



CROW WING COUNTY

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2nd Quarterly Updates from the Land Services Department

To: Local Elected Officials
From: Mark Liedl, Land Services Director
Date: July 12, 2011
Re: 2nd Quarterly Updates for 2011

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Below please find our quarterly report to keep you up-to-date on the activities of the Land Services Department. Any questions or suggestions, please let us know. Thank you for your partnership!

Office of Environmental Services *Chris Pence, Land Services Supervisor*

Land Use Ordinance Improvements

The Crow Wing County Board of Commissioners approved Land Use Ordinance improvements on March 22, 2011 with an effective date of April 22, 2011. The approved Land Use Ordinance is 79 pages less than the previous version. Rather than a one size fits all approach to land use, site specific performance standards such as stormwater management, vegetated buffers and septic system maintenance will be implemented.

Key Points of the Land Use Improvements are as follows:

- Land Use (Zoning) Classification Changes:
 - Created one Shoreland Zone for areas 1000' from lakes, 300' from rivers
 - Rural residential (RR) districts 1, 5, 10, & 20 were added to the existing 2.5 & 5 acre districts
 - Greenspace zoning eliminated (Interim zoning for Greenspace parcels: RR20)
- Shoreland Alteration Permit: \$150 fee for a wide variety of activities including:
 - Stairways, retaining walls, patios, beaches (*sand blankets*), ice ridge & vegetation removal
- Impervious surface coverage limit set at 25% for all zoning districts
- Stormwater management required on all permits for riparian lots where impervious surfaces exceed 15%
- Shoreline buffers required on all permits for riparian lots where impervious surfaces exceed 20%
- Footing inspection required to verify that newly constructed buildings meet lake/river setbacks in the shoreland
- Setback changes:
 - Natural Environment Lake (from 200' to 150')
 - Wetland (from 16.5' to 15')
 - Bluff (now 30' from top, toe, and sides vs. just the top)
 - DNR approved harbors (now: 1/2 of the building setback from the lake)
- Guest cabins are now allowed (maximum 700 sq. ft)
- 120 sq. ft. water-oriented accessory structure (shed) allowed by shoreline (must be 20' from OHW)
- Home businesses allowed in all zoning districts with a conditional use permit
- Building on a non-conforming lot now allowed without a variance if setbacks can be met
- 160 sq. ft. shed (or less) allowed without a building permit

- Travel trailers allowed as a year-round structure with a permit
- Allowances for more resort expansion and rebuilding of resort cabins
- Consolidation of classified lake/river list

Future Land Use Map

We are currently beginning our process for creating a future land use map for the unincorporated areas of the County. John Sumption of Sumption Environmental has been hired as the consultant for the project. We will be contacting you as we move forward for your input – municipalities too, as we work to make county zoning compatible with your future land use plans in our bordering areas.

Crow Wing County processes approximately 60 rezone applications per year. The creation of a future land use map will eliminate most if not all of these types of applications, allowing citizens' use of their property through administrative permits without having to pay the \$546 application fee and wait two months for the application to be reviewed and approved.

The Land Use Ordinance improvements created a shoreland district for all lakes, rivers and streams, so that portion of our zoning map is already updated. The future land use map will focus on the non-shoreland area and designate land use districts based on the County Comprehensive Plan. Townships will be involved in the process and be provided the opportunity to comment on the proposed land use districts within the township. Townships can expect to receive correspondence from John Sumption during the summer of 2011 and are encouraged to participate in the process. The goal is to have the future land use map completed by the end of 2011.

Land Fill Receives Awards for Innovation

The Crow Wing County Landfill has received 3 awards in 2011 recognizing the County Landfill's innovative and unique reuse of landfill gas (LFG) for on-site building heating and for advancing the landfill gas reuse industry. The three awards are:

- Environmental Pollution Agency (EPA) Landfill Gas Methane Outreach Project of the Year.
- National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award for "Sanitary Landfill On-Site Landfill Gas Recovery Project".
- Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs – Local Government Innovation Award for "Crow Wing County Landfill Gas Fueled Boiler".

Landfill gas is a byproduct created by the breakdown of materials deposited at the landfill and in the past had been released into the environment. Crow Wing County was one of the first small scale landfills in the nation to capture the gas and use it to heat its on-site buildings. The amount of landfill gas generated from the landfill is sufficient to power a small commercial boiler.

In addition to reusing the landfill gas, the County has seen a tremendous economic benefit of reduced costs associated with hauling leachate for offsite disposal, postponed costs associated with new disposal area construction because of accelerated waste settlement and offset natural gas use for building heat. These savings have allowed the County to implement a variety of recycling and waste diversion programs.

Crow Wing County has reduced its carbon footprint by utilizing the energy re-use project. Fossil fuels that would have been used for transportation are no longer burned and natural gas that was used for building heat is no longer needed. Also, the landfill gas emissions have a global warming effect that is 21 times more than that of carbon dioxide. By collecting and utilizing the landfill gas as heat for buildings, Crow Wing County is able to minimize greenhouse gas emissions and save money.

Office of Property Valuation and Classification

Gary Griffin, Land Services Supervisor

2011 Assessment Completed

The 2011 assessment ended with a total reduction of \$820 million in estimated market value vs. the 2010 assessment. Thank you for your partnership with us on local boards this year. I believe the process worked very smoothly and is much-improved from previous years. Please let me know if you have any suggested improvements for next year.

Overall, regarding valuation, the last two years combined resulted in the total market value of the county being reduced 1.6 billion. We are still experiencing a high number of foreclosures which affects home values, so I would not be surprised if county-wide valuations are down again next year.

Quintile and Permit Follow up – the 2012 Assessment

We currently are doing our quintile work – state statute requires us to physically examine all improved property parcels in the County, approximately 50,000 total, during a five year period, so each year we examine 20% of the parcels, or approximately 8,200 parcels to be inspected this year. So, you may see or hear about our appraisers out in the field visiting properties in the next few months.

Our objectives include: identifying inaccuracies on the property record, checking measurements and conditions of buildings, and educating the public about the assessment process. Our goal is to have this completed by the end of the first half of October. We also will be surveying customers as to the level of service provided during these inspections. We will then start reviewing all permits issued in the County which last year a total of 2,027 permits needed review. This will be completed near the end of the year.

Cutting Spending, Improving Service

Our top priority is excellent customer service. Two key components of achieving this are providing our services as efficiently as possible and ensuring consistent policies and procedures so property is uniformly and accurately assessed. Our job is to accurately value property. And within a tight budget environment, we are striving to achieve excellent service with fewer tax dollars. Over the last two years, we have cut 5 full time positions, plus one additional administrative position during 2011. We have cross-trained our administrative staff so now what used to be our “planning and zoning” administrative staff is now able to serve customers with assessing questions at our front counter, and visa-versa with respect to our assessing administrative staff assisting customers with land use questions. More bang for the taxpayers’ buck and better service! Also, we made the following changes this year to increase efficiency and reduce spending:

- Outsourced the printing and mailing of the notices of valuation and classification, reducing costs by \$8500 and three weeks of staff time for one employee. We also implemented a new schedule on all houses in the county. This caused some home values to increase this year when the majority of homes decreases. But in the end the uniformity in the assessment was greatly enhanced. Fortunately with the proactive communication we have implemented (press releases, quarterly updates and yearly op-ed) our total numbers of appeals were down this year from 1440 in 2010 to 883 this year. The County Board of Appeal and Equalization was held on June 11th with a total of 5 appeals being heard. Last year there were 10 and in 2009 a total of 47. Hopefully this is a sign we are on the right track with uniformity and transparency to property owners. To help ensure this is the case we sent out a random survey to customers who appealed their valuations. We are currently waiting for the responses.

We look forward to providing the customer service you expect from us. Please contact our office with any questions you have. Thanks and have a great summer!

Office of Public Land Management

Kirk Titus, Land Services Supervisor

Milford Mine Historic District Nomination

The Minnesota Historical Society's State Review Board unanimously approved the Milford Mine Historic District for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places on March 22. The nomination is currently undergoing a National Park Service review in Washington DC. The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places and can include districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects.

The Milford Mine Historic District is the site where forty-one miners lost their lives in the worst mining disaster in Minnesota history in 1924. The site is located on the Cuyuna Iron Range, northwest of Crosby and covers approximately 180 acres of Crow Wing County managed land. It is located within the boundaries of the Milford Mine Memorial Park.

We are working on a four phase project to complete the memorial park. Phase one, which was completed last fall, included the construction of an access road, parking lot and canoe launch. Future construction phases will include walking trails, a picnic shelter and interpretive and educational signs.

Timber Auction

The Spring 2011 Timber Auction was held on March 31. All of the 13 tracts offered, were sold and were bid up an average of 52% above the appraised stumpage rate. The bid value of all tracts was 38% higher than the last auction. The next timber auction is scheduled for late September. Remember, Townships, Cities and School Districts get a share of these revenues every year, so we appreciate your continued support for our well-managed timber growing and harvesting program. A great way to support local jobs, recreation and provide non-tax dollar revenues for local governments!

Tree Planting

The County's tree planting program for 2011 totaled over 70,000 pine and spruce pine seedlings. The planting sites are located on approximately 110 acres in Crow Wing, Mission, Fairfield, Pelican and Little Pine townships and the cities of Baxter and Crosslake. Excellent survival rates are expected because of high soil moisture conditions and timely precipitation. More than 3.6 million seedlings have been planted on county tax forfeited timber lands in the last 30 years.

Poor Farm Wildlife Management Area Controlled Burn

In cooperation with MN DNR Wildlife Division and the Conservation Corp of Minnesota, a controlled burn was conducted in May on a harvested site in the county portion of the Poor Farm WMA. The goal of the project is to increase wildlife habitat through the control of competitive woody vegetation and expose mineral soil to promote the successful germination of oak acorns.

Following the prescribed burn, members of the Conservation Corps and Minnesota Teen Challenge planted the 11 acre site with approximately 5000 red oak seedlings. This fall, the tree seedlings will be protected from deer browse through the use of mesh tubes. This project was funded through a MN DNR Wildlife Division grant.

Land Sales

Our annual Land Sale Auction is scheduled for early October. We have many parcels on our unsold list from previous auctions that are available for sale any time over the counter, so no need to wait for the auction to purchase these non-recreational designated parcels. We are looking at conducting multiple auctions during the year rather than just one, and possibly conducting these auctions at regional centers around the county rather than just at the Land Services Building in Brainerd. If you have feedback on this please let me know.

Recreation Trails

We are continuing to develop our comprehensive recreation trails plan, which we hope to have finalized by January. Thanks to all who participated in our public input process, which was conducted this past year. We look forward to a tangible road map for moving forward over the next 5 years with developing diverse recreation opportunities for diverse users, as our County Comprehensive Land Use Plan directs us to do. A system of managed, designated trails will serve all of us in properly protecting our resources and providing opportunities for residents and visitors alike to experience our tremendous forest and open space beauty.

In addition, the County Board in June approved a Grant in Aid ATV trail from Brainerd to Pine Center to Fort Ripley, connecting two existing GIA trails. We are currently developing a work plan and time line for this project, which we will post on our website when completed.

Thanks for reading our Second Quarter, 2011 update. Please don't hesitate to email any feedback you may have to Vickie at vickie.sullivan@co.crow-wing.mn.us and she will make sure we hear it.

Enjoy the rest of the summer!