

Land Services Department

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NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CROW WING COUNTY SEEKS PUBLIC COMMENT ON ZONING ORDINANCE REVISIONS

The Crow Wing County Land Services Department is requesting public comment on proposed revisions to the County Zoning Ordinance. The ordinance revisions, which are part of the County's Future Land Use Map Project, can be viewed on the County website at www.co.crow-wing.mn.us. Follow the Land Services Department tab to locate the ordinance revisions. Written comments on the proposed changes will be accepted until November 19, and may be submitted to the Environmental Services unit at environmental.services@co.crow-wing.mn.us or 322 Laurel Street, Suite 14 Brainerd, MN 56401.

The proposed ordinance revisions were presented to the County Board on Tuesday, October 19 by Land Services Director Mark B. Liedl, Land Services Supervisor Christopher Pence, and John Sumption, former Cass County Environmental Services Director, whose firm Sumption Environmental, is assisting the county with the Future Land Use Map project.

In remarks to the County Board, Liedl noted that the proposed revisions establish new performance-based zoning standards for lake lots in Crow Wing County. He characterized the proposed changes as "an innovative, common sense – and effective -- approach to protecting our lakes – the lifeblood of our economy and the very essence of what makes Crow Wing County the Jewel of Minnesota."

The proposed revisions recognize that while lot size and setbacks from lakes are relevant to water protection, performance standards such as storm water management, natural buffers between lawns and the lake, minimal impervious surfaces on lake lots and well-functioning septic systems significantly affect water quality. "If we are truly serious about protecting our lakes for future generations, we must move beyond the old debates and blunt instrument of lot size and setbacks as the Holy Grail of water protection. We can achieve far more with common

sense performance standards that help lakeshore owners practice good stewardship of these vital resources,” Liedl noted.

In his remarks to the County Board Liedl noted that when Governor Pawlenty recently rejected the new Shoreland Rules proposed by the DNR, he “challenged counties to come up with their own solutions to fit their own communities and land use needs, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach handed down from the state.” We have embraced that challenge, proposing an innovative approach to land use regulation that will be the first of its kind anywhere in the state of Minnesota. “

In addition to performance based zoning standards, the proposed revisions include new zoning classifications to replace current ones, many of which were created in 1970 when the zoning ordinance was first adopted.

“Zoning classifications established 40 years ago have little relevance to the growth that has occurred and the planning that needs to be done for the future,” noted Christopher Pence, who administers the County Zoning Ordinance. Pence indicated that Crow Wing County handles approximately 60 rezoning requests per year, while counties with more updated zoning classifications and land use maps handle less than 10 per year. “We serve neither the environment nor our citizens well when we require someone to pay a fee to rezone simply because of what a 40-year-old, outdated zoning map says. These ordinance revisions will correct that,” he stated.

The proposed zoning ordinance revisions also include the option to establish “intra-lake” zoning standards to protect sensitive shoreland in the County. Developed by Paul Radomski, a DNR Research Scientist, intra-lake zoning recognizes that a large General Development lake like Whitefish or Pelican may have some shallow bays where more protective zoning requirements are necessary than in other parts of the lake. The proposed revisions allow the County Board to establish such standards for sensitive shoreland in conjunction with demonstrable research data developed by the DNR. Also included in the revisions is the elimination of Planned Unit Development standards and the creation of Conservation Design Standards as an option for land development instead of the traditional lot and block land development process. According to Sumption, who created conservation design standards in Cass County, “the Conservation design standards we are proposing for the ordinance will be a voluntary option for developers who wish to conserve more land in exchange for higher densities. It will provide an attractive alternative for some projects, and is preferable to the PUD standards currently in the ordinance.”

Following the 30-day public comment period, the proposed ordinance revisions are scheduled to be considered at a Special meeting of the County planning Commission on December 13. Recommendations from the Planning Commission will be sent to the County Board for final action.

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