

Cooperative planning yields smart growth

BY BENJAMIN GOHS
EDITOR

Who cares about clean water and responsible land use?

Apparently five townships, the city and county of Charlevoix do.

"Communities have minimal standards for setbacks and greenbelt provisions, some of which are not adequate," said Charlevoix County Planner Larry Sullivan. "By ensuring good standards for both of those, you will help minimize the potential nutrient flow into Lake Charlevoix and Lake Michigan."

For nearly three years, the Charlevoix Area Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Smart Growth Land Use Initiative team of municipalities has worked to create uniform language across the proverbial board of local governmental districts to ensure setbacks and greenbelts are adequate.

A setback is the minimum distance a building may be constructed from property lines, other buildings or water.

A greenbelt is an area of natural or fallow vegetation left at the water's edge to help prevent runoff of oil, antifreeze and other harmful chemicals into lakes, streams and rivers.

Charlevoix City Planner Mike Spencer added that setbacks and greenbelts aid in

controlling flooding and erosion in addition to filtering contaminants like pesticides and fertilizers from water runoff.

"Being an area that relies heavily on tourism, protecting water quality is very important to our local economy," Spencer stated in an e-mailed response to questions. "Many people feel our water is one of the main reasons people visit here."

Spencer has said that, if this language is approved by the municipalities involved, it will give jurisdictions the legal authority to protect the water and ensure responsible land use.

Priorities of this voluntary venture include protecting the environment, preserving aesthetics, ensuring appropriate economic development, maintaining what they refer to as "small-town" character and improving traffic flow.

"As a general rule in Planning it is always important for different jurisdictions such as

cities, townships and counties to come together collectively to deal with planning issues because they usually affect everyone involved," Spencer wrote. "For example, Lake Charlevoix borders the City of Charlevoix, Charlevoix Township, Hayes Township, etcetera, so for just the city or one of the townships to take measures to protect water quality that is obviously not as good as all of the jurisdictions coming together and taking measures to protect water quality."

He added, "A collective, cooperative approach to this with everyone involved will do way more to protect water quality in Lake Charlevoix than just one jurisdiction. What we do in the City affects the surrounding townships and vice versa."

The estimated cost of this program is \$27,500, with the bulk of the cost paid for by grants: Partnerships for

Change and Frey Foundation gave \$19,500, the Charlevoix County Community Foundation contributed \$5,000, and the municipalities of townships Charlevoix, Eveline, Hayes, Marion and Norwood and Charlevoix City and County are covering the remaining \$3,000.

An example to changes and additions which could be approved by Charlevoix City Council, its planning commission and the other members of the initiative include:

- The high-water mark, often used as a measuring point for setbacks, would no longer be 581.0 National Vertical Geodetic Datum, but 581.5 International Great Lake Datum which basically means an established level of high-water mark equal to the 10-year flood limit line;
- The greenbelt requirement for "Natural" trees, shrubbery and other vegetation has been

changed to "native" types of the same;

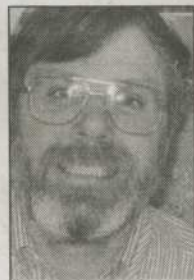
- The greenbelt shall include all land within 50 feet of the ordinary high-water mark;
- No structures, other than boat ramps, docks and retaining walls, will be allowed;
- Aside from "reasonable sanding" of beaches, dredging and filling is prohibited;
- Pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers and supplemental nutrients are prohibited;
- Yard and garden waste may not be stored or burned;
- Greenbelts must be shown on plot plans/site plans to develop waterfront property;
- Neither septic tanks or septic fields are allowed within the greenbelt.

While water quality has been

one of the main focuses early in the process, Sullivan said other issues will be considered in the future.

"The thought is that this is going to be an ongoing process," he said. "Farmland preservation, regulation of big box stores and a half-dozen other things will probably come up in the future."

Sullivan added, "The idea is for the community to continue to meet and ... bring up what their concerns are on an individual basis and see where there is a commonality of concerns and then look at ordinances and see what makes sense and implement those useful changes to the ordinance."



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