

**Minutes of the March 21, 2012
Harris Town Board Work Session – Comprehensive Plan
Public Input Discussion on Highway 169 Corridor**

The Harris Town Board met on Wednesday, March 21, 2012 to partake in a public input work session regarding the update of the township's comprehensive plan. **The purpose of the work session was:**

- To secure community suggestions and commentary on land use and transportation issues within the Highway 169 corridor* and possible Township responses.

**The corridor is defined as the strip of land roughly 600 feet along either side of Highway 169, the length of Harris Township.*

Gathering input on the Highway 169 corridor is a part of the process to update the Harris Township comprehensive plan. A consulting team of SEH, Inc. and Applied Insights^{North} are assisting the township in this effort.

Officers of the Harris Board in attendance were: Supervisors Dennis Kortekaas, Larry Key & Gary Rosato, and Clerk Michele Smith. Absent: Treasurer Becky Adams.

Approximately 45 residents and guests in attendance (see copy of sign in sheet, attached) including representatives from:

- Itasca County / Environmental services: Dan Swenson
- City for Grand Rapids: Rob Mattei and Tom Pagel

The work session began at 6:30pm at the Harris Town Hall. All township residents (apx 1,400 households) were sent an invitation postcard last week. Notice was also posted at the Town Hall.

Also in attendance were: John Powers – from Applied Insights, and Julie Kennedy – Twp Road Engineer from SEH.

Chairman Rosato opened the work session, and then turned it over to John Powers to facilitate. *(An agenda and associated handouts/maps provided for the discussion will be attached to these minutes.)*

Powers explained the process that the town board is going through to update their comprehensive plan, and explained that tonight's public input session was a part of that process. There was no proposal involved, but rather Powers was seeking resident input and insight of what they felt should happen along the Highway 169 corridor.

Residents were seated at 8 tables scattered around the room, with apx 4-8-people seated at each. Each table had maps of the proposed corridor area, agendas, and worksheets. Residents were led through discussions on the various key items as outlined on the agenda. Residents jotted their group's ideas on post-it notes, and then reported out to the group in an orderly fashion. Julie Kennedy wrote down the key ideas on flipchart paper, while all post-it notes were collected for review – even one's not shared with the group.

The following agenda was reviewed and input gathered: *(Note: John Powers will provide a summary of the input received, which will be attached to these minutes when received. Only general ideas are noted in these minutes.)*

1. The Corridor
 - a. Review land use and transportation features
 - i. North: Pokegama Lake to Grand Rapids city limits *(most of tonight's focus was expected to be on this area, due to the development potential)*
 - ii. South: Pokegama Lake to southern boundary of Harris Township

2. Questions of the Future: *For the north or south corridor, or general corridor, people were asked to write down their ideas and responses to the following:*
 - a. Regarding the type, location, and intensity of future development within the corridor:
 - i. What is desired
 - ii. What is “inevitable”?

Discussed the option of becoming a city, and then acting as a city & zoning. It’s a large decision and undertaking.

Discussed that big box development is one 40 acre plot away from development on the north end of Harris Township. The lot owned by Mark Hawkinson, once developed, will be on the border of the township. And will development stop just because they are on the border of Harris Township? Not likely was the consensus.

Where else can development go? Can’t go east/west or north; seems inevitable that it will come south. Suggested that we work with county on zoning of the area.

3. Township Options for Achieving Desired Future Corridor condition (see yellow handout, and the definitions for the following)

John Powers talked a bit about annexation. He’d recently met with the City of Grand Rapids, and found they are not looking to annex any portion of Harris Township; there is nothing on their docket. However, Powers went on to explain that a different kind of annexation potential should be considered: The Township is one development away from the next development coming into the township, along the northern border – which could result in potential annexation. Once a development/business is built on Mark Hawkinson’s property, the land to the south would be in Harris Township. And, it’s very likely that any new development in that area would petition to the city, asking to be annexed in order to receive city sewer and water, roads, etc. As a result, Powers explained that the township will need to decide if they want to try and use the County’s powers of zoning to stop intense commercial development, or plan for some area of orderly annexation to allow development in a specific area. Will the plan be to fight it, or plan for it? Powers then moved into the yellow handout, and explained 4 options to consider:

- a. North Corridor – there seems to be four basic options
 - i. Current situation – zoning and subdivision controlled by the county
 - ii. Modified current situation – seek upgraded county zoning with a special overlay zone for the Highway 169 corridor
 - iii. Piecemeal annexation – annexation of parcels of land on border of the township done at the timing and request of landowners (*township has no recourse and no control*)
 - iv. Orderly annexation – negotiate a formal agreement with Grand Rapids governing the geographic extent, timing, and triggering mechanism for annexation actions (*could be part of the deal that no other areas will be annexed – negotiate*)
 - v. Become a city – *accept all the costs and responsibilities that go along with that; not currently an option listed on the yellow page, based on prior discussions; however, it could be an option and a request could be included in the updated comprehensive plan, that the town board do an analysis of the option to become a city.*
- b. South Corridor – The options here concern zoning:
 - i. Leave current zoning
 - ii. Rezone property to/from commercial
 - iii. Apply overlay district to address specific concerns

Note: About half the residents left before ideas were shared from this section #3)

4. Advice to the town board
 - a. What should the board keep in mind as it wrestles with this issue, as they develop the revised comprehensive plan?
 - i. Citizens are allowed to vote on changes with regard to annexation
 - ii. If a “modified” condition is recommended, include a buffer for the corridor
5. Next steps and adjournment
 - a. Board will meet again – sometime in April - and draft a plan
 - b. Another public input session will be held to review draft comprehensive plan.

Tonight’s work session adjourned at 8:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michele Smith, Harris Township Clerk

Harris Township: Highway 169 Corridor Public Input Session

Harris Town Hall

March 7, 2012 / 6:30 p.m.

Purpose of meeting:

Town Board member Gary Rosato and planning consultant John Powers explained that the purpose of the meeting was to secure community suggestions and commentary on land use and transportation issues within the Highway 169 corridor and possible Township responses. It was noted that the Town Board has made no decisions regarding the corridor and that this effort was part of the larger process to update the township's comprehensive plan.

The Corridor:

Powers reviewed basic land use and transportation features in the corridor. Comments and additional information:

- TH 169 from 13th Street south to Harris Town Road is scheduled for resurfacing in 2015. This could be an opportunity to re-stripe it to allow for center lane with right and left turn lanes without altering surface width.

Questions of the Future

Regarding the type, location, and intensity of future development within the corridor:

What is desired?

What is "inevitable"?

The participants offered the following comments:

Desired

- Incorporate as a city.
- Don't become another Brainerd/Baxter area.
- No commercial condominiums / housing development along the lake.
- No annexation.
- Keep traffic level low, as is today.
- No commercial development without plan.
- Clean up blighted former or closed commercial sites.
- Modified county zoning approach.
- No big box commercial development.
- From the Salvation Army site south to the lake should remain residential.
- No additional commercial development on the west side.
- Limit depth of commercial on the east side.
- No city sewer/water extended into this area.
- No "heavy" commercial – just light like offices.
- Bring plan to voters.
- More input on county zoning.
- No more billboards.
- Enforce existing county zoning.
- Clarify commercial entitites
- South: limit commercial development
- South: keep trees along corridor / retain rural feel
- Keep trees and high visual qualities
- Limit parking lots
- Better road signage and road striping desired.
- Pump House curve has poor site distances – not safe.
- Minimize runoff to the lake.
- Commercial development should stop at the lake.

- Not allow businesses to look like T&M Marine at corner of Mishawaka Road.
- Minimize night sky light pollution.
- Increase to four lane all the way.
- Minimize sign pollution.
- Take better care of scenic wall.
- MnDOT helping maintain causeway.
- Want to be able to control what comes in.
- Limit size of parking lots.
- Create frontage road or turn lanes for access.
- Keep commercial to east side of highway but only within ¼ to ½ mile to the east of the highway.

Inevitable

- Expanded commercial dominates if not controlled – extension of water/sewer equals annexation.
- Looks like commercial development has already won.
- Increased traffic creating need for turn lane or frontage road.
- More businesses will occur.
- Commercial development will continue to move south out of Grand Rapids.
- Loss of trees in north corridor.
- Businesses on both sides of the highway north of the lake.

Township Options

Powers reviewed the basic options facing the township.

North Corridor

There are four basic options:

- a) Current situation – zoning and subdivision controlled by the county.
- b) Modified current situation – seek upgraded county zoning with a special overlay zone for the corridor.
- c) Piecemeal annexation – annexation of parcels of land done at the timing and request of landowners.
- d) Orderly annexation – negotiate a formal agreement with Grand Rapids governing the geographic extent, timing, and triggering mechanism for annexation actions. It was emphasized that there are no known plans by the city to initiate annexation of any part of the township.

South Corridor

The options here concern zoning:

- a) Leave current zoning.
- b) Rezone property to/from commercial.
- c) Apply overlay district to address specific concerns.

The participants offered the following comments:

North Corridor

- What are benefits if this area is annexed?
- As a first step, focus on modified approach with a zoning overlay, then evaluate if this is effective for the long-term at which point town could negotiate orderly annexation or pursue incorporation as a city.
- Study becoming a city.
- Harris needs to take control and have a plan.
- If we wanted to be in the city we would be – want the town board to protect these rights.
- Be more involved in the updating of the county comprehensive plan.
- We need to understand the tax base impacts of these actions.
- We should stay a township.
- Seek to delay piecemeal or orderly annexation by modifying county zoning.

- Influence design of an overlay to deter commercial development.
- Prevent annexation or control the corridor development.
- Do the opposite of the TH 38 overlay, which sought to eliminate commercial development, by seeking to attract commercial development but only to the corridor area.
- Encourage the county to “abide” by Harris’ recommendations, not just listen to them.
- Create an overlay district but only on the east side of Hwy 169.
- Pursue orderly annexation if it will maintain control of development.
- Where would annexation stop?
- Current situation does not adequately handle design and control of development.
- Orderly annexation should provide predictable development; know impact in advance; loss of township tax base; township loses sovereignty but gains some degree of control of change.
- If piecemeal annexation started to happen, then trigger implementation of orderly annexation.
- Only way to stop annexation is to become a city.
- What would be the effect on township finances if there is partial annexation?
- Current situation if possible, but combine modified county approach and orderly annexation if needed.
- Allow commercial on east side only and only as far as Salvation Army.
- Not sure about our ability to “maintain” control.
- What’s the main objective – prevent annexation or control development in corridor?
- All areas are impacted by growth.
- Let’s develop the will to stop future development.
- Limit to small businesses on one acre or less.
- Corridor should be concrete above ground with bypass under it across University farm. Run electric train from Blackberry to Virginia on 169 corridor; would help mining.

South Corridor

- Restore recreation areas
- Rezone to residential
- Keep commercial zoning at existing level
- Keep north woods look and feel (primarily, maintain mature trees along corridor)
- Provide street light at Crystal Springs Road / 169 intersection
- Allow conditional use permits only if they comply with the Harris plan
- Keep this part of corridor as pristine as possible
- Minimize commercial development
- Consider noise pollution impacts on adjoining residential areas
- Strive for better aesthetics on building and site design – if land use controls cannot do this then limit the amount of commercial
- Maintenance of the causeway – not being done effectively.
- No change in zoning or regulation.
- Upgrade of county zoning.

Words of Advice

What should the Town Board keep in mind as it wrestles with this issue?

- Think of the greater good not just “don’t come all the way to the lake”; don’t take any of Harris / stay unified.
- What is entailed in incorporating?
- Stronger Harris comprehensive plan with Harris residents participating.
- Remove Minnesota Power from Cohasset and what’s their tax value? Would it be analogous to Harris? What level of service is provided?
- Phased approach to options. That is, adopt modified county approach with an overlay district and have an orderly annexation plan for the future if it is needed.
- Citizens vote on changes that may come up (e.g., orderly annexation agreement).
- If an overlay district is pursued, then include a buffer along either side of it.

Next Steps

The Town Board will incorporate this input into the draft plan which will be presented to the residents. There will be another public meeting to review the draft plan.