

MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION

June 6, 2023

The Mower County Board of Commissioners in and for the County of Mower, Minnesota, met in a Work Session on June 6, 2023 at 1:00 p.m. at the Government Center, 201 1st Street NE, in Austin, Minnesota.

All members present, viz: Chair Mike Ankeny, Vice-Chair Jerry Reinartz, John Mueller, Polly Glynn and Dan Sparks (remotely arrived at 1:05 p.m.) Also in attendance were County Administrator Trish Harren and Executive Assistant Denise Barthels.

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Lucas Wiltse, GIGFire (formerly LTD Broadband) RE: Supporting Community Broadband did not appear as scheduled.

Assistant Public Works Director/ Environmental Services Valerie Sheedy and Environmental Services Supervisor Angela Lipelt appeared before the Board for continued discussion of proposed changes to the ISTS and Zoning ordinances related to regulation of individual septic system compliance. Mower County is required by statute to regulate septic systems for clean water purposes. It is estimated that two-thirds of the 3400 septic systems in Mower County are compliant and the remaining one-third are of unknown condition. Current triggers for a septic compliance inspection are 1) sale of the property; 2) addition of a bedroom; or 3) any development within shoreland and 4) zoning permits if the septic system on the property is more than 20 years old.

The Board heard comments from the public in attendance. It was noted that people are in favor of clean water, but not all agree on how to achieve it. Suggestions for the County included inspect systems of unknown compliance by township by township; inspect systems of unknown compliance by watershed; inspect all systems of unknown compliance using a quintile process like valuations over five years; begin with establishing an accurate inventory; start inspecting systems of unknown compliance based on risk – those in shoreland or older than 30 year. It was also suggested to notify landowners in advance of the compliance inspection schedule so they can be prepared and plan for possible costs. It was also recommended to provide education on financing options. Staff will continue to collect input from area citizens, community groups and the townships.

Greg & Courtney Hackensmith appeared before the Board for the discussion regarding type and placement of a septic system on a parcel they are considering purchasing to build a home. Hackensmith's object to the County's interpretation of the type of septic system and placement of septic system for their planned home construction project. Following discussion, the Hackensmith's were informed the next step would be to make an appeal to the Board of Adjustment.

County Administrator Trish Harren informed the Board that she had received notice that one of the County appointed representatives on the joint Austin Mower County Homeownership Fund Board has resigned. The County has been asked to appoint a replacement to fill the remaining term that expires on December 31, 2023. The Board requested that an ad be placed to seek interested individuals to serve.

The Board discussed the possible impacts related to the Cannabinoid legislation. Some counties are adopting ordinances now and others are establishing a moratorium to have more time to establish an ordinance to encompass all areas and/or departments impacted by the legislation. It was suggested that a committee of stakeholders be established to gather information for drafting an ordinance. Public Health will take the lead on the Committee. It is expected that the Association of Minnesota Counties will also provide input on county ordinance language. It was suggested that Commissioner Sparks serve on the committee when it is established.

Administrator Harren reported that there is interest by the City of Austin and SWCD to partner in developing the Ramsey Dam area for enhanced public use. The Department of Natural Resources owns and manages the public access and has upgraded the dock. The upgrades would include improving the road access, vegetation management, provision of garbage receptacles and temporary or permanent bathroom facilities. The Public Works Director Mike Hanson, Commissioner John Mueller, and Administrator Harren will represent the county on this proposed project.

Commissioner Sparks arrived at the meeting at 2:48 p.m.

The Board requested that discussion of the use of GIS change finder data for zoning purposes be added as a discussion item on the August work session and that use of the data be discontinued for the time being.

The work session concluded at 2:52 p.m.

THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BY: _____



Chairperson

Attest:

By: Trish Harren
Clerk/Administrator