

MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION

March 5, 2024

The Mower County Board of Commissioners in and for the County of Mower, Minnesota, met in a Work Session on March 5, 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, 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.

County Assessor Michael Harvey presented for discussion a Local Option Disaster Abatements and Credits application on behalf of Stinger Attachments, Rose Creek, MN. In October 2023, a fire damaged the property making it unable to be occupied. If approved, Stinger Attachments could receive a property tax refund for the two months that the building was unable to be occupied and operational as well as a reduction in taxes payable for 2024 that reflect the reduced value of the property due to the fire. Mower County Board of Commissioners will consider the application and decide during an upcoming meeting.

Assistant Public Works Director-Environmental Services Valerie Sheedy presented for discussion proposed changes to the Zoning and Septic Ordinances. The drafted ordinance changes are going through a public comment period and will be heard by the Planning Commission on April 2. A recommendation for adoption will be presented to the County Board on April 9. The proposed changes relate septic compliance inspections. Currently Mower County requires a compliance inspection when there is a sale or transfer of property, a bedroom is added, a permit is requested in shoreland or on a non-conforming lot, and when applying for any land use permit and the current septic system is greater than 20 years old. Recently a septic data layer was added that shows all septic systems in Mower County. With this new data layer, septic location, age, proximity to shoreland, impaired waters, etc. is visible. This will allow a focused approach to compliance based on risk. Approximately 400 – 450 systems are of unknown age and are classed as the highest priority for a compliance inspection. Ms. Sheedy also presented a proposed change to the ordinance related to Type III septic systems clarifying when they will be considered acceptable. In summary the proposed ordinance changes are as follows:

1. Add Compliance Inspection Criteria (Section 4.02) and remove references to land use permit when SSTS >20 yrs. (Section 4.09)
2. Add Abatement to Section 8.10 (Enforcement and Penalties)
 - a. Authorizes the Department to abate an IPHT and recover all costs; at the discretion of the County Board; and
3. Clarify use of Type III systems: on new development, for existing lots only

The Board briefly discussed the Impassable Road Petition received from The Meadows on Dobbins Creek regarding Red Rock Township's maintenance of 228th Street

and 574th Avenue. It was noted that to date no additional information has been received since the public hearing held on February 27. The comment period is extended to March 22 for additional information. A summary of findings of fact will be prepared for the Board's consideration and action on March 26, 2024.

County Administrator Trish Harren Gjersvik summarized the proposed change to the Grow Austin Program. It is recommended that changes be made regarding the calculations on how businesses get incentives so that the methods align to recent changes to the Department of Employment and Economic Development, DEED, incentive program. Mower County has been in an economic development partnership called "Grow Austin Program" with the Development Corporation of Austin, the City of Austin, and Austin Utilities since 2018. The Board will consider adopting the following proposed changes on March 12:

1. Eliminate \$250 / 125% of poverty for family of four incentive level
2. Lower the 180% of poverty award from \$3,000 to \$2,000
3. Create a new 220% of poverty award of \$3,000
4. Remove non-mandated benefits from the calculation of wage levels
5. To be eligible for the incentive award, jobs must be in place for one-year
6. All partners will require 75% of jobs to be 140% of poverty for family of four
7. Eliminate job training grant up to \$25,000

Public Works Director Michal Hanson presented a status update on the easement acquisition for the four-mile segment addition to the Shooting Star Trail from Taopi to the Iowa border. A second letter to impacted landowners (13) was recently sent with offers to purchase the 20 ft easement needed to build the bike trail. A few calls have been received with questions and concerns. It was suggested that the Engineer host an informational meeting with the landowners regarding the trail extension.

Lastly the Commissioners were informed that the commissioner warrants approved at the February 27, 2024 meeting for payment on Friday, March 1, were internally processed one day early to coincide with the end date for payment of 2023 expenses for audit purposes. Payment was still distributed as normal on March 1, three days after approval per statute.

The work session concluded at 2:42 p.m.

THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BY: John T. Mueller Chairperson

Attest:

By: Trish Harren Gjersvik
Clerk/Administrator