

**Avon Hills Initiative Executive Committee and Staff Meeting
December 6, 2006 4:45p.m.
Room 150 New Science Center, Saint John's University**

Present: Jackie Leedah, Peter Dwyer, Lowell Rushmeyer, Bill Fahrney, Steve Plantenberg, Allan Davisson

Bill moved to approve the minutes from the October 25th meeting. Peter seconded the motion.

1. Introduction and message from Peter Dwyer
Peter introduced himself and asked questions about the typical meeting habits of the group. Peter suggested that meeting minutes be approved by the group at the beginning of every meeting. The minutes for the last meeting were then looked over and approved.
2. Initiative Foundation funding update
 - 2.1. The project is currently waiting for written approval from Cold Spring in order to proceed. Cold Spring wants us to meet them and give a presentation. We need to determine who will do this.
 - 2.2. Allan and Tom have volunteered to give a presentation to the Cold Spring group.
Allan and Tom are presenting to the Cold Spring group on December 14th. St. Joseph, Avon and Collegeville townships have already given their approval.
3. **Discussion of property tax problem**
A proposal has been put forth, and accepted, to assess property for tax purposes based on the potential of the lot. Lowell attended and spoke at the latest County Commissioners meeting and witnessed the passage of the proposal. Jackie expressed concern that this development will push property owners to split up their land to ease the tax burden, thus making any benefits gained during the County Comprehensive Plan (CCP) review process moot. Based on this concern, the committee discussed options to counteract the new assessment system. Based on the equation for determining property tax (see attachment), focusing on developing a separate tax class for undeveloped forested lands seemed the most logical. Offering a separate tax class as part of a conservation overlay could make the CCP review valuable. Allan felt that regardless of what action is taken, to make conservation overlays feasible the idea needs to be brought to the state government's attention and it needs to be publicized. To address the new assessment system in the short run, it was suggested that Steve ask an attorney to check into the legality of the assessor's proposal process. The group also decided to ask the County Assessor to explain his position as a main purpose of the Avon Hills Initiative is education.
4. Update on Stearns County Comprehensive Plan – Steve P.
 - 4.1. A new OS (other/special) zone designation has been proposed. This design would benefit land with historical and biological value among other things.
 - 4.2. A phone survey of approximately 500 local people suggests that the community is generally in favor of increased recreation opportunities and that they are willing to pay for it. Allan summarized this sentiment as preservation with access.
 - 4.3. Responses from public input meetings have been coming in. Geological information has also been presented. Steve felt that a sense of where they want inter- and intra-county relations strengthened is beginning to be established.
The review process will continue through June, 2007. The last meeting discussed the transportation plan and utilized maps predicting increases in traffic flow. Steve hoped that rustic road designations would be considered.
5. Additional Items

The next Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for December 27, 2006 from 4:45p.m. to 5:45p.m. at Saint John's New Science Rom 150. The meetings are open to the public.

Tom recently met with a property assessor to learn the basics of how assessing works. The following are some key points addressed at the meeting:

- The basic equation for determining property tax is: Assessment Value x Tax Class x Mill Rate.
 - The assessment value is the most neutral factor and is determined by assessors.
 - The tax class is the most political factor and is determined by the state. There is a big benefit to being in a good tax class.
 - The mill rate is determined by auditors as required to fund county, school, and local needs.
- The goal for assessors is for the assessment value to have between 95 and 105 percent accuracy compared to recently sold pieces of real estate.
 - This value is harder to determine in areas with fewer sales.