

**Town of Duluth
Planning Commission
Approved Meeting Minutes
November 20, 2014**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 by Chair Paul Voge.

Present: Paul Voge, Brigid Pajunen, Jo Thompson, Jerry Hauge, and Larry Zanko

Absent: Wayne Dahlberg and John Schifsky.

Also present: Don Sitter, Town Board liaison to the Commission; Dave Edblom, Town Board Supervisor; Jim Ward, Town Board Supervisor; Clint Little, MN DNR; Val Brady, NRRI; and Andrea Crouse, NRRI

The agenda was approved with the addition of a discussion with James Gittemeier on trails immediately following the presentation on Town culverts.

The October minutes were approved as written.

Jo introduced Val Brady and Andrea Crouse from NRRI. They were here to make a presentation on the Duluth Township ditch and culvert survey.

Val said that Duluth Township is an MS4, so the Town is under specific regulations from the State to manage its stormwater. Part of these responsibilities is to inspect stormwater conveyances which are basically the ditches and culverts along Town roads. Under the MS4 regulations, an electronic map of all the locations that have to be inspected is required. Val said that in addition, Duluth Township is under somewhat higher scrutiny because the Knife River is listed as impaired by the State due to turbidity (Total Maximum Daily Load or TMDL). She said the Sucker River may also soon reach that level of impairment.

Val said that with a road and ditch system like the Town has, stormwater moves off of the land very quickly, causing stream volumes to go up quickly, which increases their eroding power. The biggest concern is volume control, but volume control is difficult.

Jo said that she and Val mapped the ditches and culverts on Town roads using GPS and took photos in April 2012. GPS points can be downloaded to a spreadsheet and data can be added to the spreadsheet for each point. The spreadsheet can then be uploaded to a mapping program and when that point is clicked on, the associated data pops up. They applied for a MN Coastal Program Grant through NRRI and with that were able to engage Andrea to help create the interactive map system.

Andrea said that she and an undergraduate student went into the field and walked the ditches. They took GPS coordinates of all the ditches, noting condition of the ditches and identifying potential issues. They found crushed culverts, culverts that were almost buried, eroded culverts and some that were purposely blocked. They entered all of the data into an Excel spreadsheet and created an interactive map of all the data they collected.

Clint said that the ditches and culverts associated with the County roads were inventoried last fall with the same level of detail.

Sue asked if the spreadsheets were flexible such that the Town could add maintenance information to them – like when a culvert is replaced or gravel is put on a road. Val said that they were.

Andrea said the map will be available online. It is a free, public account and can be hosted on the Town's website. A user can choose scale and base map and watershed boundaries. Pop-ups come up for each point. There can be one or more pop-up, for instance, one for inventory information, one for watershed information, one with possible issues associated with that point, and one for photos. Photos would have to be hosted on an online site to be accessible. Layers can be turned on or off and layers can be added. Possible layers to add might be soil information, parcels, wetlands inventory, etc. Data can also be added to the pop-ups, for instance, priority, estimated cost to fix, etc.

Andrea said that she kept track of everything as she did it for the project and wrote an SOP with step-by-step instructions for the whole process.

Don Sitter asked who would be responsible for updating the database.

Val said that the current grant runs out in six weeks. What has been done so far fulfills the requirements for the MS4. If the Town were to want more, they would need to get that data. The State requires inspections. Those don't have to be electronic, but need to be retained.

Andrea said that she could help by uploading spreadsheets once a season or so. She could also create ACCESS reports that might be useful for the Town's road contractor.

Jo suggested that the Town budget to have someone keep it up to date. Stormwater management will be an ongoing issue for the Town.

Val said that they only mapped road culverts, not driveway culverts. There are about one hundred culverts in the database. Because of the TMDL impairment of the Knife River, improvements in the Knife River watershed are supposed to be given priority. She submits a report for the MS4 requirements once a year and the Town gets credit for any improvements made.

Dave Edblom, Town Road Supervisor, said that the Town replaces about five culverts a year.

Jim Ward said that the State has a system for culverts on State roads. All are assigned a number and are evaluated and given a condition rating of 1 to 4. Data they collect for each culvert includes pipe material, condition, (rusting, scouring, spalling) and length of pipe. Another useful thing they keep track of is the amount of fill over a culvert.

Brigid asked if elevations are measured. Val said that the GPS gives altitude, but it is from where they are standing above the culvert, so it may not be that useful. Clint said LiDAR could be used for elevations, but Val said that adding a LiDAR layer would be computing intensive.

Paul said that the Commission has been looking at possibilities for developing trails along our main travel routes in the Township. He introduced James Gittemeier, who is a transportation planner with the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council (MIC).

James said that the MIC does all transportation planning for the area. A bikeway plan for the Duluth/Superior area was created in 1994. The Duluth plan was updated last year. He is also working with Superior, Proctor and Hermantown, so it is a good time for Duluth Township to look at bikeways and trails, as well. He displayed a map of roads in the Township that showed suitability of the roads for trails. The roads are color coded by slope. A slope of 0 to 5% is considered suitable for trails while a slope of 5 to 8% would require work. The Town roads are not as steep as they initially thought. He then showed a map of the population densities of the urban areas in the Duluth/Superior area. The area of the Township by the French River is the most densely populated area of the Township. Their research has shown that the biggest users of trails are those living within 5 to 10 minutes of the

trail, so they try to locate trails near population centers. He asked what the Commission has considered regarding trails in the Town.

Don Sitter said that the Commission has talked a lot about widening shoulders along the Town roads that get the heaviest use by bicyclists and pedestrians.

Jo agreed, saying that there has been an emphasis on making roads safe for biking. There is also a general desire to enhance outdoor recreational opportunities.

Paul said that they have also talked about connecting major points in the Town such as the Town Hall, North Shore Community School (NSCS), and the Scenic Highway. Major roads that get a lot of non-motorized activity are Ryan Road, Homestead Road, and Korkki Road. Another concern is how to get people across the freeway safely.

Brigid said that the Town roads get a lot of recreation use by folks from outside the Township.

James said that they are going to try to widen the shoulder on one side of the Scenic Highway. He said that about 7% of the population is comprised of hard-core bicyclists. Another 60% would use the trail if it were safe, but will not venture out otherwise. About 30% are anti-trails altogether. Their goal at MIC is to build for the 60%. Adding a shoulder to a roadway is very expensive. Trails can be cheaper because they do not have to have a base that will support a vehicle. He said that the first step would be to figure out what we, as a Town, want. At least two public meetings would be needed, one for input and one for the proposal. One of the first steps is to involve the public, often through a questionnaire or a public meeting.

Don said that he thought it might be good to have a rough plan to put in front of the public to start with.

James said that letting residents know the process is going on and gauging their response is important. Start with an initial public outreach. Presenting a specific trail alignment can result in individual reactions that make it hard to move forward. The key is engaging the public.

Sue said that a reasonable schedule might be to start in late summer, so that by the end of the fiscal year we would have a sense for how residents feel. One way of reaching residents would be to talk to the people who are out using the roads for recreation. Another would be to talk to residents at the recycling center on Saturday mornings. Mid-summer would be a perfect time to do a survey. She will propose a schedule starting in the summer that the Board can look at. It would be nice to have a steering committee, as well, and the Board usually creates and appoints committees.

James said that he would put together a schedule and a scope of work. He can facilitate public meetings, too, and help with survey wording.

Paul asked how cost sharing usually works.

James said that there is trail funding available. Usually the local entity ends up paying about 20%. DNR Legacy money has been used in other places to match federal money. Legacy funds would have to be connected to a regional system. Connecting to the North Shore and Scenic Drive would qualify.

Sue said we would also be working with the County since most of the roads we are looking at are County roads.

James said that St Louis County is reluctant to add shoulders to existing roads. Jim Ward added that they have to buy right-of-way and that it is very expensive.

James said that he is working with nine schools over the next year, so he cannot add NSCS this year, but it is a good idea to always consider routes around schools. The school has to demonstrate a large commitment to Safe Routes to Schools to be considered for that program. Safe Routes is as much about getting students to incorporate physical activity into daily activities as it is safe routes.

Director's Report

Sue said that we will have the Pierson variance hearing at the January meeting. The Town holiday party is on December 11 immediately following the Town Board meeting. On the horizon, maybe in the spring, there will be a variance for the Town Hall addition. Plans for that are getting closer. A stormwater plan will be needed, too, although the Town is looking at the idea of acquiring more property to help with impervious surface allowances. There is also a CUP hearing coming up for a short-term rental, probably before spring. There will be no meeting in December unless something comes up.

New Business

Sue said that there is a Planned Unit Development (PUD) proposal in the works at the old Shore Crest/Nokomis property. She put up a map showing the property. The property includes the parcel west of the restaurant property and is roughly 40 acres in all. On the east side is Pierson's property. The Town has never done a PUD before. It is handled as a conditional use and is similar to the subdivision process. The main difference between a platted subdivision and a PUD is that a PUD is planned around open space that is maintained as a part of the development. This particular proposal is for condos and will have trails as a part of their open space. The developers are interested in preserving and caring for the environmental aspects of the site. They hope to develop it in two stages, but would like to do the PUD process all at once. They are planning on six to eight two-story condos that will go up the hill. The restaurant building will have two condos in it. Salmela is the architect. The Commission needs to determine the area of notification for the CUP. A community participation report is required. The minimum notification area is one quarter mile, but it could certainly be larger. Jo made a motion that the notification area be one-quarter mile. Jerry seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Accessory Structure Size vs Lot Size

Sue said that she talked with Tim about recording it with the County when someone builds a larger accessory structure based on a larger parcel size or combined parcels. It would then go with the property like a variance or a CUP. It would help the Town and it would help people who are buying the property. Tim said that he thought it might be possible, but he wanted to talk to his firm's land use attorney before giving a definitive answer.

Paul said that currently, there is nothing that dictates someone has to prove they are not creating a nonconformance.

Township Brochure

Brigid had some sample pages of the brochure with one column some sample pages with two columns. The existing brochure is two columns, but now with so many URL references, it seemed to her that one column works better for fitting the URLs on one line. The only downside is that it does not fit as many pictures. The Commission agreed that one column worked better.

Concerns from the Audience

Clint complimented the culvert inventory. He said Val, Andrea and Jo did a great job.

The meeting adjourned at 9:24.