



**City of Lake Elmo
Planning Commission Meeting
Minutes of May 30, 2012**

Chairman Williams called to order the meeting of the Lake Elmo Planning Commission at 7:02 p.m.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Boyer, Hall, Williams, Fliflet, Haggard, Pelletier, and Obermueller;

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Ziertman;

STAFF PRESENT: Planning Director Klatt and City Planner Johnson.

Approve Agenda:

Commissioner Obermueller requested that business item #4 shows that a presentation is going to be made by Natural System Utilities LLC, not Ecocheck.

M/S/P: Hall/Boyer move to approve the agenda as amended. Vote 5:0.

Minutes:

May 7, 2012- Chairman Williams proposed that the minutes reflect the fact that there were no additional nominations for the position of Vice Chair, so the nominations were closed.

M/S/P: Williams/Boyer move to approve the minutes as amended. Vote 4:0. Abstained: Obermueller.

Public Hearing : None

Business Items: *Review of Community Septic Systems - Tom Birkland of Natural System Utilities Presentation*

Mr. Birkland began his presentation outlining the scope of work that is completed by Natural System Utilities. This work includes the review and maintenance of wastewater treatment systems, or septic systems. He noted that the performance standards that are used in this work are determined by the permitting agency, typically a county of Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

Mr. Birkland then moved on to describe the systems that currently serve properties in Lake Elmo. He first described the community system that serves Carriage Station.

Chairman Williams asked if there is a constant flow of recirculation.

Mr. Birkland explained that the frequency of recirculation depends on the amount of use and a formula that calculates the dispersal.

Mr. Birkland moved on to describe the system that currently serves the Farms of Lake Elmo.

Chairman Williams asked how the final liquid is disposed of.

Mr. Birkland explained that the liquid is dispersed through drip piping system. This system is similar to a drain field.

Commissioner Bloyer asked if the performance of these two systems is strong.

Mr. Birkland explained that these systems are award-winning systems.

Commissioner Obermueller asked if Natural System Utilities designed the systems at Carriage Station and Farms of Lake Elmo.

Mr. Birkland explained that his company did not design the systems, but operates as a wastewater treatment system management company.

Commissioner Fliflet noted that Farms of Lake Elmo still has many open lots.

Commissioner Obermueller asked where the drain field is located. In addition, where would a secondary drain field be located if the primary system failed?

Mr. Birkland explained that the system at Farms of Lake Elmo cleans the liquid to about 98% before it reaches the end point. Failure of this system is unlikely.

Mr. Birkland moved forward to describe the system at Wild Flower Shores.

Chairman Williams asked about the poor nitrogen removal of this system.

Mr. Birkland explained that there is poor nitrogen removal because this type of system does not involve recirculation.

Chairman Williams noted that the purpose of the wetland is no capture the nitrogen so it can periodically removed.

Mr. Birkland noted that studies have shown that plants have mixed results in capturing the nitrogen.

Mr. Birkland then outlined the Whistling Valley I system. He noted that this system is very similar to Carriage Station. These systems use pressure-dosed beds for dispersal.

Chairman Williams asked about the area that these beds require.

Birkland explained that these beds are about 200-300 yards long.

Moving forward, Mr. Birkland then described the Whistling Valley II system.

Chairman Williams asked about the material that is added.

Birkland explained that the material added is used as food for the bacteria, resulting in the dispersal of nitrogen gas.

Mr. Birkland then described the systems at Fields of St. Croix I & II. He noted that these systems are well integrated into the surrounding landscape, incorporating walking trails around the systems. He then followed with a description of the system at Tamarack Farms and Sanctuary.

Commissioner Pelletier asked about the use of "injector systems".

Mr. Birkland explained that these types of systems utilize tanks for each individual home. The Farms of Lake Elmo has a similar system.

Commissioner Pelletier asked if this technology was more current.

Mr. Birkland explained that systems that utilize injector pumped do not have to utilize gravity to ensure proper flow. The type of system installed is more dependent

Commissioner Haggard noted that homes in Carriage Station have garbage disposals. Should they be using these garbage disposals.

Mr. Birkland noted that garbage disposals can clog wastewater treatment systems.

Chairman Williams asked about the reduction of contaminants of each type of system. It would be useful to compare the reduction of contaminants of each type of system.

Mr. Birkland moved on to describe a maintenance issue in the Sanctuary system.

Commissioner Fliflet asked if the systems that incorporate grinder pumps are less averse to becoming clogged.

Mr. Birkland explained that during the period of build-out, the systems are more fragile in terms of clogging. Once these areas reach full build-out, the systems function much better.

Commissioner Pelletier asked if we should be more cognizant of the performance of different types of systems and relay this information to HOAs.

Mr. Birkland explained that education for residents on how to use their systems is important in terms of maintaining good performance and longevity.

Commissioner Boyer asked if the performance of community systems can be improved with better awareness among the residents.

Commissioner Fliflet asked if the older community systems can be upgraded with newer technology.

Mr. Birkland explained that it is extremely expensive to replace old systems with new technology. In addition, simple systems do provide excellent treatment.

Commissioner Boyer asked about the life-cycle of these community systems as compared to individual systems. In addition, what does system failure entail.

Mr. Birkland noted that if the system is well maintained and designed, then it should last a very long time. Failure is typically related to the drain field, not the collection or treatment. This results from oversaturation.

Chairman Williams noted that the failure of the Hamlet system was related to treatment.

Commissioner Hall wanted to know how common bacterial contamination is among these systems.

Mr. Birkland explained that it is not common.

Commissioner Hall wanted to know where the sludge is disposed of.

Mr. Birkland noted that disposal occurs in several facilities around the Twin Cities.

Commissioner Pelletier commented that the failure of the Hamlet on Sunfish Lake system gave the other community treatment systems a bad name. In addition, it is important for the City to not allow substandard systems. Also, does the inclusion of injector systems help avoid system failure?

Mr. Birkland explained that systems can be augmented to perform better.

Chairman Williams asked about the standards called for by the permits for community treatment systems.

Mr. Birkland explained that these permits have requirements related to the amount of nitrogen disposed of by the system. He noted that the typical levels of nitrogen found are between 3-8 milligrams per liter of nitrogen.

Chairman Williams asked if there was any open water at any of these sites.

Mr. Birkland noted that the post-treatment discharge can sometimes bring water to the surface, although it is not common.

Commissioner Fliflet noted that the above ground treatment building are not aesthetically pleasing . Can the City require the developers to better address the aesthetics of treatment equipment.

Planning Director Klatt noted that the Planning Commission can address this issue at subdivision and development review. This could be addressed through screening or other mechanisms.

Commissioner Bloyer noted that a structure could be built around this equipment.

Commissioner Obermueller asked that the presentation be emailed to the Commission and shared with Lake Elmo residents.

Planning Director Klatt noted that this is valuable information in terms of future subdivisions or other community systems that may be connected to City sewer.

Commissioner Bloyer asked if a connection to City sewer is made, do these systems need to be removed, or do they remain dormant?

Planning Director Klatt was not certain and will find out more information.

Business Items: *SSTS Update – Washington County*

Mr. Pete Ganzel of Washington County provided an update related to permits issued for subsurface sewage treatment systems in Lake Elmo. Since the first of the year, 9 installation permits were issued. In addition, 12 inspections were completed. Of the 12 inspections, 7 were complaints and 5 were found to be not compliant.

Mr. Ganzel noted that he can describe the issue related to the community system at Hamlet on Sunfish Lake. First, the system was undersized for the flowage received. Now the system is operating effectively, however it is quite expensive.

Planning Director Klatt noted that the Hamlet on Sunfish Lake does have an agreement with the City to connect to sanitary sewer as soon as it is available. The main reason for this agreement is that the current system at Hamlet is quite expensive to operate. Klatt also explained why the County now permits wastewater treatment systems in Lake Elmo. He explained which government entity is responsible for different wastewater treatment systems.

Mr. Ganzel explained that it is the responsibility of the County to enforce minimum standards in terms of nitrate levels and other requirements.

Chairman Williams asked how it is determined which systems are inspected.

Mr. Ganzel explained that private companies complete compliance inspections whenever a property is sold to a new owner, or in the instance of a significant expansion of a property. These inspections look for leakage and separation.

Commissioner Bloyer asked about dry wells.

Mr. Ganzel explained that a dry well is similar to a cesspool, but one step up. These systems clog frequently. There are many reasons why these systems should be replaced.

Planning Director Klatt notes that inspections must be completed whenever a property is sold. Bringing a system into compliance is the responsibility of the seller and buyer.

Commissioner Bloyer requested that the City Engineer make a presentation about sewer design and water systems.

Planning Director Klatt noted that the City Engineer made a similar presentation at a recent Council Workshop. However, the City Engineer could be able to present this material to the Planning Commission as well.

Chairman Williams noted that this information would be valuable for the I-94 area where the design of the sewer is not finalized.

Commissioner Pelletier asked about injector system use in the city of Lindstrom.

Mr. Ganzel explained that solids must still be accounted for and systems must be design with the appropriate variable way strength.

Pelletier wondered whether these types of systems could be used effectively for businesses.

Mr. Ganzel noted that pre-treatment can be very powerful. It is a matter of designing a powerful enough system for the type of use.

Commissioner Obermueller asked about the type of system utilized at the Durand property.

Mr. Ganzel noted that a pressure bed system was used. It is similar to a gravity system.

Commissioner Bloyer asked about the depth of the system.

Mr. Ganzel noted that this system is 3 feet deep.

Planning Director Klatt took this opportunity to highlight the findings of the Village Area septic system survey. The results of this survey revealed that 58% of the responses noted that they were interested in being connected to City sanitary sewer.

Chairman Williams noted that responses related to system replacement need to be better defined. There may be lower-cost options available related to maintenance of the system. Overall, system replacement needs to be better defined.

Planning Director Klatt noted that expansion of properties is causing greater strain on current wastewater treatment systems.

Commissioner Obermueller inquire about replacement of systems in the Village Area.

Mr. Ganzel noted that most properties do not have room for a drainfield or for a secondary system. He also noted that a property must be at least two acres large to adequately fit a drainfield.

Planning Director Klatt asked about the use of holding tanks.

Mr. Ganzel noted that holding tanks are not a good option for residential properties.

Commissioner Obermueller asked if the County would work with residents who were in a tough situation.

Mr. Ganzel noted that this situation is related to the variance process.

Commissioner Bloyer asked if the connection to the Old Village is on the near horizon. In addition, how does the City intend to pay for it.

Planning Director Klatt explained the design options, as well as potential costs associated.

Business Items: *Comprehensive Planning Work Group Update*

Planning Director Klatt explained the formation of the work groups and described their scope of work. Klatt highlighted all of the public meetings that have taken place in these planning processes.

Chairman Williams noted that all property owners in the I-94 area were invited to the stakeholder meetings.

Planning Director Klatt explained the densities associated with the I-94 plan.

Commissioner Hall asked if the City is in danger of not reaching their required REC counts if the lower density ranges are used.

Planning Director Klatt explained that the Council would like to see a balance of densities.

Commissioner Bloyer asked about the density of the Stonegate development.

Planning Director Klatt noted that the density of this area is 2.5acres/unit.

Chairman Williams asked about the minimum of 3.5units/acre mandated by Met Council.

Planning Director Klatt explained that as long as the whole of the areas reaches its targets, then the Met Council will accept the plans.

Regarding the comp plan update process, Klatt noted that an adjacent community review process allows for 60 days. After this review, the Met Council has a 60-120 day review process.

Planning Director Klatt moved on to describe the planning process of the Village Area. Major milestones of this process include improved community outreach, an illustrative village plan, and a draft land use plan.

Chairman Williams noted that traffic movements along HWY-5 are currently dangerous and should be improved. The Work Group goals should include improving safety.

Commissioner Fliflet noted that traffic and pedestrian safety is consistently addressed at the Village Area Work Group.

Planning Director Klatt went on to describe the current draft land use plan of the Old Village.

Chairman Williams noted that the Hamlet on Sunfish Lake is not included in the REC Counts, even though there is an agreement to connect this development to City sewer.

Planning Director Klatt noted that this option is being explored. However, the provisions of the MOU do not credit the City for existing areas to be connected. This option will be explored further. Nevertheless, this option would require the expansion of the Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA).

Commissioner Haggard asked if the boundary of the Village Area has been approved by the City Council.

Mayor Dean Johnston noted that the boundary has been defined for over 8 years.

Planning Director Klatt noted that discussion of the Village Boundary is ongoing. In addition, Staff is working through the process to keep the greenbelt in conservation easement is also ongoing.

Commissioner Obermueller asked about the process involving a Transfer of Development Rights system.

Planning Director Klatt explained that discussions with MN Land Trust are still ongoing.

Planning Director Klatt wrapped up the presentation by describing major decision areas moving forward and future work.

Chairman Williams asked about the role of the Parks Commission in better defining the location of trails and facilities.

Planning Director Klatt explained that the Parks Commission is focused on trail connections that will improve access to parks in Lake Elmo.

Mayor Dean Johnston noted the REC count was kept to a minimum to develop greater flexibility in terms of keeping the rural character in place. Regarding the city's capacity to pay for infrastructure, the Mayor noted that the City has an excellent bond rating. Nevertheless, the City must be smart in how we phase the infrastructure. Finally, the Mayor noted that the City gave land to the County for the Regional Park. Due to this concession, the City has received a Grant to help pay for the sewer pipe to the Village. However, this grant expires at the end of 2014. Therefore, this project must commence in the next year.

Commissioner Bloyer asked about the cost of the Village pipe.

The Mayor noted that from I-94 to 30th St., the sewer would cost 6 million dollars.

Council Updates:

City Council affirmed the hiring of Nick Johnson for the position of City Planner.

The Oakdale Gun Club CUP amendment was approved.

The Christ Lutheran Church septic system variance was also approved.

Staff Updates

The City is still seeking volunteers for the HWY-5 landscaping project. Those who are interested in volunteering are asked to meet in the rear parking lot of Lake Elmo Bank at 9am.

Special thanks was extended to the businesses who partnered in the project, as well as the Public Works Department for excellent work in preparing the sites.

Upcoming Meetings: 6/11 Planning Commission

City Council agreed to participate in the Lake Elmo Ave demonstration project with the help of local businesses and the Lake Elmo Rotary. This project is intended to demonstrate what Lake Elmo Ave. would look like with the addition of streetscape amenities.

Commission Concerns

None.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kyle Klatt
Planning Director