

Harris Town Board
ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION
with the Staff of Grand Rapids
Wednesday, September 18, 2013, 7:30pm

The Harris Town Board met on Wednesday, September 18, 2013 at 7:30 p.m., at the Blandin Foundation, with the following officers present: Supervisors Gary Rosato, Dennis Kortekaas, Larry Key, and Clerk Michele Smith. *Absent:* Treasurer Becky Adams

Present from Grand Rapids: Julie Kennedy - City Engineer and Rob Mattei - Community Development Director. Also in attendance was Glen Hodgson – Township Engineer from SEH.

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

The last time the group met for a round table was in December 2012, to discuss Northwest Gas coming into Harris Township. Since then, Glen Hodgson has become Harris Township's road engineer from SEH (formerly, Julie Kennedy), and Julie Kennedy has become the Grand Rapids City Engineer (replacing Tom Pagel).

Updates were given by the various attendees at tonight's meeting:

Julie Kennedy – City Engineer:

Will be working on Crystal Lake Blvd, including an Oct 30th input session. There were 70+ people at the summer session, and overall, a 90% consensus NOT to close the street near the fairgrounds – but agreed that *something* needs to be done. However, there is no consensus as to *what* that means. There will be 3 options reviewed at the input session on 10/30/13. The county has been invited to attend.

Kennedy was not aware of anything going on along the township/city borders currently, though there is construction going on currently at the Airport, regarding a second runway.

Rob Mattei - Community Development Director:

The city had a very busy summer, with apx \$20 million in building permits so far in 2013 – for both residential and commercial. The average is 17 million/year, so it has already exceeded that - and it's only September. There have been more permits this year too, than in previous years. The new Frito Lay distribution outlet currently being constructed along Airport Road is one of those projects. Others include:

- Hammerlund building near Range Line Road (2.7 million for 2 phases)
- Majestic Pine Assisted Living – on Golf Course Road (11 million)
- Old St. Joes site will be First Avenue Condos, with grants from IRRRB; the building will be 4 stories with 36 units, for rent or purchase (5 million)
- Friesens are building near McKinney Lake - 10 units of assisted living (almost 1 million)
- Keifer's (sp?) is building three 29 unit apartment buildings (Lakewood Heights). These are all 'market rate' apartments – not income based.

Mattei also talked about a retail market analysis going on. The University of Minnesota Extension will conduct the study. Hospitality will be looked at too, and will be useful for marketing the area and to provide information when someone calls seeking information about the demographics of the area. This type of analysis hasn't been done since 2007.

Glen Hodgson – Engineer from SEH:

Public Utility Commission (PUC) has property for sale along River Road, where a treatment area used to be (near the “leaf pile”). River frontage included. Property has a lot of potential – but no one has shown interest yet.

More students are in the engineering program at Itasca Community College (ICC) than ever before. And, the new stop lights at college are working great; much safer for those trying to come out of ICC.

Harris Township is starting to look at 2014 for possible road projects. Hodgson planned to bring a priority list to the township’s P&D meeting on Sept 25, 2013 to discuss. One road mentioned was Isleview – noting it would make sense to improve the township’s section when the city does their section, in order to save on mobilization. However, Isleview was not currently on city’s radar for improvement any time soon. Kennedy Kennedy asked to be kept in the loop, after board reviews the road prioritization list – and considers Isleview.

The old Pump House property is for sale – but no knowledge of what’s happening with it.

Township board members:

ATV trails through city and county were discussed. There is talk of a desired designated route, south of town. No one was sure of the current status and direction, but had heard that the County has ‘paused’ their efforts until an official request has been made to them by an ATV club such as Rapid Riders. Because township roads will be connectors, the board was concerned how routes will affect the shouldering. Kennedy agreed to look into the matter.

Other items discussed:

Snowmobile trail: The city was asked to reroute the snowmobile trail near Veterans Park crossing, as going through the old Rainbow (currently, Lake Inn) parking lot doesn’t work– unless you know the area well.

Walking trail along Mishawaka: The walking trail along the city’s section of Mishawaka Road is very well used per Kennedy. The only complaint she’s heard is there’s too many people on it. Discussed possible grants available to build trails – and noted that the cost of trail maintenance is *not* included in these grants; this is unfortunate, as trails can be very expensive to maintain.

Development along Hwy 169, south of the city limits to the causeway was discussed. The group discussed the comprehensive plan results for an overlay district, but noted that it didn’t get much traction from county. The County does not want to be involved as it would add another level of detail for its employees. An option would be to add a *general* criterion that would require a Conditional Use Permit for any commercial development going in to Harris Township. The County may be more receptive to something like that, and would defer the detail to the township. The township, then, would do the critical approval. The town board agreed it was a good time to get started – especially in looking at commercial replacement coming to the old Harbor, Black Cherry, Pump House, etc. that are currently for sale. Storm water needs to be reviewed there too, with development. And, it may also be a good time to require a setback far enough off Hwy 169 for a frontage road some day.

Kennedy asked how coordinating the township’s paving project went with county this year, as it was a first. “Seamless” was Glen Hodgson’s response. Both the township and the county worked well with Hawkinson, and the township saved a lot of money.

The town board discussed *coordinating with the city for road striping*, in hopes that their cost would be lower. Kennedy noted that AAA will be in Grand Rapids in May 2014, and that she found it's much cheaper to do their striping next spring, rather than this fall.

The GIS cemetery database that the township purchased from the City of Grand Rapids was discussed. There was some confusion by the city, wondering if the township still wanted the program as they had not seen payment since the initial installment in 2009. The board confirmed that they did want it – and really liked what they saw from demonstration in 2012. Clerk Smith wondered if a billing had ever been sent to the township. The board also asked what the township gets in return for the annual \$4,500 cost. It was clarified that the cost included room on the city's server (program should be backed up periodically) as well as technical support of the program. Clerk Smith mentioned numerous issues and frustrations that she and the maintenance crew are having with the database, and Kennedy agreed to work with them to resolve the issues.

Lack of internet service at Harris Town Hall was discussed briefly. There are no current providers in the area that will supply internet to a business – only residential homes can get Mediacom and Century Link, and Paul Bunyan is not yet available in the area.

The group discussed inviting someone from Itasca County to these round table meetings – in particular, Dan from Environmental Services (aka Zoning). In fact, meeting with the county was part of the revised comprehensive plan revisions –meeting either with them and the city, or separately meeting with each. The board agreed that they'd like to see them invited to the next informal round table meeting with the township and city staff.

No future meeting date was chosen, but late winter/ early spring was mentioned.

Tonight's roundtable adjourned at 9:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michele Smith – Harris Township Clerk