

MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION

February 6, 2024

The Mower County Board of Commissioners in and for the County of Mower, Minnesota, met in a Work Session on February 6, 2024 at 1:00 p.m. at the Government Center, 201 1st Street NE, in Austin, Minnesota.

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

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Project Developer Luke Schwitzer of Avangrid Renewables provided the Board with information pertaining to the proposed Solar Project in Pleasant Valley Township. This project is planned to be a 200 MW solar project with an estimated Commercial Operation Date of December 2026. Approximately 2200 acres are under lease and the process for permitting and environmental surveys are proceeding. Permitting for the proposed project is through the PUC and the information provided is a courtesy to the County Board.

Assistant Public Works Director Valerie Sheedy provided the Board with a septic update. Ms. Sheedy credited staff members from Environmental Services and GIS that helped assemble the data within the report. Currently the county requires a septic compliance inspection at property transfer, addition of a bedroom, zoning permits in shoreland areas or on other non-conforming (small) lots and since 2021 with zoning or any land use permitting when the system is greater than 20 years old. The County had compliance inspection report vouchers to assist with septic system compliance testing in 2022 and 2023. There are approximately 3392 active septic systems in the county. Of the active systems 434 are of unknown age, 465 are at least 40 years old, 155 are at least 30 years old and 438 are at least 20 years old. Possible ordinance amendment options include continuing the current compliance methods, but change from greater than 20 years to greater than 30 years. Alternatively, the county could continue the land transfer septic compliance requirements, bedroom addition (since size of system is based in part on number of bedrooms), and shoreland areas and focus on highest risk systems such as aging systems and systems in watersheds or water tributaries where e coli has already been detected. Ms. Sheedy also suggested a policy change concerning Type III systems for non-conforming property. Ms. Sheedy also informed the Board that an internal staff person has added soil inspections to her job duties and will be trained and able to do these final inspections by summer. This final inspection has been a bottleneck in the installation process. There are limited providers who do this work which has led to delays.

Health & Human Services Community Health Services Chris Weis and Health & Human Services Director Crystal Peterson provided the Board with information pertaining to a move to a Tobacco Free Campus. It is part of the Stateside Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) grant / initiative / framework to have a smoke free work site. SHIP has been

working to create healthier communities across Minnesota by expanding opportunities for active living (MN Moves / MN Well-being), healthy eating (MN Eats) and now tobacco-free living (MN Commercial Tobacco-Free - CTF). The goal is to improve employee health and to reduce employer costs. It is estimated that smoking and tobacco use costs Minnesota \$4.7 Billion / year which is about \$824 per person in each home each year. It is estimated that Mower County loses about \$253,036.80 per year due to smoking in lost productivity and increased health care costs. Other neighboring counties have already gone smoke free campus and their policies are available for review for possible incorporation into a new Mower County Tobacco Policy. It was suggested that a committee be formed of both tobacco users and non-tobacco user employees to review options for a Mower County tobacco-free campus and recommendation for policy amendment.

The Board discussed the Meadows at Dobbins Creek impassable road maintenance petition received. In the subdivision, 228th street and 574th street have been maintained by Red Rock Township until January when Red Rock Township stopped plowing these streets. Ms. Nelsen informed the Board the in accordance with Minnesota Statute 163.16 Impassable Road and upon receipt of a written complaint, the County shall fix a time and place for hearing the complaint with notice to the town clerk and the persons signing the complaint. An action item will be included on the February 13 board agenda to set a date, time and place for a hearing on the petition.

The Board discussed the new Minnesota flag and seal. Constituents have been contacting the commissioners mostly in opposition to the new flag. The governor had appointed a 12-member committee to solicit flag and seal proposals with a deadline to make a selection and present it by January 1, 2024. The committee sought new designs and from the entries three designs were recommended with one new design certified for adoption by the governor effective May 11, 2024. There is discontent that the citizens were not allowed to vote on whether or not to have a new flag or to vote on any proposed new flag design. The other concern is the cost to the state, counties, townships and cities for making the change to the new flag and seal. An action item will be on the February 13 board agenda to reflect the Board's input and request to Governor Tim Walz.

County Administrator Trish Harren Gjersvik provided an update on the Chert Quarry Grant Project. A new resolution will be presented at the next meeting verifying that Mower County will serve as the fiscal host and has committed funds for the trail project so that the grant funding can be accepted.

In addition, Ms. Gjersvik provided information on the Fairground Capital Projects slated for 2024. The largest projects include the Sterling Park fencing, a switch to LED yard lighting, and men's bathroom upgrades to urinals. A portion of the SHIP grant will be used to provide water filling stations around the fairgrounds.

Ms. Gjersvik provided the Board with an update on Grow Austin and the incentive provided to Nu-Tuk in partnership with Austin Utilities and the City of Austin. Mower County's share of the first-year payout for the eligible incentive is \$80,100. The parameters of the Grow Austin business incentive are being reviewed for possible revision.

County Attorney Kristen Nelsen provided an update on National District Attorneys Association Prosecutor Advocacy Day in Washington DC which she had attended. Two primary areas addressed and of concern are to adopt legislation that will provide grants for recruitment and retention of prosecutors and to have facilities for the retreatment for mental health of juveniles.

The Board discussed the request from Hunters for Hunters for support of removing wolves from the endangered species list and allowing there to be wolf hunting and trapping season. Following discussion, the Board decided that since this is not a local issue, they will not take any action.

Under Miscellaneous Business a drafted letter prepared by County Engineer Mike Hanson was presented to the Board for review regarding purchase of right-of-way for the Shooting Star Trail extension route from Taopi to Iowa. It is estimated it will cost about \$160,000 to acquire the land for the trail extension. Acquisition of right of way is a requirement in order to submit the \$2.1million bonding request for the 4-mile trail extension. Right of way acquisition is a reimbursable expense. The Board thanked Mr. Hanson for the work he has done in support of this project and for the update. It was noted that Board support for the trail extension was authorized by resolution in July of 2019

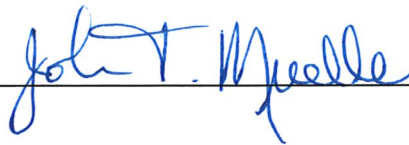
Ms. Gjersvik asked the Board if they wanted to continue investment in the gravel bed nursey project that has been managed by Don Smith for the past several years. Approximately 40 bare root trees are purchased locally and planted in the gravel bed nursery that is located at the Mower County Fair Grounds. The plan for 2024 is to plant twelve of the trees at the Fair Grounds and the remaining in Taopi as the community continues to recover from the December 2021 tornado. The total cost for trees and supplies is approximately \$5000. Hundreds of volunteer hours are donated by Master Gardeners, 4-H members and family, Taopi city officials and other community members to make this project a success.

Ms. Gjersvik informed the Board that notice has been received that the City of Lyle has disbanded its police department and has been meeting with the Mower County Sheriff's department regarding a contract for services like those the County has with the City of Adams and LeRoy. Additionally, the window to order budgeted squad cars has been moved up to the second week of February and Head Mechanic Chris Eastvold will be ordering squads as soon as possible to avoid the backlog in acquiring new vehicles.

The work session concluded at 3:04 p.m.

THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BY: _____



Chairperson

Attest:

By: Christa Hanna Gjersvik
Clerk/Administrator