

Avon Hills Initiative Executive Board Meeting
February 25, 2009, 4:45 p.m.
Room 150, New Science Center, Saint John's University

MINUTES

Board members present: Peter Dwyer, Mike Leedahl, Steve Plantenberg, Allan Davisson

Staff present: Bill Fahrney, Jenny Kutter, Sarah Gainey

Guests: Todd Holman, Sandra Zwilling, Kimberly Thielen-Cremers

1. Introduction of Chris Butters, visiting professor from Norway and sustainable communities expert—tabled to March meeting.
2. Review of conference and annual meeting results—Sarah Gainey
 - Sarah presented the board with a summary of the evaluations received from the January 24 conference:
 - The event was consistently rated above average and the majority of respondents had never attended an AHI conference before. Direct mailing still seems to be the most effective advertising tool.
 - People were generally drawn to the conference because the topics were compelling. Natural history topics, parks & trails, and renewable energy topics were the most popular requests for future topics
 - Board member's impressions of the conference:
 - Pleased to see such a diversity of presentations, and a partnership with the local arts community
 - The time of year may be good as turn out might have been due to the cold weather—it got people out of the house.
 - If we continue to have 200+ in attendance, should explore ways to expand the venue to accommodate more people without feeling crowded.
 - It was great to see kids attending—may be our niche!
 - Thank you to so many great volunteers.
 - Possibility for 2 conferences per year?
 - Arboretum may not be able to co-sponsor a second conference for lack of time and staff, but AHI could discuss the possibilities of a second conference partnering with other organizations
 - Sandra Zwilling attended the conference and said that she particularly enjoyed the combination of landowner and natural history topics as well as the venue for connecting with other people/organizations in the community.
 - Next meeting agenda item: set the date for the 2010 conference
3. Coordination of Randall Arendt visits with Avon and Collegeville Townships
 - The board would like to firm up details of Randall Arendt's visit to work with Avon and Collegeville townships.
 - Need to send Arendt documents to review

- Allan mentioned that the cost of the Arendt visit will be \$8000 plus travel and lodging
 - The LCCMR grant covers the \$8000, but township boards will need to cover the travel/lodging, should work to minimize costs
 - Allan and Steve will coordinate with Tom Kroll to work out dates in April for Arendt's visit—possibly a Saturday that works for both townships
4. Future environmental overlay district—Steve Plantenberg
- a. The new Stearns County comprehensive plan recognizes that there are different challenges in different parts of the county. The Avon Hills is officially recognized as an area with specific needs for future planning. The county is conscious of the rare plants, species and diversity in the area.
 - b. The next step is the ordinance review, to bring ordinances in line with the county comp. plan. Allan and Steve both serve on the ordinance review board
 - c. A representative from the county, along with the consultant writing the ordinances will attend the March AHI meeting to get input from AHI.
 - d. Some things to think about and prepare for at that meeting:
 - i. With the establishment of an overlay district in the Avon Hills, criteria needs to be set that can be used not only in the Avon Hills, but also for other identifiable areas that could use the tool for planning.
 - 1. Example: lakeshore overlay districts can be applied in a number of settings.
 - ii. What language would help people know that this overlay district means?
 - 1. Environmental overlay district/Conservation OD/Natural Resources OD—potentially too vague, easily misinterpreted
 - e. Todd Holman, from the city of Baxter, has worked on developing a smaller scale overlay district in Baxter. The city created a long-range planning commission whose duty was essentially to oversee the implementation of the city comp. plan
 - i. The long-range commission created a conservation overlay district task force which met over the course of year to achieve three goals:
 - 1. Develop a map using existing data to clearly identify the conservation overlay district.
 - 2. Define conservation design: make a definition that is explicit in its intent so that it is essentially “interpretation-proof” as staff/commission/council members change
 - 3. Develop a list of 10 recommendations to the long-range planning commission to be included in the comp plan for the conservation overlay district (see attached list)
 - ii. We want people to understand that we still want them to have full use of their own property, but would like to have a set of guidelines and incentives to make it clear how their needs can be met while taking into account the surrounding area.
 - 1. Baxter worked hard to create a district that is more incentivized rather than regulatory

- f. Next month we'll have the update from the county. What more needs to be inventoried and how else can we be of support in the ordinance review process related to the Avon Hills?
- 5. Clarification of AHI policy on taking positions on local planning issues
 - a. The board acknowledges that one of the reasons of the success of the organization has been that we've kept personal opinion and political stances separate from the organization so that we can serve most effectively as an educational organization
 - b. How does our work with the county fit into this position?
 - i. AHI is providing input into the comp plan and ordinances along with a variety of other organizations.
 - ii. In the end, AHI does not write or vote on final ordinances, so our input is just that.
 - c. AHI should continue its policy of generally supporting concepts—i.e. rural road designations—without necessarily taking a stance about specific local issues so that we can maintain our status as a viable educational organization within the community.
- 6. Conservation Easements
 - a. Bill Fahrney reports that he and Tom have met with several landowners, 3 easements are in the early process and several other landowners are interested. If board members have names of landowners who might be interested, pass the information along to Bill.
 - b. How do we plan for future conservation easements after LCCMR funds run out (2011)? How do we continue to support landowners? Should start thinking beyond 2011.
 - i. Develop an incentive to allow trails through protected property to improve public access where appropriate?
 - ii. Proactively develop funding for restoration—incentives to help people better their land?
- 7. Other business
 - a. Sandra Zwilling mentioned the Avon Economic Development Committee has a new visioning meeting planned for August that AHI might be interested in.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 25 at 4:45 p.m. in New Science 150.