

MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
WORK SESSION

May 2, 2023

The Mower County Board of Commissioners in and for the County of Mower, Minnesota, met in a Work Session on May 2, 2023 at 1:00 p.m. at the Government Center, 201 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE, in Austin, Minnesota.

Members present, viz: Chair Mike Ankeny, Vice-Chair Jerry Reinartz, John Mueller, and Polly Glynn. Member excused: Dan Sparks. Also in attendance were County Administrator Trish Harren and Executive Assistant Denise Barthels.

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Solid Waste Consultant Dave Lucas appeared remotely and provided the Board with information pertaining to the planned updates to the new Solid Waste Management Plan. Some changes that have been made since last presented to the Board include, but are not limited to, adding Nobles County Landfill as a disposal site, recycling and landfill rate changes, adding programs for organics recycling and recognition of the MPCA grant received for an expansion to the Recycling Center. It was noted that, as required by the MPCA, Solid Waste Management plans are reviewed and re-written every ten years. The plan will be posted for public comment. A copy of the proposed plan is available on the web site or may be obtained by contacting Mower County Environmental Services.

County Administrator Trish Harren informed the Board that the requested revision to the septic ordinance is on the Planning Commission agenda. Since the Board has not yet seen the proposed changed language, Administrator Harren invited Environmental Services Supervisor Angela Lipelt and Assistant Public Works Director Valerie Sheedy to review the proposed changes with the Board. Ms. Lipelt and Ms. Sheedy provided background on the history of septic compliance in Minnesota as well as the efforts Mower County has made to date. The proposed language change consists of an exclusion to the zoning permit trigger for a septic compliance inspection for agriculture structures. The Board discussed at length the goal of the zoning permit compliance inspection trigger as part of the strategy to consolidate the timeframe to complete a septic inventory in Mower County. Utilizing property transfer only was estimated to take 25 years to reach county wide compliancy. Adding another trigger utilizing permitting was estimated to reduce that by 10 years. However, the public is having a hard time understanding why permits for structures that are not related to a septic require a compliance inspection. The Board earlier revised the ordinance to eliminate the trigger for small structures. The change was designed to eliminate agriculture structures as agriculture business owners are having a hard time understanding the compliance inspection requirement, especially for structures located on agriculture land without a house or a septic. After discussion it was agreed to continue to move the proposed change to the Planning Commission for public comment and recommendation. However, the Board expressed interest in investigating whether this strategy is having the intended impact on reducing the timeframe and whether another strategy that is directly tied to the outcome of clean water might be preferable.

COMMISSIONERS' RECORD MOWER COUNTY, MINNESOTA

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Public Works Director Michal Hanson appeared before the Board with an update on Dodge County Wind Gen-Tie Line. Hanson and Sheedy recently completed service on an advisory committee to review possible routes. Hanson reviewed a map that outlined the possible gen-tie routes. Hanson noted the recommendations are based on safe setbacks as well as future planning for road enhancements. Hanson will put recommendations into letter format for approval at the May 9<sup>th</sup> Board meeting for submission to the PUC.

County Administrator Trish Harren provided a brief strategic planning update. Mower County has discontinued its agreement with Sicora except for data collection.

County Administrator Trish Harren informed the Board that the City of Austin is discussing the possibility of renewing the local option ½ cent sales tax that generates approximately \$1.7 million per year in revenue. The city has potential projects that could be funded with sales tax vs. levy dollars including a public safety building. The city would like to conduct a needs assessment for public safety and has offered to include the County in that study. The total cost of the study is \$11,500. The Board requested that this be added to the Joint City/County meeting on May 18<sup>th</sup> for discussion.

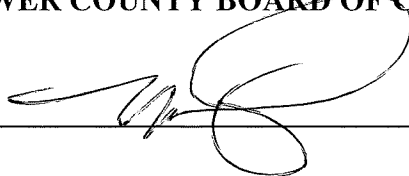
The County had received a copy of the Cedar Valley services 2022 annual report and it has been made available to the commissioners for their review.

Citizen John Martin appeared before the board to express concerns regarding transparency and accountability. He noted the failure of the county to inform citizens there is a way to remove the Sheriff from office through petition and claimed possible withholding of evidence related to a case he was involved in. Mr. Martin further claimed the County wrongfully sold personal property before adjudication of a case, failed to provide prescription medication to an inmate, and does not manage temperature for inmate comfort. Mr. Martin indicated that the County wasn't informing the taxpayers of suits filed against the County. Lastly, Mr. Martin claimed certain elected officials and local attorneys are/were involved in selling drugs. County Attorney Kristen Nelson advised Mr. Martin if he has allegations of criminal behavior that he should report that to the appropriate law enforcement agency with jurisdiction; if he has a concern of wrongful actions of her office, he can report those to her, and she will investigate; and that she annually reports existing and pending suits against the county exceeding \$20,000 in the audit.

The work session concluded at 3:35 p.m.

**THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

BY: \_\_\_\_\_



5-23-23

**Chairperson**

Attest: .

By: Trish Harren

**Clerk/Administrator**