



Record of Meeting

Township Listening Session

Stearns County held a Township Listening Session on October 21, 2019 to better understand the Township Officials' needs, issues and opportunities as it relates to the 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update. The meetings were facilitated by the planning consultant and held at Albany City Hall (1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.) and the Stearns County Service Center (7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.). The meeting was open to Township staff and elected officials. Attendance recorders can be found in Attachment A.

Meeting Recap

Lance Bernard from HKGi (planning consultant) provided an overview of the work that has been completed to date. This included a summary of public engagement events and draft materials (e.g., pillar statements). The presentation also included an introduction to draft policies that start to address future growth areas in the county (see Attachment B). Therefore, it is important to note that one of the objectives in updating the comprehensive plan is to continue to recognize growth areas. As part of this effort, the County has reached out to the cities and townships to reaffirm their growth boundaries that were identified in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. In many cases, the boundaries have stayed the same or expanded through more recent local planning efforts (e.g., Albany, Avon, Belgrade, Freeport, and Melrose).

The presentation focused on a new approach (see Attachment B: slides 18 - 26) that is being explored as part of the comprehensive plan update to guide growth in a more sustainable manner. This approach suggests the County should move away from a Future Land Use Plan that guides growth at a parcel-by-parcel basis. Instead, the growth areas should be represented as illustrative boundaries and paired with stronger policy language and guidelines to help facilitate growth. This approach will help continue to manage growth in a sustainable manner, while providing the following benefits:

- a) To maintain an existing pattern of larger lot rural development (limited to moderate residential) that has occurred along the urban/city fringe.
- b) To encourage cities and townships to evaluate their own growth potential and plan accordingly within a quarter-mile to half-mile buffer from their city limits. This effort should be locally driven and adopted as part of their own local comprehensive plan.
- c) To guide future large lot rural development within the urban growth areas and prevent the encroachment of non-farm uses into agricultural lands.
- d) To provide property owners greater flexibility in developing their land when located in proximity to an urban center.

More information on this proposed approach is highlighted throughout the presentation (see Attachment B). A summary of the comments received during the meetings are documented below.

- a) It is important to recognize the term “urban growth” may imply annexation. Moving forward, the Comprehensive Plan should reconsider the definition of “urban growth” and how it is depicted on the Future Land Use map.
- b) The illustrative bubbles (see Attachment B: slide 23) may be perceived as “market driven” areas that are anticipated to develop over time. (Note: The illustrative bubbles do not represent land capacity needs to accommodate growth.)
- c) The Comprehensive Plan should incorporate design standards or guidelines to help better inform development decisions that occur inside and outside the growth areas.
- d) More effort is needed by the Comprehensive Planning Team to decipher how to best represent the growth areas as part of the Future Land Use Plan. However, the Comprehensive Plan cannot ignore that some communities (townships and cities) have aspirations to grow and have identified these potential growth areas in their local comprehensive plans (see Attachment D). Stearns County’s current Comprehensive Plan and past plans have identified growth areas as part of its Future Land Use Plan.
- e) The Comprehensive Plan should incorporate design standards or guidelines to help better inform development decisions that occur in proximity to any agriculture use (animal operations or crop farming).
- f) Policies, strategies, or criteria developed to help facilitate growth or land use decisions should be developed with both the township and cities interests in mind.
- g) Today, Townships are challenged with meeting infrastructure needs (road improvements) from a funding perspective. New development will only add more pressure to these current challenges.
- h) Growth along major transportation corridors needs to be considered.
- i) Design standards for development should take into consideration its relationship (size, scale and type) to adjacent land uses.
- j) Avoid spot zoning.

Attachment A - Sign In Sheets

Attachment B - Presentation

