

BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 2, 2021

The Benton County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on February 2, 2021 in the Benton County Board Room in Foley, MN with Commissioners Scott Johnson, Ed Popp, Jared Gapinski, Steve Heinen and Beth Schlangen present (Schlangen joined virtually at 9:15 AM). Call to order by Chair Popp was at 9:00 AM followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

Johnson/Heinen unanimous to approve the agenda as amended—add item: Mississippi River Watershed Board appointment.

No one was present to speak under Open Forum.

Gapinski requested that Consent Agenda item #5 be “pulled” for further discussion. Heinen/Johnson unanimous to approve the remaining Consent Agenda: 1) approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of January 19, 2021 as written; 2) accept and file Committee of the Whole Minutes of January 12, 2021 as written; 3) appoint Angie Arnold to a three-year term on the Benton County Extension Committee—January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2023; 4) approve revisions to the Benton County Fiscal Policies as presented; and 6) approve 2021 Solid Waste Hauler Licenses Round 1 and authorize the Chair to sign—*Tom Kraemer Inc.; Jim’s Mille-Lacs Disposal, Inc.; West Central Sanitation, Inc.; Waste Management of MN Inc.; City of St. Cloud; Opatz Metals and Rolloffs; Gary’s Trucking & More LLC dba Bumble Bee Express R.O.; Rapid Container Service Inc.; E-Z Disposal; Red-E-Bins USA LLC; and Veit Container Corp dba Veit Disposal Systems*. Regarding Consent Agenda item #5 (final payment for CSAH 2 reconstruction project), Gapinski questioned the fact that this project dates back to 2019. Chris Byrd, County Engineer, explained that this project experienced a number of delays, including an added change order and negotiations with the contractor; final agreement with the contractor was reached late in 2020. Gapinski/Johnson unanimous to approve final payment to *Rice Contracting and Development Services* for Project SAP 005-602-016—CSAH 2 Reconstruction Project on Little Rock Lake, and authorize the Chair to sign (Consent Agenda item #5).

The next item on the agenda was a public hearing to consider the minor final plat entitled “*Pearls Addition*” in Watab Township, submitted by JANNEW Properties, LLC/Sandra Saldana. Roxanne Achman, Department of Development Director, reported that the request is to split a parcel with an existing home on it into six residential lots, all over two acres in size; the property was rezoned in late 2020 from Agricultural to R-2 Residential. Achman stated “...it does back up against the railroad...we did reach out to the railroad and asked them if they had any concerns...their concerns were that people could cross the railroad if there was not a barrier put up...we did find out, in state statute, it is the responsibility of the railroad to install any sort of barriers...” She noted that Watab Township recently adopted their own subdivision ordinance which requires that plats with two or more lots be reviewed by their Planning Commission; preliminary plat and final plat approval was received through Watab Township. Sandra Saldana (PO Box 276, Sauk Rapids) spoke in favor of the request, stating her belief that it is a good fit with the county’s comprehensive plan and for economic development in the township and the county. The public hearing was opened at 9:11 AM. Achman referenced a letter received from Gloria Nelson (9760 Hemlock Road NW, Rice) who stated concerns with noise, agricultural smells, and the nearby railroad tracks. Gapinski commented “...concerns about fencing off the tracks...I know the railroad is supposed to take care of that...could we put something like that in this ordinance...my concern is more coming from me being on the fire department...and little kids...” Johnson commented that, from the

Planning Commission's perspective, these are responsibilities of the individuals who will, potentially, be buying these lots; the Planning Commission voted unanimously to move this forward to the County Board. Heinen was in agreement that it would be the responsibility of the individuals who bought these lots to petition the railroad for a fence. With no one else wishing to address the Board, the public hearing was closed at 9:14 AM. Motion by Gapinski to approve the final plat of "*Pearls Addition*" and authorize the Chair to sign the final plat. Second by Johnson. Motion carried per roll call vote with Gapinski, Heinen, Schlangen and Johnson voting aye and Popp abstaining from the vote.

Chris Byrd, County Engineer, explained that the City of Sauk Rapids received Transportation Alternatives grant money to construct a trail along the east side of CSAH 1 from Golden Spike Road to Osauka Road (high school entrance); although this trail lies just outside of County right-of-way for the most part, there are a couple short sections in which the trail enters the right-of-way of CSAH 1. Byrd stated "...those wanting to walk or bicycle to the high school can use the trail along Golden Spike Road...use the pedestrian crossings that have already been constructed at this roundabout at Mayhew Lake Road and Golden Spike Road...stay on the east side of the road all the way up to the high school...there wouldn't be another crossing that needs to be constructed here at Osauka Road...from an engineering standpoint, for pedestrian safety..." Byrd stated that the Public Works Department is planning on issuing a utility permit to the City to allow them to construct their trail within County right-of-way; this is a 100% city-funded trail—the County does not intend to maintain the trail; however, the City is requesting that the County Engineer sign off on the plans. He noted that trail construction is planned for this summer. Heinen noted "...the City of Sauk Rapids has been looking at this for a very long time...the only question back then was how do we create the trail to go across CSAH 1...there is a trail system that goes from Osauka all the way around to every development...all the way up to Highway 10...this is just another piece of the puzzle to connect all the trails together..." Gapinski added "...we are already at 40 MPH going by the school during school zone...what happens if we just change it to 40 MPH at all times...that way it allows people to think about going a little slower to be able to get across..." Byrd stated that changing the speed limit permanently would require a traffic engineering speed study be performed. Popp pointed out "...they are going to have to cross by the roundabout...is there a potential need to install flashing pedestrian lights there..." Heinen stated "...I'm not speaking for Sauk Rapids, but that was one of the main concerns..." Byrd stated "...I wouldn't want to do anything that isn't warranted to install those kinds of things...there is a benefit to a roundabout with those splitter islands...when you get to that refuge, you can stop and wait for a clearing...right now, we don't have the volume for pedestrians or vehicles..." Popp commented "...maybe we should have a conversation with the City if it would warrant flashers for pedestrians...I don't want to see the County be liable..." Heinen stated his agreement, adding "...that would also fall on their responsibility for that signage..." Byrd clarified "...we are granting a permit...not necessarily giving them an easement..." He stated he will continue with the utility permit and signing of the plans; he will be in contact with the City of Sauk Rapids to discuss potential signage.

Byrd reported that mill and overlays on County Roads 46, 88, 89 and 90 are planned for this summer; paving the shoulder along CR 88 is also planned. Although these are separate projects, Byrd stated plans to "tie" the projects together under one contract; advantages could include attracting more bidders and lower unit prices. He noted that these are sales tax projects; bid opening is scheduled for March 5th. In referencing the proposed trail construction by Sauk Rapids High School, Byrd stated "...we'll have a lot of asphalt paving or bituminous paving in the area...the City may be the beneficiary of some good unit prices...but I don't want to tie their project to ours...they've got a lot of federal requirements that we wouldn't have in our project..."

The Regular County Board meeting was recessed at 9:37 AM to conduct a Human Services Board meeting.

The Regular County Board meeting was reconvened at 9:46 AM.

The Regular County Board meeting was recessed at 9:47 AM to conduct a Ditch Authority meeting.

The Regular County Board meeting was reconvened at 9:55 AM.

Board members reported on recent meetings they attended on behalf of the county.

Under Commissioner Concerns, Chair Popp commented "...the Upper Mississippi One Water One Plan...there is a meeting on the 18th of February...your SWCD Directors...Soil and Water Boards...it consists all the way from Crow Wing down to Sherburne into Wright County...consists of the cities of St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, Sartell...some of the northern counties are torn between having one plan for that whole thing...and then it's the Clearwater Watershed in Sherburne County...we have the whole Mississippi along there...some of the concerns...if we do this all under one plan, the cities and the river are going to grab a huge amount of the funding... Morrison has got the same concerns...from what I gather, I don't think there is a lot of interest in three plans...maybe more interest in two...we need to designate somebody to go to this meeting...there's going to be a lot more players...if they are just going to have one body that's going to decide the funding, I'm afraid Benton County and Morrison County are going to be left out..." Johnson/Heinen to appoint Commissioner Popp as the representative to the Mississippi River Watershed Board and Commissioner Gapinski as alternate. Motion carried unanimously per roll call vote.

Johnson/Gapinski to set Committees of the Whole: February 18, AMC Virtual Legislative Conference; April 8, Association of Township Officers. Motion carried unanimously per roll call vote.

Jason Aarsvold, *Ehlers Public Finance Advisors*, provided detailed information to the County Board on tools used to help promote economic development—tax increment financing (TIF) and economic development tax abatements. He explained that these tools can be used to encourage certain types of development or redevelopment that would not normally occur without assistance, leading to actions such as job creation/retention, redevelopment/renovation of blighted areas, and assistance with housing or commercial development. Aarsvold referenced the Toppan-Merrill Expansion in Sartell as an example of an Economic Development TIF District. Amanda Othoudt, Executive Director of the Benton Economic Partnership, stated her hope that the County Board will consider using TIF and Tax Abatement to promote economic development in Benton County. Gapinski commented "...I think both of these tools are absolutely needed in this county...we need to spur some business/economic development growth...our three major cities, Sauk Rapids, Rice and Foley, have four-lane roads coming to them or through them...let's use them to build business..." Popp added "...we have the work force in this county..."

Othoudt referenced the county's revolving loan fund (RLF) program, noting that it has not been utilized to its fullest extent. She stated "...BEP would like to propose to the County Board to, potentially, take that responsibility over and help promote that program...administer the program on the county's behalf...the county already has a finance committee for their RLF...we are proposing to establish our own finance committee under Benton Economic Partnership...consisting of finance professionals...BEP would be able to process and facilitate those projects in a confidential manner...process the applications

if they come to fruition...and present it to the County Board in a complete package...the revolving loan fund program, essentially, offers gap financing for certain economic development projects...you currently have two active loans...you have about \$400,000 end cash balance as of January 1st...shifting that responsibility from county staff to BEP is what we are asking the County Board to consider...we could work with the County Attorney to put some sort of agreement together to set forth roles and responsibilities...” Monty Headley, County Administrator, explained where the funding for the county revolving loan fund came from. Gapinski stated “...I think trying to build this fund back up would be very good...make sure we are using it to attract business...partner with TIF and Tax Abatement...I think this really needs to be a team effort with cities to make sure we are attracting new businesses or retaining our businesses...and helping them expand...” Board consensus to send a letter of thanks to the current finance committee, letting them know that a new committee will be formed by BEP. Gapinski/Johnson to turn the county’s revolving loan fund program over to the Benton Economic Partnership (upon a signed agreement between Benton County and BEP as prepared by the County Attorney’s Office). Motion carried unanimously per roll call vote.

Gapinski/Heinen to conduct a closed meeting of the County Board (at 11:21 AM), pursuant to MN Statutes §13D.03, Subdivision 1, to consider strategy for labor negotiations. Motion carried unanimously per roll call vote.

The Regular County Board meeting was reconvened at 11:55 AM.

Johnson/Gapinski to adjourn at 11:56 AM. Motion carried unanimously per roll call vote.

Edward D. Popp, Chair
Benton County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Montgomery Headley
Benton County Administrator