

MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
WORK SESSION

February 7, 2023

The Mower County Board of Commissioners in and for the County of Mower, Minnesota, met in a Work Session on February 7, 2023 at 1:00 p.m. at the Government Center, 201 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE, in Austin, Minnesota.

All members present, viz: Chair Mike Ankeny, Vice-Chair Jerry Reinartz, John Mueller, Polly Glynn and Dan Sparks. Also in attendance were County Administrator Trish Harren, County Attorney Kristen Nelsen and Executive Assistant Denise Barthels.

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

The new IT Director James Keltgen was introduced to the Board.

Mower County Sheriff's Office Detective TJ Lynch along with Sheriff Sandvik, Chief Deputy Mark May and Captain Dave Pike presented to the Board a proposal for a Mower County Shooting Range. The proposed site is County own property which is an old gravel pit in Section 36 of Marshall Township. The Sheriff department desires a training site of its own to best utilize its training time and prevent unnecessary overtime by having to fit another facility's schedule and pay their use fees. Staff has reviewed the National Rifle Association's source book for recommended best practices for establishing a range and applicable statute. The first step would be to obtain a conditional use permit from the County to permit a shooting range on the property. The property has already been reviewed for wetland concerns and the proposed area is outside any wetland areas. Earthen berms will be used to designate the area of the range to catch any stray rounds with a reclamation plan in place.

Solid Waste Officer Marcus Thompson discussed with the Board several items. First architectural quotes have been received for the electronic collection addition to the recycling center planned with the \$250,000 grant funding received which requires a local match of which the County plans to use ARPA funding for the infrastructure investment. The low bid was Armon Architecture. Second, Mr. Thompson informed the Board that a new 5-year contract with Freeborn Co-op Oil for the continuation of rural recycling has been prepared and will be presented to the Board for approval. Third, Nobles County Landfill has requested a Certificate of Need letter of support which will be presented to the Board for approval. Lastly, Mr. Thompson indicated that again this year he is applying to be a MN Greencorps Host Site. Mower County was selected last year but a person was unavailable. A Resolution to make application will be presented to the Board for approval at the next meeting.

Assistant Public Works Director Val Sheedy and Environmental Services Supervisor Angie Lipelt provided the Board with solid waste and zoning updates. The County started SSTS septic compliance initiatives in 2020. The voucher program has been successful in having compliance inspections done. Mower County has been using the "trigger" approach

that landowners coming in for conditional use or land use permits that have a system that is more than 20 years old will be required to have a septic inspection for compliance. The vouchers were used for this purpose. The department is reviewing the ordinance for possible amendments related to an agricultural exemption. The department is moving to use GIS to review feedlots and associated watershed. The on-line permitting is working well and over 800 burning permits were issued last year.

Finance Manager Loni Swensen presented to the Board the Payroll and Benefit Reconciliations for 2019-2021 for write-off purposes that will be presented to the Board at the next meeting for approval. Human Resources and Finance are working on the reconciliation process to improve accounting balancing. Payroll processing has been transferred to the Finance Department.

Mower County Attorney Kristen Nelsen gave an update on National District Attorneys Association Conference she attended. Nationally districts are struggling with work force shortages and struggling to hire lawyers. The concern with the health costs for inmates was brought to the attention of our local congressional leaders.

County Administrator Trish Harren reviewed the Arvig 2023 Border to Border Grant Application Partnership proposal that will be presented to the Board for approval at the next meeting. There is a new grant for low density areas and Arvig is proposing to apply with a project that has 283 passings to 235 unserved and 48 underserved areas with a project cost of \$6.8 million. Arvig's investment would be 40% at \$2.7 million with a request for 50% funding from the Border to Border grant at \$3.4 million and a request for Mower County to contribute 10% or approximately \$686,938.88.

The Board briefly reviewed and discussed the Tax Abatement Request from Hormel Food Corporation for a market rate community childcare center in Austin, MN. It was noted that the City of Austin has approved Hormel's request on February 6. According to a childcare study there are approximately 809 children needing a childcare spot in Mower County. The proposed site is the vacant lot west of Worlein funeral home. The abatement would be for the estimated \$5 million in improvements only for the childcare facility and not the value of the land. Local homebased daycares have expressed some concern that this new center could impact their client base. The Board was clear that they support adding day care positions in all areas from centers to in-home childcare.

It was noted that Austin Public Schools has requested to meet to discuss upcoming plans and/or situations that intersect both the County and the School. May 8<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 was suggested. This date and time will be added to a future agenda for approval.

County Administrator Trish Harren reported that the Grand Meadow Chert Quarry is entering Phase 3 of its project. In phase I the property was purchased with grant funding. In Phase 2 the property was cleared of buck thorn with the assistance of Sentence to Service and Highschool students. Phase 3 is for trail building. Mower County has given the Chert Quarry \$50,000 as an endowment. There is a \$180,000 grant available to help with trails but it requires a 20% cash match of \$40,000. The Historical Society will be requesting the

Board to reallocate its \$50,000 endowment contribution so it can be used for the cash match. In addition, Mower County will be asked to be the fiscal host on the trail grant.

The work session concluded at 3:38 p.m.

**THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**BY:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Chairperson**

**Attest:**

**By:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Clerk/Administrator**

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