

TOWN of MAY
WASHINGTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA
OFFICIAL TOWN BOARD MINUTES
September 9, 2022

The Board of Supervisors of the Town of May convened a special board meeting on Friday, September 9, 2022, via virtual telephone/video conference. Those present included: Board members John Adams, John Pazlar, and Steve Magner; Clerk/Treasurer Bobbi Hummel; Town Planner Nate Sparks; Attorney Dave Snyder; representatives from Wilder Foundation and representatives from Damascus Camps. Chair Adams called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

Notice was posted on the township's website and at the Town Hall more than 72 hours prior to September 9, 2022 for the public to attend.

The sole purpose of this special meeting, requested by Wilder Foundation and Damascus representatives, was to update the town regarding the sale of Wilder Forest.

Chair Adams noted that this is a listening session for the Board and any questions should be directed to Nate Sparks, Town Planner.

Nate Sparks recapped background information. May Township was contacted by Kelly Urista from Wilder Foundation about a potential purchaser of the current Wilder Foundation Property. Wilder Foundation requested a meeting with the town Board regarding the use. The property in question is in the conservancy district and a moratorium is currently in place. The Board requested a submission of questions from the buyers in advance so they could be prepared to discuss those questions. The response to the request was received and included a letter that included the mission, vision and needs of the facility. No real questions were received other than a request to approve Damascus' general plans. This would be the time and place to have dialog about the use of a proposed camp. The township does not have the budgetary means to handle some of the impacts that are created by a larger scale use. The township is a rural area without urban services and does not have the ability to add it. The township needs to be sure the intended use for this area fits within the rural context as it is a unique location. Some of the parameters and plans for expansion of new facilities that are being discussed would require scrutiny by the township. This is not something the township is prepared to discuss at this juncture. Formal plans and application would need to be submitted. Some of the submitted plans would need to be discussed as they are somewhat vague. At this time, the town Board is here to listen and discuss the possibility of future conversation. Questions are welcome.

Attorney Dave Snyder states that this is a good opportunity to hear the current mutual concerns and objections. The current conservancy zone ordinance is from the 1960's and has some generic and generalized descriptions. The moratorium gives the town an opportunity to sharpen what our mutual objectives are.

Kelly Urista stated that Wilder has wanted to sell the property since 2003, though they have not actively marketed the property. Wilder has been successfully leasing the property and she feels

they have done everything they can to work with the township under the conditional use permit and trying to ensure all the tenants were operating within that permit. The septic system is not compliant and they have worked with the county to get through this final year of the school. Wilder is not in a financial position to consider replacing the septic system and at the end of the school's term they will be closing the property and will not replace the septic system. Kelly states she wanted this meeting because she wants to make sure any questions or plans were addressed. She understands that nothing formal will be approved today and she understands that a formal application must be made. The hope is that plans can be discussed today and Damascus Camps can learn what the Board concerns are in regards to any plans prior to submitting the formal application. Kelly states Wilder wants this sale to go through, as it would allow Wilder to provide more programming in the east metro and allow Damascus Camps fulfill their dream.

Paul Donovan, Realtor with Cushman & Wakefield, states that they are here with the hope to get guidance from the township prior to embarking on this. They do not want to go into something blind or spend a significant amount of funds prematurely.

Tim and Helen Healy have been trying to find a property for 2.5 years for Damascus Camps. They have seen the need for this type of camp. Mr. Healy states that kids need to get into nature and out of the urban areas. The Wilder property is appealing to them because of its beauty, it would give children the opportunity to get away from their phones and hear the voice of God. It would give them hope and joy that they are so often lacking. They want to remain consistent with the past use of the Wilder property. Their primary focus is a summer camp with many activities that get kids into nature and challenge themselves. This would also include time during each day to share the gospel through music, dramas and nature. Throughout the year, retreats and conferences on the weekends would also take place. The opportunity to be on a unique and pristine property will help them bring campers to the area. The plan is to remodel some of the dorms and build a new lodge on the property to accommodate a meeting hall and dining space. The lodge would be sizable, but in relationship to the 600 acres he feels it is not large. Future plans are camper cabins, an activity barn, and staff cabins. Eventually (over the next 30 years) replace some dormitories. Estimates for the lodge would include a club room for 350 people. Size estimates are around 30,000 square feet.

Summer camps run from June 10 through August 10 yearly. Mr. Healy estimates 200 campers for the first couple years but he believes it will easily grow to 500 per week. Traffic would be a Sunday afternoon drop-off, mostly by church busses. Friday pick-up would be busses and cars (parent pick up) and estimates Sunday traffic to be 200-250 cars at capacity. Non-summer months youth retreats will be almost exclusively busses (4-5) and groups of 100-200 maximum. Traffic will be almost exclusively be from the west. Mr. Healy states increased traffic will be mainly on Fridays during the summer months. The vision for the organic farms is to incorporate science into camps, that will likely take a couple years.

Paul Donovan wonders if the traffic numbers stated above are less than what is occurring today and asks for the board reaction. Nate Sparks states that the Board is not able to react/respond to that at this time.

(Question/Answer discussions are below)

Q: Mr. Snyder: How are the kids brought to the camp, how are they garnered?

A: Mr. Healy: The camp's goal is to be parish based, so bussing works the best. He estimates 90% of campers will come from a parish. During the course of 1 week there may be campers from 3-4 different parishes. Parishes would likely come the same week of every year. Tim notes he has a camp that runs similar located in Trego, Wisconsin. Trego is renting a facility. The goal for May Township/Wilder is to purchase the property.

Q: Mr. Snyder: Would Trego be a good example for the township to learn about your camps?

A: Mr. Healy: Yes, they can send YouTube videos. He also notes that Damascus is out of Ohio and is an existing camp.

Q: Mr. Snyder: What happens in fall/spring at this location?

A: Mr. Healy: Youth groups and confirmation groups will be coming to the camp. They are also looking at making a smaller retreat center in addition to a lodge. This retreat center would be for smaller groups. There will be multiple weekend retreats and the hope is during the week they will have 1-2 day retreats. Eventually holding a faith and science camp as it is a requirement of 6th graders to have an overnight science camp. Tim believes the traffic will slow down, as will the staff traffic.

Q: Mr. Snyder: Are the retreat activities (non-summer months) exclusively children?

A: Mr. Healy: Primarily youth, but the hope is to host other retreats such as a women's silent retreat. It would be a mixture for youth and adults and estimates 80% youth.

Q: Mr. Snyder: Is there any part of your camp that is not religious? Will there be any commercial use?

A: Mr. Healy: No commercial use is anticipated. It is a Catholic initiative, but they do have possibilities of partnering with other denominations to use the facility. It will not be exclusively Catholic. They will rent it out to other groups but mostly they would be religious.

Q: Mr. Donovan: Can you provide more detail or parameters of use so the township has some idea of what to expect about use. Mr. Donovan notes they want to be part of the community. The Catholic church values community, appreciation and respect and expect that in return.

A: Mr. Healy: It will be hard to commit to any hard perimeters as there will be other uses. Again, he notes it will be used for religious activities. They look at this as a partnership and understands there will be some give and take during this process on both sides.

Q: Mr. Snyder: What are your plans with the camper cabins?

A: Mr. Healy: A duplex style with 14 kids and a shared bathroom. There would be 8-12 camper cabins.

Q: Ms. Urista: How soon would the camper cabins be put in?

A: Mr. Healy: Depends on how the fund raising goes, but may be years down the road. Whatever they build he wants it to fit in and notes that anything they build will be close to the village area

and will not change the scene for any residents or road frontage. They are working with an architect that may come up with something different but still sees all of the buildings within the village. Noise would not be an issue.

Q: Mr. Sparks: Who would be using the camper cabins?

A: Mr. Healy: Campers, kids. There will not be any kitchens in the camper cabins. These cabins are in addition to the Earth and Sun building.

Q: Mr. Snyder: Are the kids bussed out by the parishes and can parents come during the week?

A: Mr. Healy: The kids are bussed in on Sunday and on Friday there is a closing mass/ceremony. The kids whose parents came for the closing mass go home with their parents; others are bussed. There will be no traffic flow during the week except perhaps food trucks.

Q: Mr. Snyder: Can you speak to the need for emergency service needs?

A: Mr. Healy: Can't speak to that at this time. He can find out how many instances came out over the past two years in other camps.

A: Mr. Donovan: This would be something they would be willing to research as he does not expect it is the townships burden. He thinks they can find a good solution or maybe contract separately. Trego may be in a bit of a different situation in regards to emergency services so may not be the best comparison.

Q: Nate Sparks: A new 30,000-foot lodging and dining hall will be built. There are similar facilities on the grounds now, what are you converting the current buildings into?

A: Mr. Healy: Earth and Sun would be used for camper lodging, if that is enough for 200 campers. Clearing and Homestead would be staff housing. Administration would stay administration with a nurse's station and offices. The meeting house and commons may be used for break-out rooms. Initially, they may be used as a small retreat center until the funds are available to build. The retreat center may be built farther east.

Q: Mr. Sparks: Can you explain retreat centers for kids and possibly for adults. The township has a current retreat center that was grandfathered in as it was established in the 1950's. A retreat center is not currently allowed in the town. How would you address that?

A: Mr. Healy: In the summer some rooming options where the adults would stay. In the winter it would be small groups and the possibility of a couples, men's, and women's retreats.

A: Mr. Donovan: This is first and foremost a youth camp.

Q: Mr. Snyder: Would it be accurate to say that every group that comes is there for religious fellowship and/or education? Do you see a non-religious component to future operations?

A: Mr. Healy: No. There will be enough interest that they will be able to fill it. There are 187 churches in the diocese and 90 schools including 14 high schools.

Q: Mr. Snyder: Would it be possible to layout a timeline?

A: Mr. Healy: They are putting together a master plan currently and can share it with the township. Some of the timing will be money dependent.

A: Mr. Donovan: A timeline for growth would be an option.

Q: Mr. Sparks: Are you basing capacity of the site at all on the infrastructure here or is it based on everything you can get on the site?

A: Mr. Donovan: They are aware they have to do all the infrastructure or a substantial part. The site cannot handle the school currently. The septic system has issues. They will have to size it at a larger capacity and will do that in an engineered and respectful way of the site.

A: Mr. Healy: They would not go over 500 campers in the summer months. (mid June - mid August).

Mr. Donovan states that the hope of the camp is to provide peace and tranquility. To provide a time to quite yourself and connect with God, yourself, and others around your so people can build a friendship of support that is missing in many people's lives; with the primary focus on youth. They are very aware of travel and demands on roads that this can put on a small community and they want to minimize that. They wish to keep it a tranquil place for everyone.

Q: Mr. Sparks: Do you have any plans for use of the water?

A: Mr. Healy: Square Lake is a 10 minute walk and would probably do most of the water stuff off of Square Lake. They would like to keep Clear and Mays as pristine as possible, there may be some canoeing and kayaking on those. Possibly some fishing. He does not foresee swimming.

Q: Mr. Snyder: Will all traffic be coming off Norell?

A: Mr. Healy: I think so. Signage to the camp would also go up to direct people.

Q: Mr. Donovan: What is your timing on the process?

A: Mr. Healy: I understand this will be a process and formal application is necessary. I do not want it to drag on forever.

Q: Ms. Urista: Does Damascus have to wait until the moratorium is lifted at the end of November to put in their application or can they put it in now?

A: Mr. Sparks: The township is not processing any applications at this time.

Q: Ms. Urista: After the application is completed, what is the timeline for approval?

A: Mr. Sparks: It depends on the completeness of the application. There are possibilities for 2 - 60-day extensions.

Q: Ms. Urista: With 120 days of maximum extensions, we are looking at potentially the end of March (or earlier) for an approval to come through.

A: Mr. Sparks: Yes, one could use that as a set of assumptions.

Q: Mr. Healy: Do you have a guiding document for the application?

A: Mr. Sparks: Yes, the Condition Use Permit has requirements on the website. Although those requirements could be changed/alterd due to ordinance updates of the moratorium.

Q: Mr. Donovan: By the end of November the requirements could change?

A: Mr. Sparks: Correct.

Q: Mr. Donovan: What is the latest date that happens?

A: Mr. Sparks: End of November.

Q: Ms. Urista: Will it be published by then?

A: Mr. Sparks: Potentially, yes.

Q: Mr. Donovan: If not published by end of November does that mean you could extend the moratorium?

A: Mr. Sparks: We are unable to speak about the outcome of the moratorium at this time?

Q: Mr. Donovan: Can we work on the application with the township staff prior to November?

A: Mr. Sparks: The moratorium process could change the requirements for conditional use permits.

Q: Mr. Donovan: What is the timeline for resolving any issues on the moratorium? Is it published?

A: Mr. Sparks: The moratorium is set to be complete at the end of November. Nothing has been published at this time.

Q: Mr. Donovan: What was the reason for the moratorium?

A: Mr. Snyder: We had an area in the township called the conservancy zone. The list of uses available in that area was general, somewhat antiquated, and very strange compared to the rest of the township.

Ms. Kelly Urista comments that when Wilder Foundation was looking at offers, they had 3 criteria.

1. Same/similar mission to Wilder.
2. Conservation of the land.
3. Fiduciary responsibility to Wilder in general.

Wilder wants to maintain the conservancy and Tim and Helen Healy (Damascus) spoke to that every time they visited the site and stated that they also wish to maintain the pristine property. That was really important to Wilder and he believes it important to the community. The mission of Damascus is to bring the kids out and have them experience nature. That is how Wilder started and this potential sale brings it full circle for Wilder Forest.

Paul Donovan does not want to increase costs and they want to lower the traffic flow that is currently happening, an improvement over the current state. They want to build in the township and complete infrastructure on-site. They will maintain it themselves and it will support the camp; following all state and local regulations. They want to be in a peaceful setting and appreciate the updates to the conservancy zone. If the township feels like this might not happen based on what they have presented they would like to know. At this point they are continuing to move forward.

Kelly Urista wonders if the township is hearing or seeing any red flags at this time so the buyers would be aware and can address it in the formal application.

Mr. Sparks notes that adult retreats were something that is a concern, as mentioned earlier.

Ms. Urista acknowledges that as good information and suggests that the applicants can give that more thought as to how it is presented so it is understood better. She knows and understands that the traffic has been a concern. She is hoping there are no other red flags.

Mr. Sparks remarked that the township is not ready to give a list of red flags at this time. He suggests that if there are things that need to be modified to fit within this context please do so as sometimes if you are willing to give a little it shows a bit of good faith.

Dave Snyder reiterates that the purpose is to evaluate potential future uses for the district. It is an opportunity to study what we want. Therefore, it might be a good idea for Damascus to weigh in with the township and present their desired use. The board will take all comments into consideration and make ordinance changes in this moratorium period. General comments are welcome by anyone that has an interest in what happens in the conservancy zone. Also, submission of a master plan and general timeline in advance could be beneficial to give the township a better understanding of Damascus Camp goals.

Mr. Sparks remarked that focus of the staff and town board is going to be on completing the moratorium.

Mr. Snyder clarifies that there are no meetings scheduled at this time to evaluate the ordinance changes but there may be meetings scheduled in upcoming weeks or months. Clerk Bobbi Hummel can alert interested parties to any upcoming meetings. Again, nothing scheduled as of this date.

Motion to adjourn was made by Chair John Adams, seconded by Supervisor Pazlar. By Roll Call Vote: Adams, YES; Pazlar, YES; Magner, YES. Meeting Adjourned at 12:03 without objection.

Submitted:

Approved:



Bobbi Hummel
Clerk/Treasurer



John Adams
Board Chair