. He stated there has

been solar farms in Buffalo Township and the developers never work with the township. He went on to say everything the developers promised, was never followed through on. Weise said there is a shortage of food for people and asked why they would put in solar fields. Weise stated the solar fields are not producing electricity like they are supposed to. Weise said he is in favor of the moratorium.

KEVIN YONAK, MONTICELLO TOWNSHIP

Yonak lives in Monticello Township and is on the Township Board. He stated he is representing himself and does not speak for the Monticello Township board. Yonak stated he agrees with the moratorium. He said he thinks the floodgates are opening and there is going to end up being too much of this type of development in the townships. He said he thinks it will affect property taxes. He said from his understanding solar projects are based on agricultural taxes. He said there is a good website, Center of the American Experience which shows problems with lease agreements between agricultural property owners and solar companies. He said there are issues with the easements and what they are giving away.

HARLEN ANDERSON, COKATO

Anderson stated he has one solar farm and one under construction. He asked the Commissioner's if they had any questions about what goes on when these solar farms are built. There were no questions for him. Anderson said he would support the idea of a moratorium; however, he thinks what they have for solar farms is good. He said he believes, they should make rules and live by the rules. He said the developers that did his first solar farm were great, but the second group wasn't following the rules made by the county. Anderson said his family has been doing business in Wright County for 150 years and he sees it as a plus for farmers. He said he believes solar farms generate more money to the farmers than CRP. Anderson said in 25 years when the solar farm is done it can be turned back into a corn field.

Wetter stated a lot of solar farms have weeds growing underneath the panels. Anderson said the first one they did was put on an Alfalfa field and there were no land alterations. They cut and maintained them 3 times last year. The second solar farm did a lot of land alterations and didn't ask him if he was okay with it. He said there is lack of communication with the second developer.

TERRY WEISE, BUFFALO TOWNSHIP

Weise came back to say that these lands will not be returned to farming. He said after the one that was in Buffalo, there were scrapers for months at a time moving dirt and it was never was turned back into farm land. He said it will cost millions of dollars to remove solar farms. He said the only tax money they get is from the electricity.

ROB SCHULTZ, BUFFALO

Schultz offered to take the board out to the site in Buffalo to show what Minnesota Native Landscapes has done, and what it now looks like, five years after they installed the vegetation on that site. He said there are national studies on that site to look at pollinators and wildlife habits and to learn about carbon sequestration. They are putting the right plants in those sites for water infiltration. Schultz stated MNL are being good stewards to the land, because it's their backyard and their state.

Daleiden closed the public hearing and no additional comments were made.

Vetsch said the conversation is not against solar energy, but more about making sure Wright County is doing its due diligence in protecting Wright County tax payers from harm down the road. Vetsch stated the issue right now is that the ordinance may not be defined enough which is why a pause is needed. They need to look at the ordinance to make sure it has the correct language.

Husom said that is her concern as well. They don't want the liability to fall on tax payers, so they need to make sure failsafe are in place. Husom said that they may need to have a discussion regarding things that are pending. Husom stated Wright County is one of the top solar producers in the state and one of the top tax collectors for production.

Kaczmarek asked how many different solar vendors Wright County has worked with. Sean Riley, Planning and Zoning, said he didn't know the exact number but approximated 5 to 10 developers and companies that have gone through the process and built solar farms. Kaczmarek said sometimes you must revisit policies and procedures because things can come up that you weren't planning for five years ago.

Riley said he believes Wright County has a good product when it comes to the Zoning Ordinance. There are 15 to 20 solar farms that have been done in the County that have been done well and we have experience.

Kryzer told the board that if this resolution is approved they will need to discuss setting up a committee and do some studying. He said they could start that process at the next Board meeting. They can start soliciting people who would like to be on the committee.

Vetsch explained if they have a CUP they are okay to continue, but if they don't have a CUP developer's permit done they have to stop.

Kryzer said without a developer's agreement, Planning and Zoning will not issue a building permit to start construction.

Vetsch moved to approve Resolution Adopting an Emergency Interim Zoning Ordinance Institution an Emergency Moratorium on Solar Energy Farms. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0 on a roll call.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

ADMINISTRATION

Schedule recognition for Group and Employee of the Year on February 23, 2021

Schedule Employee Years of Service Recognition on March 2, 2021

Kelly stated there has been discussions with the leadership team regarding employee recognition and years of service. They have been taking into consideration COVID 19 and safety measures. They still want to make sure the employees are recognized for Group and Employee of the year and Employee Years of Service. Kelly said they would like to have the Group and Employee of the Year recognition at the board meeting on February 23, 2021 and the Years of Service recognition at the board meeting on March 2, 2021. He stated they are not planning on having everyone attend in person but instead have a video that will be presented to the Board, so they will be recognized in a public forum.

Husom moved to set the dates of February 23, 2021 and March 2, 2021 for Group and Employee of the Year and Years of Services. The motion was seconded by Wetter and carried 5-0.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE/ ADVISORY BOARD UPDATES

Kelly said work continues on ERP. They had sessions Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of this week, working on the general ledger. Now that Meyer has started, they are having discussions regarding the Finance Department and working on the vision and how we will move forward in the future. A group went to look at the construction site yesterday to see the progress and get updates.

Wetter stated on January 20, 2021 the Wright County Historical Society voted for Officers, they will remain the same as last year. She advised, even though the Wright County Historical Society is closed, they have had many research requests which they have been following through with. They also explained why they are closed. The purpose of the Historical Society is to protect and archive the collections and due to COVID 19, the cleaning products they use would put the archives in jeopardy.

Vetsch said the Trailblazer Joint Powers Board met virtually last week. Commissioner Krueger from McLeod County will be the Chair for this coming year. They welcomed 4 new members as well as Commissioner Daleiden. Vetsch stated they are still doing their pandemic funding through MNDOT, and MNDOT is fully funding the operations at this point. They are still working on trying to find software that will meet the needs of the system. The Business Relief Program is moving forward, and they are trying one more big push to get applications in because there is still funds available.

Daleiden said he was on the radio last week, the Trailblazers met last week as Vetsch said. Also, the Wellness Committee met last Tuesday. He said even with people working remotely there was still quite a bit of involvement virtually. The Wellness Committee is going to try something new by tying somethings in with the Parks Department to get employees

out in the parks and on the trails. There aren't any winter projects right now, but there are going to be doing some summer projects like, teaching people how to camp.

Husom stated she has nothing new to update on.

Kaczmarek said the Planning Commission met and had some site inspections, one being a solar farm and the other was a property that wants to look at having some larger scale events. Kaczmarek said he participated in 2 AMC virtual meetings. He said there are 100 new Commissioners and/or County Administrators throughout the state. The Library Board met and picked Officers and he was appointed to the Finance Committee.

Frank Petitta, Information Technology said in approximately 3 weeks there should be video of the New Justice Center online.

The meeting adjourned at 10:36 a.m.

County Board Minutes submitted by Angie Fisher, Administrative Specialist