

Harris Town Board
ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION
with the Staff of Grand Rapids
Wednesday, May 2, 2012, 7:15pm

The Harris Town Board met on Wednesday, May 2, 2012 at 7:15 p.m., at the Blandin Foundation, with the following officers present: Supervisors Gary Rosato, Dennis Kortekaas, and Larry Key, and Clerk Michele Smith. Absent: Treasurer Becky Adams

Present from Grand Rapids: Tom Pagel - City Engineer, Rob Mattei - Community Development Director, and Shawn Gillen – City Administrator.

Also in attendance, Township Engineer, Julie Kennedy and Allie Jervelin – Intern from ICC Engineering program

The purpose of tonight's round table was to continue dialog between the township and the city staff (not the city council) on upcoming improvement projects on shared roadways and anything else of common interest.

Annexation concerns

Mattei and Pagel attended the public input session regarding the Highway 169 Corridor at Harris Town Hall in April, and were surprised to hear that annexation was still a major of Harris Township residents. Gillen explained that there are no plans by the City to annex any portion of Harris Township, as there is no advantage for them to do so. The city is currently looking at being a million dollars “in the hole” for the next decade from annexing Grand Rapids. They paid 5 million dollars to do so, and only received \$600,000. Gillen said to reassure Harris Township residents that the city does *not* have any incentive to annex them. He also shared that it was Grand Rapids Township that approached the City of Grand Rapids and requested to be annexed; Ainsworth was building, and intended to request annexation from the city in order to get necessary utilities. Once that happened, Grand Rapids Township feared they would then not have the tax base to take care of the environmental issues (septic) of the township. So, Gillen clarified, the city did not “go after” the township, as Harris Township residents seem to fear.

The board discussed that septic systems could become an issue in Harris Township, especially around Pokegama Lake. Pagel suggested that the city could work with the township, whereby the town could buy a service from the city. The township would *not* have to be annexed in order to tap into this service.

Regarding the discussion that residents on the township border can petition to become part of the city, Mattei thought that the town DOES have a say in that – despite what John Powers mentioned at the public input session on the Highway 169 Corridor. This policy changed in recent years, to stop “land grabbing”.

Discussed if someone bought Bubble & Bows, Pump House, etc., and wanted to develop and asked the city to annex them, how would they feel about that? The city explained that they'd need to check with their attorney, and think about it themselves. There may be advantages for the city if the development pays for infrastructure across an empty city lot to get to their twp development (sewer/water). There may be options to share services across the border. And an agreement was discussed, where the city and town would discuss any future annexation / corporate boundary adjustments within ¼ mile (1320 feet) of either boundary. A “cooperative planning agreement” would help determine how to handle development along jurisdictional borders. To do this, detail would be needed in both the city and township’s comprehensive development plans. The county would also have to be involved, to change their ordinances/comp plan accordingly.

Detachment from the City of Grand Rapids

The town board asked the city how the recent “detachment request” meeting went, with a group of residents on Horseshoe Lake Road from the former Grand Rapids Township, who’d been annexed by the City of Grand Rapids. The residents were requesting to detach from the city and become a part of Harris Township. They’d been to a Harris Town Board meeting in October.

A meeting was held in April between the resident group and the City. Gillen commented that about 1/3 of those in attendance seemed come out of curiosity, and the other 55 people represented about 5% of the total population of the area (apx 1,000). The city attorney explained that if the area wanted to detach, it would have to be proved that the area is rural in nature, and a petition with signatures of 75% of property owners in the designated area would be needed.

Costs to detach would include \$120,000 in legal fees, paid by residents, 4.5 million dollars paid by Harris Township to the City of Grand Rapids as reimbursement for the recent road/area improvements, plus, Harris would have to pay the city for 8 years lost revenue – so roughly 10 million total.

The city staff noted that the area detaching would have to adjoin Harris Township, and that they can't attach to Cohasset, as you can't detach and reattach to a city.

When asked if the township has any say in a detachment matter, the staff advised that the township has a choice to say "no thank you" if a petition is received, or say nothing. The first thing, however, is that the group must submit a petition to both city and the township. If the city says "no", and if township *doesn't* act on it, the request goes to a judge. However, if the city says no, and the township says 'no', then it doesn't go to judge. Detachment has happened one time in MN, per Gillen, and the result – which sets precedence - would be in city's favor.

The status of the resident group was not known, but the city staff felt that the sticker shock caused the credibility of the detachment option to decline. It was noted that when the group came to the township, they had just found the option for detachment from the city, and didn't know much about the process. However, for the city meeting, they did come with an attorney.

University of Minnesota Extension - cows

In considering an overlay district for commercial development along Hwy 169 as a part of Harris Township's comprehensive plan, Supervisor Rosato asked about the area along Harris Towns Road, where the cows are. If the U of M wants to build a barn, where the house used to be, is there any reason the township would want to oppose it, with regard to overlay of commercial? It was recommended that the board talk to Dan Erikila about this. He is the head of the North Central Research and Outreach Center, and a regional director for University of Minnesota Extension, responsible office co-located with NCROC in Grand Rapids

"S" Curve striping

The city stated that they would be implementing a striping plan for Hwy 169, including the "S" curve, in 2015. They will look at adding a center and right hand turn lanes, for safety as discussed by residents and the board at the Hwy 169 Corridor public input session.

City Police in Harris Township – why?

The board commented that they were seeing a lot of city police outside the city limits. The City explained that the city police are a part of a "Toward zero death" saturation program (used to be called the safe & sober program). A grant pays for extra duty Grand Rapids Police to patrol outside city limits. Basically, a spot is chosen, and it's saturated with county sheriff and city police; being a part of this program gives them legal authority to be in any jurisdiction.

Mishawaka Road

The city noted that they are restricting the axle load limit on the city's portion of Mishawaka Road. They would like to put a sign at the Highway 169 entrance, which would state "weight restriction ahead", and then at the city limit a sign that advises of a 4 ton per axle limit. The Board liked this idea. The board recommended advising Hawkinson that it will be fine to drive their gravel trucks, headed east out of their pit, as that part will not be restricted.

The Harris Town Board approved the city's request to put a sign at the Hwy 169 entrance, advising traffic of weight restrictions ahead, so that large trucks don't get to the city limit and then try to turn around.

The radar traffic sign on Isleview was discussed; the board asked the city if it was effective in reducing traffic speed, as township residents had requested one in place of the existing speed humps on Mishawaka Road. The city explained that roads are chosen for the signs, due to complaints on speed for the road. Pagel will know in a week or so how effective the signs are. It records the speeds that people are traveling, which the city will review and give to police department. If there is a speeding issue, the city will then saturate the area during the time when the data indicated speed has been violated the most. The cost of 1 radar traffic sign is \$10,000 plus cost of enforcement and data analysis

Speed humps were discussed briefly, as the township has some now on Mishawaka Road. The city explained that they only put them on local city streets with traffic cutting through, and where speed is an issue; they do not put them on "collector streets". They recommended that the board leave the Mishawaka Road humps in place, and felt the complaints will likely die down, after people get used to them.

Extending the new trail system along the city's portion of Mishawaka Road to the Pokegama Lake causeway was discussed. The town board would be open to working with the city on a project, and offering consideration to use the township's "Cottage Grove" easement for the trail, which runs parallel to the township's north/south portion of the Mishawaka Road. The city was agreeable, but noted the county would need to sponsor it, as it's outside the city limits.

The city mentioned that they would be completing the extension of 21st street (Oakdale) in 2015, from Hwy 169 (intersection at Target, heading past the Catholic Church) to Horseshoe Lake Road. The city will be conducting a public hearing, and the town board will be invited in hopes of their support of the project. The board commented that they would support the road going through, as it would relieve heavy traffic along their portion of the Mishawaka Road. The board recommended inviting Mishawaka Road residents to the public hearing as well.

Mishawaka boat landing was discussed, regarding the lack of adequate parking space. Now that there are 'no parking' signs along the road (as there is no township ROW), people find it difficult to park at the landing. They asked if the board considered purchasing the land across Mishawaka from the landing for parking. The board explained that they had, but determined it would not only be a bad investment due to the swampy nature of the land, but it would be a very unsafe place for a parking lot – on a corner, and hill, with potential traffic backing across the Mishawaka road. Reconfiguring the existing parking lot is an option, but difficult, given the large trees there. The city mentioned that there are grants available, should the board decide to do something.

Horseshoe Lake Road

City will be starting reconstruction on Horseshoe Lake Road this summer. The city council moved on the last phase of Horseshoe Lake Road – and the trail.

GIS systems

Julie noted that Allie Jervelin was in the intern who would be working on the data entry portion of the GIS cemetery project, and asked Pagel for an update to help with scheduling Allie's time. Pagel explained that Mike LeClaire had lost his intern, but was just about done with the Harris Township cemetery project. Pagel will advise her soon on the status.

With no further projects to discuss, the round table between the Harris Township Board and the Grand Rapids city staff adjourned at 9:00pm. Another meeting will be set up in September, or sooner if needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Michele Smith - Clerk