# EAU CLAIRE COUNTY
# LAND CONSERVATION COMMISSION

## MEETING MINUTES - MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2016
## AGRICULTURAL & RESOURCE CENTER – ALTOONA, WI

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| MEMBERS PRESENT: | Robin Leary, Bruce Willett, Dean Solie, Gary Gibson, Ray Henning, Glory Adams, Tami Schraufnagel |
| MEMBERS EXCUSED: | Ricky Strauch |
| STAFF PRESENT: | Kelly Jacobs (P&D - Land Conservation Division); Greg Leonard (P&D - Land Conservation Division); Chad Berge (P&D - Land Conservation Division); Josh Pederson (Parks&Forest); Lance Gurney (P&D) |
| OTHERS PRESENT: | Jen Roetter, USDA-NRCS; Don and Tami Schroeder, AEA applicants; Vic and Mary Price, AEA applicants; Fred Poss & Rod Zika, Lake Eau Claire Association |

1. **Call to Order**
   Meeting called to order at 5:17pm by Chair Leary.

2. **Presentation to review the proposed Land Conservation Division move to Courthouse (Lance Gurney, Planning and Development Director)**
   Lance Gurney was asked to come in and follow up on the proposed move to courthouse as requested in the July Land Conservation Commission meeting. Gurney discussed the memo from Corporation Counsel, dated September 9, 2016, that outlined the authority of the Land Conservation Commission in relation to personnel management, budgeting, and operational oversight including physical office location of land conservation division staff.

   Leary indicated that the LCC is concerned because we do a lot of programming and educational activities out of the County Ag & Resource center and is concerned about limited courthouse accessibility after 5:00PM. In addition, the UW-Extension offices and staff are also in state of flux and any of those changes are unknown at this time. Also, is there an intention to sell the building? What are the budget expectations associated with such a move?

   Gurney indicated that specific UW-Extension plans are unknown at this time and have included speculation of becoming a more regional model with the state going through a 9 month process to determine how they can meet the state directive of staff reduction. Gurney indicated that he has talked with Kelly Jacobs about mobile office option so that staff is able to provide spot services right on the property.

   Gurney mentioned that the County Strategic Plan outlines a priority to innovate & adapt as well as to be fiscally responsible & collaborate.

   Discussions moved to the County Highway Shop. It is currently in the pre-planning stage and there has been a space assessment completed that have given three options to: tear down and rebuild onsite, remodel existing facility, or build off site. Ray Henning indicated that there has been nothing solid presented yet. Josh Pederson indicated that he has not been part of those discussions.

Gurney indicated that in 2017 there is a recommendation to complete a space needs and analysis study county-wide.

Concerns were expressed regarding How the Ag and Resource building would function following LCD's departure, what is planned for the other departments that are left, the fact that many of these decisions are being made as a result of speculation, costs associated with the move. Also concerned about the function of the Courthouse building— will there be more custodial help needed? What are the additional security issues (especially with youth programming in a potentially more dangerous environment)? It is nice to have all the existing services together under one roof to better serve the client here.

Discussion on the background of the current location. Originally the offices of USDA-SCS (now natural resources conservation service), USDA-ACS (now farm service agency), County LCD, and Extension were all housed together as a one stop shopping center for ag & extension programming. The group moved to the ag & resource center building in March 1991 and County LCD has been here ever since. It cost the County $225,000 to buy this property at the time.

Leary indicated that she was a little taken back by the tone of the memo, a little surprised, and she hoped the budget was not a threat that required this consideration. Gurney indicated that he requested the memo from Keith Zehms, that he has recently discussed it with Jacobs, and had no idea what the memo would include. He requested it to determine the role of LCC, the role of P&D, and the role of his Position. The intention was to provide clarity to the roles, but does not envision changing the budget review process-- LCC still has an important role.

Request for a report on the watershed work -- there was a discussion about the watershed efforts and how those tie into the Lake Eau Claire Planning team work that has been occurring. In regards to the budget review process for watershed plan work-- that typically comes to the LCC for their review, then is recommended to the Committee on Planning and Development (following Lance's review), and then they recommend a budget to County Administration.

Gurney indicated that the timeline for the move is tied to changes in the Housing Authority (which is intended to transition in 2017 and 2018. There were concerns expressed as to if there would be room for LCD to do what they do. Gurney indicated that there are 4 conference rooms on 3rd floor and 15 total in the courthouse. P&D staff usually use 3 or 4 that are closest to their offices. Regarding locked doors, evening meetings are typically best held on 1st floor. Parking for additional staff and customers was a concern. Also discussed difficulties surrounding air exchange which changes based on occupancy in the rooms.

What's next? We want some input – Gurney directed Jacobs to work out details.

Schraufnagel indicated that she serves with LCC, Parks and Forest & UW Extension Committees. The move will allow for sharing of more resources with P&D, but what about the resources that are being directed away from the remaining Parks and Forest staff? What are the new facility requirements for remaining offices? We need to also consider what will happen to the Parks and Forestry Department. Gurney indicated that his focus is first on how the P&D department is covered and then will go to other departments on how to partner with P&D.

Gurney indicated that there are approximately 50 customers a day at P&D and there are 1.7 administrative staff to cover the office. As such, all staff have to chip in. Some of the levy limits have made it a little more difficult.

Poss outlined that concerns are well taken and concurs that it is much easier to park at the Ag&Resource Center & access staff. The concern regarding safety for young people and senior citizens is very important. Also, the concerns regarding the costs associated with a move. Without LCD staff in the Ag&Resource Center, what are the long term plans for this building?

Willett indicated that the location to bring all services together should not be housed in the existing Courthouse. We need a longer term vision – populations are likely to increase to 3 times the population of today and will require more staff. Staff and customers all need a good place to park as well. The consideration of using existing County park land for building is completely out of line. The County does need a convenient location that is fairly central in the County and should be thinking more about what's to the east of us. Development in the form of 200 more apartments in River Prairie and likely more to come.

Alternate options were discussed by LCC members including the potential for Housing authority to rent some of the ag center space? Potential for the Planning and Development Department to move out to the Ag Center. A lengthy discussion followed on the history of the Housing authority in Eau Claire County.

Jacobs asked what spurred the discussions about the Land Conservation Division move, as that had not yet come up in the discussion. Gurney provided a list of the benefits to relocating LCD staff to the Courthouse including:

- Ongoing issues with budget and find ways to better fund staff and maintain personnel
- Reduce duplication of everything associated with a separate office (i.e. Two copiers, two plotters, office coverage)
- Able to help cover for each other during vacancies
- Accommodate all functions of P&D in one suite
- Team work → right now we have physical limitations
- To improve public service in response to development activity (i.e: subdivisions, chapter 17 & chapter 18 codes)
- interdepartmental effort under one roof
- still able to use this building as long as county owns it (i.e. nutrient management workshops)
- internal accountability, over sight, staff management
- opportunity created by space that will open as part of the housing authority departure

Gurney feels that there may be some challenges as part of the move, but none are insurmountable.

Leary asked for comments and thoughts from the public in attendance at the meeting. Tammy Schroeder outlined the concerns that parking is not easy to get to at the Courthouse, it requires a special trip, the Courthouse is not a friendly building (it is intimidating) and the current location serves the Land Conservation Division well. She added that she would hate to see LCD move downtown.

Adams indicated that this group in the ag and resource center services people out and about in the County. Gurney indicated that P&D department also services those people too and even more so. When Gurney was asked why he doesn't want to move P&D out to the Ag & Resource Center building, he indicated that there are 23 staff in the P&D department and we would have to kick out UW-Extension in order to accommodate them. Gurney indicated a better option might be to finish the 25,000 sq ft unfinished space on the 3rd floor of the

Courthouse-- it would cost $250,000-$300,000 to finish that one side. The big picture would include functions that regularly serve the public to be located on the 1st floor of the Courthouse.

Question from LCC regarding how much office space does Eau Claire County rent in City of Eau Claire? Gurney was not aware of anything besides storage units.

Questions from LCC asking when they will we see the nuts and bolts for the budget associated with this move? Such costs to include staff costs for boxing up and moving time? Gurney indicated that there are no external costs and that it will be done in house. There are also budget savings as a result of efficiencies gained from being co-located.

City of Altoona also assessing their options for office space too.

Question regarding what happened to cost of running this building following the NRCS office leaving (cost per square foot)?

Discussion that before or in consideration of moving LCD:

1. Take look at customers (they are typically not townies, they are farmers/agriculture and almost all are landowners). How are we going to serve them?
2. Who the customers really are and how they're going to be served at the CH
3. Once LCD is out then finance will be calculating the cost and the building may no longer be available.

Gurney indicated that the building availability/continuation is not germane to LCD move and is still a county facility available for use. He and Jacobs will get together and talk about how to mitigate those impacts and concerns.

**3. Public Input Session**

**Fred Poss, Lake Eau Claire Association:** Poss opposes the county staff decision to take our $100,000 of lake rehabilitation funds and put it towards Eau Claire River watershed projects. He is opposed to not spending County money to "just dig sand". The sediment traps protect the rookery. The watershed project aims to reduce Phosphorus and identify bank areas to stabilize, but bank stabilization costs millions of dollars. Poss asks the County to restore the partnership we thought we had in Eau Claire County.

**Rod Zika, Lake Eau Claire Association:** Zika felt that it is clear that Lake Eau Claire and Lake Altoona will be lost if nothing is done. In the past, the LCC has coordinated meetings and a mgt plan developed through County staff support. Plan strategies were approved by Army Corps, DNR, and county. It was recommended that effort be maintain over 25 years. All the money spent over last 3-4 years is wasted if we don't continue the plan. It is clear that we're reversing everything we've worked for.

Jacobs responded with an overview of the strategy associated with reframing of these capital projects. Included in the watershed project recommendation are the following: 1) $70-75,000 for the Lake Eau Claire Troubled Waters Sediment trap; and 2) $20-25,000 to assess high banks and sediment transport and other strategies as outlined in the 9 key element plan. Yes, we should really have another $25,000 in the request for gravel pit trap maintenance in order to fully fund the Lake District's $100,000 request for this budget; but we as a County don't have a lot of extra

money to do everything we want and we also have to prioritize reduction of sediment and Phosphorus from upland sources as well as leverage additional funding resources at the state and federal levels. Gurney concurred that the money is not being taken away from Lake Eau Claire as it was always County money. Yes the funding mechanism is being reframed.

Zika requested that Lake Altoona also has additional recommendations and engineering studies identified in their plan and the County needs to bite the bullet and stick to the plan. Gurney clarified that the Lake Altoona District is the entity that is responsible for implementation of the Lake Altoona Plan.

**Gibson requested that the Watershed implementation efforts be highlighted in the next few** agendas coming up here. It was mentioned that DNR staff have indicated that their lowest priority is dredging. Leveraging additional funds through collaboration is important - bringing in additional resources will be a good thing to build from in order to pool resources for these efforts. It will be good to have a discussion to help everyone understand how this all lays out. Jacobs indicated the next meeting of the watershed implementation team will be held on October 20, 2016 at 6:30pm at the Augusta Senior Center.

**4. APPROVE MINUTES**

Motion by Willett to approve the meeting minutes for July 18, 2016 and August 15, 2016. All in favor. Motion carried.

**5. REVIEW VOUCHERS**

The vouchers were reviewed.

**6. COUNTY COST-SHARE APPLICATIONS AND LEDGER UPDATE**

Motion by Henning to approve contracts for Weiss and Wehling projects. All in favor. Motion carried.

**7. APPROVE AGRICULTURE ENTERPRISE AREA (AEA) APPLICATIONS**

Leonard discussed that the role of the LCC includes implementation of the Farmland Preservation Program as one of the County Codes outlined in Chapter 17. Now that Agriculture Enterprise Area (AEA) has been approved by the state, land owners can apply for agreements. The 15 year agreement is between the landowner and the state and is approved by the LCC in between. Parcel configurations can be complex and parcels with things like “Life Estate” are handled separately from other parcels of a farm – as such, farms can have multiple applications. The application process is ongoing, but for those that wish to claim tax credits for this calendar year, the applications need to be done by the end of October.

Included in your packet is a summary page for each of the applicants. We are now at just over 2000 acres and expect that there will be new credits of just over $5000 to landowners as part of these applications. Discussion on what might be a good goal for these applications. Some AEAs are happy that they have established an AEA and a sign is up. The AEA in Clark and Marathon is very active where some have only one landowner that is eligible for the credits. Some correspondence has indicated that 11% of total eligible acres are enrolled in state AEA agreements. We feel that here in Eau Claire County perhaps we could be double the state average and have at least 22% of eligible designated acreage in agreements.

Discussion with landowners present:

Tammy Schroeder: With this program I can control what happens to this land from my grave. I'm glad that there will be a cost to take it out of agriculture in the future. I like that Eau Claire County sees the importance of agriculture.

Vic Price: I want to see the farm managed in a sustainable manner. As direct marketers we're amazed at the disconnect between consumers and their food. As a farmer conservationist I've seen a lot of programs and this one has a lot of merit. This program is bringing money back to Eau Claire County. If agriculture went away, we'd be losing our largest economic drivers in the county.

Mary Price: This program identifies prime agricultural land in the County. I would also like to see our agricultural agencies stay together and let out resources continue to be available to us farmers. Being mobile does not mean that staff are more accessible—hard to predict how the day will go and it's nice to just stop by the office and find someone there.

Motion by Henning to approve all AEA's as presented. All in favor. Motion carried.

**8. AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMITTEE MEMBER REPORTS**

NRCS- As an agency they are combining field offices in multiple counties, but so far Eau Claire has not been considered. Jen Roetter provided a report on status of contracts and signups associated with the CRP, CSP, and EQIP programs. Highlighted the special Cover crop initiative and soil health initiative that provides funds for no till, conservation cover rotation (hay), and cover crops. Also discussed education/outreach with the youth leadership, Chippewa Farm City Days, and work with their STEM internship volunteer.

**9. NEXT MEETING DATE**

Next meeting will be October 17, 2016 at 5:15PM. LCD report will be provided as part of the meeting.

**10. ADJOURN**

Motion by Willett to adjourn at 7:12PM. All in favor. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kelly Jacobs
Subcommittee Clerk

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