

County's Comp Plan draws sharp criticism

BY RICK BUSSLER
DCI PUBLISHER

The proposed Dodge County Comprehensive Plan for the next decade is drawing sharp criticism from an organization that has been battling the county's growing feedlot industry over the past six years.

In reviewing the proposed draft plan for the county's Comprehensive Plan, Sonja Trom Eayrs, who represents Dodge County Concerned Citizens, accuses county officials, both elected and appointed, of doing nothing to address serious health concerns tied to factory farms in the county. She said the county acknowledges many of the problems in the Comprehensive Plan, but is "doing nothing to correct the problems."

However, Mark Gamm of Dodge County Environmental Services, disagrees with Trom Eayrs' assessment of what the county is doing.

Some of the problems outlined in the plan include dangerous air emissions, irresponsible use of ground water resources and overall water quality. But, Trom Eayrs finds nothing in the proposed comp plan that will stop the growth of those problems.

"People need to wake up and see what is occurring in their own backyard," Trom Eayrs said.

The county held a public information meeting on the proposed comp plan on Feb. 20. Since that time, Trom Eayrs has shared substantial documents and comments with the county regarding the comp plan. She pointed out that the county has had several months to consider the comments from DCCC, but she claims the county has not made any effort to address the serious concerns.

Specifically, Trom Eayrs is concerned about the 53-acre minimum. The county has a density limit on dwellings constructed on less than 53 acres in the agricultural district. Yet, she points out, the county allows for the construction of factory farms on "postage-stamp parcels" of just five acres. "This is idiotic,"

Trom Eayrs says. "Many citizens in Dodge County are third, fourth and fifth generation families and, by birthright, should have the right to live in rural areas that their ancestors settled."

In regards to factory farms, the draft report acknowledges that both farm owners and non-farm owners have expressed concerns about the number of animal feedlots in their neighborhood and related impacts on water quality and air quality. "While the draft report acknowledges that there is a problem with factory farms, county leadership does not make a concerted effort to change direction in order to solve this serious problem," Trom Eayrs said.

DODGE COUNTY PUBLIC HEARING
Hearing will focus on county's
Comprehensive Plan
For the next decade
Wednesday, Aug. 7
7 p.m.
Government Services Building
Mantorville

With land use and water quality problems, Trom Eayrs said the county acknowledges the problem, but "there is no effort by the county to address high nitrates in the Comprehensive Plan." She added there is no effort by the county to address manure management or air emissions from area factory farms.

"Dodge County continues to ignore the environmental degradation of Minnesota waters and public health consequences due to the size and concentration of factory farms," Trom Eayrs said. "When will Dodge County officials put the citizens of this county first, not pigs?"

Trom Eayrs accuses county officials of giving the agricultural industry "preference over our own citizens." She said she feels county leaders have been "irresponsible as far as permitting factory farms" in the county. "I think they are duck-

ing their responsibility," she said. "The fox is in charge in Dodge County, and the fox is determined to stay in charge in Dodge County. We're determined to call them out."

But, Gamm says the county has taken some proactive steps in dealing with concerns raised by DCCC. He said the draft plan includes a number of implement actions. Some of them include: review of options for increasing rural housing opportunities while protecting prime agricultural land and consideration of new Groundwater Protection Overlay Zoning District with a purpose to further protect vulnerable drinking water supplies from pollutants. Gamm also points out the county is working with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to implement its Nitrogen Management Plan to protect surface water and groundwater.

The Comprehensive Plan is an in-depth analysis of countywide goals and aspirations. The plan defines future policy and action for a wide variety of issues including land use, housing, economic development, transportation, broadband technology, natural resources and environment, recreation and history and culture. The plan, which was last revised in 2001, enables the county to adopt and enforce land use controls including zoning.

The county received more than 827 written comments from landowners and other interested parties, including DCCC, according to Mark Gamm of Dodge County Environmental Services. He points out that everyone has an additional opportunity to comment on the draft plan at the upcoming public hearing.

The Dodge County Planning Commission will meet Wednesday, Aug. 7 at 7 p.m. in the south wing of the Government Services Building in Mantorville for the purpose of adopting amendments to the Comp Plan. Public comment will be received during the public hearing portion of the meeting. When the public hearing is closed, the Commission will act on the requests.

Letters: A cougar is no surprise in factory farm country | Twin Cities Pioneer Press

By Letter Writers | letters@pioneerpress.com |

June 14, 2019 at 5:08 am

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It's no surprise that a cougar was spotted recently near Dodge Center in Dodge County, Minnesota. This isn't the first time that a cougar has been sighted in the area; one was observed a few months ago near our family farm in Westfield Township.

Our farm is surrounded by 11 swine factory farms in a three-mile radius. Dead animals from area factory farms are left to rot in open composting sheds, rather than using a rendering service. Area corporate factory farms are havens for predators such as cougars that are searching for an easy meal, placing rural communities, children and pets at risk.

When will local citizens understand the dangers associated with corporate factory farms and challenge the foolishness of public officials who approve these facilities?

Brad Trom, Blooming Prairie

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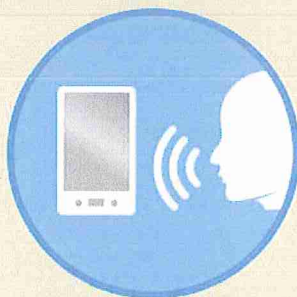
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MINNESOTA SAFETY COUNCIL

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Mower County Free Fair

August 6-11, 2019

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Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 7:30 am-10:00 pm; Sunday 7:30 am-5:30 pm

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Schedule of events is current as of July 11, 2019 and subject to change.

This publication is brought to you by the

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Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of all information contained in this guide.
We apologize for any incorrect information that was inadvertently published.

Court of Appeals hears dairy farm case

BY BRIAN TODD
news@agrnews.com

ST. PAUL — A three-judge panel heard oral arguments in a lawsuit against the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency on July 17, and when a verdict is delivered, it could spell the end of a planned dairy expansion in Winona County.

The Minnesota Center on Environmental Advocacy and Land Stewardship Project filed an appeal against the MPCA's Jan. 4 decision to grant a permit to Daley Farms for its proposed expansion of the dairy and approve the findings of an environmental assessment worksheet.

MCEA and LSP argued that the state should have required a more stringent environmental impact statement.

"If it's mandated we do an EIS, it'd kill the project," said Ben Daley, co-owner and operator at Daley Farm in Lewiston.

Amelia Vohs, an attorney for the MCEA, said the big picture issue in the appeal is that the MPCA did not follow its own guidelines in determining an EIS was not needed.

"Minnesota law requires all permits to ensure all recipients can meet the requirements of Minnesota law," Vohs said.

To that end, she added, there's no scientific way to prove the Daleys can avoid the kind of irreversible pollution the MCEA, LSP and hundreds of individuals cited as a concern during the EAW public comment period.

Vohs said the MPCA essentially contradicted itself when it approved the permit and did not require an EIS but then asked for the state to conduct a general environmental impact statement study of nitrates in the karst region of southeastern Minnesota.

While the Legislature did not approve funding for the that study, Vohs said the fact that the MPCA sees nitrates as a problem — and the Daleys' expansion would create millions

of additional gallons of liquid manure, a source of nitrates — shows the agency recognized the danger of allowing the Daley Farm expansion project while it simultaneously approved that same expansion.

"You can't prove there's not going to be pollution caused by manure from the site," Vohs said.

Daley said the appeal by the MCEA and LSP is just one legal hurdle the family farm is facing in its efforts to get its project underway.

After the MPCA gave its approval, the Winona County Board of Adjustments in February denied a request for a variance by the Daleys to exceed the county's 1,500 animal unit cap for feedlots. The Daleys have filed an appeal in district court, but that case is still in early stages; a case number has not been assigned and a date for a hearing has not been set.

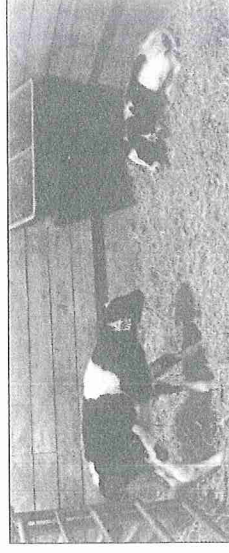
Daley said his attorneys are still gathering data from Winona County through a freedom of information request.

Meanwhile, the Winona County Board of Commissioners has — and likely will again — discuss the merits of the county's animal unit cap in the face of the changing nature of dairy farming.

From 2007 to 2017, the county lost nearly half its smaller dairy farms, those with herds of 199 or fewer cows — dropping from 212 to 118 — and 55 percent of the total number of cows on dairies of this size range, according to the U.S. Census of Agriculture.

Instead, the dairy industry has shifted toward larger dairy operations. In Winona County, the largest dairies, those of 500 cows or more, increased from seven farms to 10 during that time, with the number of cows going from 5,590 to 7,312, an increase of 30.8 percent, the census reported.

"If you had an animal cap in the entire country, I could see that working," Daley said. "But they're trying to change the whole dairy industry in this one county."



File photo

A pair of newborn calves enjoy their first day at Daley Farms dairy in Lewiston in this Oct. 23, 2018, file photo. The dairy, currently home to more than 1,400 cows that are milked daily, is hoping to expand to roughly 4,600 cows.