

Avon Hills Initiative Meeting Minutes
October 25th, 2003

In attendance from the Avon Hills Initiative Team:

Allan Davisson, Collegetownship Planning Board, Landowner in Collegetownship Twp;
Ernie Diedrich, Professor of Economics and Environmental Studies, College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, St. Joseph Healthy Communities Partnership, Sierra Club member;
Ralph Eiyndck, Landowner in St. Wendell Twp and St. Wendell Twp Planning Board;
Garth Fuller, The Nature Conservancy
LeRoy Gondringer, Dairy Farmer with land in Avon and St. Wendell Townships, and member of Avon Township Board of Supervisors;
Abbot John Klassen – Saint John's Abbey – Landowner in all 4 townships.
Mike Lee, MN DNR Ecological Services; Agency manages land in Avon Hills;
Bill Mock, Landowner in St. Wendell Township;
Steve Plantenberg, Avon Township Planning Board, President, St. Cloud Builders Exchange, Upper Spunk Lakes Assn member and homeowner;
Vince Schaefer, Landowner in Collegetownship Twp and Stearns County Commissioner;
Chris Schellinger, Developer with Collegetownship Development Group, Landowner in Collegetownship Twp;
Tom Wicks, Landowner in Collegetownship Township;
John Wittrock, Landowner in St. Wendell Twp;
Lori Wolff, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Agency manages land in Collegetownship Twp;

Not in Attendance from the Team:

Margie Evans, Mayor of Avon
Rob Sip, Stearns County Environmental Services

Staff to Initiative:

Kim Chapman, Applied Ecological Services
Thomas Kroll, Saint Johns Land Manager and Arboretum Director;
Emily Franklin, Student Intern

Many observers were also in attendance

I. Purpose of the Initiative

- Incorporation of local knowledge of the Avon Wills Area with ecological and other scientific knowledge
- Identification of tracts of land which contribute to the rural nature of the area
- Create vision for the future of Avon Hills
 - : Rural character
 - : Economically productive
 - : Environmentally sustainable conservation vision

II. Examples of Information and Products

-General information presented by Kim Chapman (provided on handout)

-A suggestion was raised to add economic data regarding the productivity of tracts of land and the economic value or impact of the various pieces of land in the Avon Hills area

: Data might include: Location of feed lots, sizes of parcels, demographic distribution of economically productive lands, and zonation of land

: Transparency overlaps to compare demographics with ecologically important lands

- 4 townships and buffer of areas illustrating these demographics for future meetings?

: Data for townships is available it is just a matter of obtaining and centralizing the information for future usage

: Rob Sip, panel member and Environmental Supervisor for Stearns County Environmental Services has access to this information and could make it available to the panel at future meetings

: Political boundaries including roads and property boundaries will also be placed on all future maps

: Information about cell tower locations is also available on maps

-Side spin-offs of the cultural component of the vision in relation to the Ecological spin-off

: Differences in cultural values, including the recognition of various cultures (cultures of profit, culture of sustainability, conservation ect)

: An acknowledgement of variable values took place. The ultimate goal of a vision for Avon Hills is not to strive for a utopia, or unattainable goal, but rather the attainment of a realistic vision

: There really is no need for an extra spin off regarding culture, since culture is what the citizens of Avon Hills live each day and it is therefore implied in the vision.

: Since time is not allocated to incorporate a cultural spin off a compromise was reached. Each panel member was extended the opportunity to write stories and share cultural experiences in order to express these views. The panel members were also asked to express an analysis of the culture found in Avon Hills.

- Avon Hills recently celebrated a centennial anniversary and a panelist wondered how historical information would be integrated into the data.

: Another compromise was reached regarding this issue. Panelists were asked to write about the historical changes in their communities and how those changes have impacted the things they care about. This information is to be included in the paragraph regarding the culture of Avon Hills discussed previously in the session.

III. Communicating the Shared Vision

-Video option: Discussion of this involved creating an aesthetic visual project or photo essay with a stress upon community and member input as the seasons were followed in Avon Hills. Grants were discussed in order to fund such a project

- Additional tours

-Guided maps of the Avon Hills area

- GIS mapping and other resources through the county to be utilized in the formation of some of these projects

: Suggestion to extend involvement opportunities to GIS graduate students at --
Selling the idea to the public/so what?

: The creation of a model with different perceptions of what the area may look like in the future without concern to issues presented by the Avon Hills Initiative and what the area may look like with concern to these issues

: This type of model stresses the importance of the issues at hand and how they affect the community as a whole and the development of the area

: Information needs to be made available to the public in order to avoid the Avon Hills Initiative as being perceived as an elitist movement deciding the fate of an entire community

: Invitations to meetings and an emphasis on including the community must be made in order for the Initiative to be a success

: The Avon Hills Initiative must also be seen as an opportunity for environmental education at the primary, secondary and collegiate levels. There are rare and beautiful ecosystems in the area for students to explore and come to understand

: Sustainable recreation

IV. Team Member Views: The Future of Avon Hills

The land should look the way it does now one hundred years from now. I'd like to see it stay just the way it is.

Cluster or minimize the spread of development, control the density in certain areas, and maintain pristine areas.

Preserve the uniqueness of the area, share the uniqueness with others, and balance this with the reality of generational land transfer.

Keep farms separate from housing development, preserve woodlands and bogs, and put housing developments in proper areas.

Value is not correlated to price, but rather importance. It is important to change perspectives away from strictly price. We have to define value and what is important to the community. We need a vocabulary to talk about that and strengthen that.

Change is inevitable. We have a sense of change over time. The current political climate values the environment. We must capitalize on these values. Maps with a regional focus provide a better way to discuss development in order to sustain the cohesive community

vision and avoid pressures from developers. We have a pretty good idea about what ought to go where.

I hope nothing will change in the next 100 years, but people are going to want to settle in this area; they want to be here. How can we allow for this without drastically changing the Avon Hills landscape, how can we avoid fragmentation? We need a vision to provide everyone with information, and provide options and solutions to all farmers and landowners—solutions that are also realistic.

I'd like to see more stewardship: a view of the farm as part of the ecosystem and a value passed down through the family. What are the options to continue these traditions?

A different focus of development, a regional focus from the ground up using bioregional planning regions, planning based on ecology, watersheds and other natural phenomenon, that provide more flexible ways of development. We value what we measure, and so we ought to measure what we value; give it reality and give it a constituency.

I'd like to have this place look pretty much the way it does today one hundred years from now, but with establishment of corridors between fragmented areas, and adjustments in land use, although in general there's good management of land in the Avon Hills. We will have more people, and how to deal with that is important.

V. Boundary of Avon Hills

- As a Political process, broader range of Avon Hills Initiative is to be desired rather than a narrow range.

 - : several agreements with this point, avoid detrimental development of areas outside of Avon Hills (avoiding Not in my backyard or NIMBY)

 - : one large boundary with more defined purposes within narrower boundaries

- The idea of going big and narrowing is congruent with the philosophy embodied by the Nature Conservancy. The organization typically looks at a large area first and then narrows down purposes of specific areas within the larger boundary.

- A focus of four townships gives you a group of people working in solidarity with one another; general boundary of Avon Hills should incorporate the four townships, despite the variable ecological boundaries.

- Hard township lines are not necessarily the best route in terms of ecological value of land. Areas outside of those four boundaries should also be considered in terms of an ecological importance despite their location outside of the township boundaries boundaries.

Consensus: The Avon Hills boundary may include the four township boundaries with a buffer zone incorporating sensitive areas outside of the hard township boundaries.

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