

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Steve Johnson called the meeting to order at 6:01pm with the following members present: Chris Carlson, Kendal Braun, Deanna Soderberg, Amy Birnbaum, Loren Lueck, and Steve Johnson.

Absent members: John Weiers

Zoning staff present: Keenan Hayes, Jessica Sonsteby

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIENCE

Steve Johnson led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES:

SEPTEMBER 8TH 2025

Mr. Lueck made a motion to approve the minutes and was seconded by Mr. Carlson to approve the September 8, 2025, Planning Commission and Board of Adjustments meeting as presented.

Motion Carried unanimously 6-0

OLD BUSINESS:

CONSIDERATION OF A REQUEST BY MILLE LACS COUNTY FOR A DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE AMENDMENT REGARDING ZONING

Mr. Hayes reads the staff report and written comment:

Seth Monroe: 505 1st Street, Princeton MN

Dear Commission Members:

I was recently made aware that Mille Lacs County has requested for the Development Ordinance to be amended to align with the Comprehensive Plan that was adopted in November 2024. I unfortunately could not attend the public hearing the meeting where this will be discussed, so I would like to pass along my concerns regarding the amendment to the development ordinance.

The central location of our land surveying/civil engineering firm at 505 First Street, Princeton, MN, 55371 forces us to navigate dozens of County, City, and Township zoning/development ordinances, seeing both ordinances that work as intended, and various others that do not. I unfortunately see items in the current proposed amendment that align with ordinances that do not work as intended.

My first concern with the proposed amendment is the large-scale rezoning of most of the County to an AG (Agricultural) zoning. Mille Lacs County covers such a large geographic area in a North-South direction extending from the outer suburb growth of the northern Twin Cities suburban area to the Southern extents of the northern Minnesota wilderness. I understand the need for areas of the County to be preserved with low density and tillable agricultural land. However, I believe placing the Southern extents of the County (Bogus Brook, Milo, Borgholm, Milaca Townships), which are primed for growth from the recent and ongoing improvements to the Highway 169 corridor, in the same category as the more northern Townships in the County is a mistake. Most of the requests for land splits and development we receive that fall under Mille Lacs County Development Ordinance jurisdiction lie within Bogus Brook, Milo, Borgholm, and Milaca Townships. As proceeding North across the County from there, we receive less requests for land splits or development. I believe this is a clear indication of the areas of the County that should be preserved for rural residential growth and not smothered by large lot size requirements that the AG (Agricultural) zoning requires.

My next concern with the proposed amendment is the large lot size requirement being given to the AG (Agricultural) zoning district. We receive many requests every year from long-term residents that wish to subdivide off the existing homestead from the tillable land so they can continue living in their home and sell the tillable land to continue to be worked by others. As most know, the homestead area of a farmer's land is generally quite small as they wish to produce as much land as possible. A 10-acre minimum lot area and 600-foot minimum lot width would force many of these such "homestead" parcels to include a portion of the tillable land that would then be removed from production. These lot size requirements would also limit the number of parcels that could be subdivided off for a family member to live adjacent to the long-term resident and assist with the continued production/utilization of the tillable land. I believe these proposed lot sizes will unintentionally institute a density of as little as 2 parcels per 40-acre parcel (with one side of road frontage) to as many as 4 parcels per 40-acre parcel

(with two sides of road frontage). Is this really what is being intended? Many ordinances from adjacent Counties/Townships have moved away from these stifling density requirements because of large backlashes from residents.

My final concern is regarding the possible financial impact this large-scale rezoning and lot size requirement increase may have. I am not a resident of Mille Lacs County but often find myself listening to residents complain about the large tax burden that is left on their shoulders living in Mille Lacs County. The low volume of taxable parcels (with many of the parcels being large enough to qualify for reduced tax rates) combined with the amount of necessary resources required, leave the large tax burden on fewer residents. The proposed rezoning and lot size requirements will only limit the amount of taxable parcels to share in the tax burden.

Given the concerns I have presented, I would request the planning commission further investigate the proposed zoning ordinance amendment changes and provide clarification if things may want to be revised to prevent unintended consequences.

Public Comment opens: 6:07 pm

Craig Wensmann; Bogart, Pederson & Associates, Inc; 13076 First St, Becker, MN 55308; a surveyor that has worked in Mille Lacs County for 26 years, is on the Steering Committee for Sherburne County, has concerns about the new agricultural zoning district lot size minimum. Mr. Wensmann states that in order to conserve farmland, the lots should be broken into 2–3 acres, so the farmland surrounding the original homestead can still be farmed and won't contain any parts of the tillable farmland. Mr. Wensmann states that he has noticed that most of his lot splits are coming from Milo, Bogus Brook, Borgholm, and Milaca townships. Mr. Wensmann is seeing a trend that there are no first-time homes available in Elk River, so the hometown people are moving away from their hometowns to find these homes in Mille Lacs County because the real estate is more affordable. Mr. Wensmann states that if we were able to keep the lots smaller and more affordable, then Mille Lacs County would generate a larger tax base. Mr. Wensmann states that most of the new zoning districts will be zoned as agricultural, and 6% are rural residential and 2% are transition zones, so with most of the land being a minimum lot size of 10 acres, it will cause issues around the cities that have parcels that are not going to be zoned rural residential or a transition district.

Mr. Johnson asked Mr. Wensmann what he has seen for other counties' minimum lot size requirements for an agriculture residential zoning district. Mr. Wensmann states that the optimal size would be 2–3 acres in order to support two septic systems and to be able to cut out all the workable farm land.

Mr. Johnson asked Mr. Wensmann his opinion on the transition zones because Mr. Johnson sees them as a golden platter for the cities to annex, and he disapproves of this. Mr. Wensmann said that if the parcels around the cities stay agricultural land, the cities would more likely annex those. If the properties around the cities were rural residential with smaller acres allowed, these parcels could be developed within the County and not be annexed by the city later in the future.

Kristie Bernard; 9998 110th St, Milaca; a relator in the area who works with many families that want to split up the farmland with a farm homestead on the property. Mrs. Bernard finds that many of the original farm homesteads once split contained 2–3 acres. When the parcels were split larger, she noticed that only 2–3 acres were kept up and the rest of the property was overgrown with weeds. The 10 acre proposal for agriculture is too large for the aging population to take care of. Mrs. Bernard would like to see the new agricultural zoning district have a smaller acre requirement rather than 10 acres.

Curt Bekius; 11796 102nd Ave, Milaca, MN; Bogus Brook Supervisor has received several complaints about newly developed homes that are having water intrusion issue from being built on old farm land. Mr. Bekius would like to see that the new agricultural zoning district stays at the 10 acre minimum.

Public comment closes at 6:32pm

Mr. Carlson asked if a property owner who came to the zoning office and wanted to split a parcel currently zoned as agricultural would be allowed to split the parcel into smaller sections other than 10 acres. Mr. Hayes says the property owner would need to apply to re-zone the parcel into rural residential in order to create parcels smaller than 10 acres. Mr. Hayes states that his research from other counties shows that their Ag minimum lot size is typically closer to five acres and believes that five acres would be sufficient, but not less than two acres.

Mr. Hayes states that this framework is good to move forward with, and we can make changes in the future if we need to.

Mr. Carlson stated that Borgholm Township and the City of Milaca had a meeting and asked them what

their 10-year plan was and stated they didn't have one.

Mr. Lueck likes the five acres better than ten acres, stating that property owners are able to maintain the property better than ten acres.

Mr. Braun prefers to see the Ag district stay at 10 acres because the people he spoke with don't want to see large development happening near them. Mr. Johnson doesn't agree with the proposed 10 acres and would like to see it around five acres. Mr. Johnson says this is a fluid document and changes can be made if needed. Ms. Birnbaum also agrees that the Ag district could be five acres.

Mr. Johnson opposes the transition zone all together and would like to see it removed.

Ms. Soderberg makes a motion to approve this request with the change of the minimum lot size for the Agriculture district to five acres and to a minimum lot size width of 300' feet. Seconded by Mr. Lueck.

Vote 5-1 Mr. Braun opposes. Motion passes.

NEW BUSINESS:

CONSIDERATION OF A REQUEST BY MICHAEL & DEBORAH TABBERT FOR A PUBLIC ROAD FRONTAGE VARIANCE

Mr. Hayes reads the staff report.

No written comment.

Deborah Tabbert; 35008 Quail Rd; Applicant explains how Quail Road was part of the County road at one point in time and then, over time, the county and township wouldn't claim the road.

Public comment opens 6:48pm

Josh True; 34994 Quail Rd, Onamia, MN; Works for the City of Onamia, and they have a proposal to adopt Quail road and maintain it to get access to their parcel 14-005-1601. The City of Onamia has been maintaining Quail in the past.

Public Comment Closes: 6:49pm

Mr. Lueck makes a motion to approve the request as submitted. Seconded by Ms. Birnbaum.

Vote 6-0. Motion Passes

CONSIDERATION OF A REQUEST BY JOSHUA BREITUNG FOR A NON-CONFORMING STRUCTURE DECK EXPANSION VARIANCE

Mr. Hayes reads the staff report.

No written comment.

Jean Breitung; 5301 Oak St, the applicant's son is here to speak on his behalf about the deck expansion needed for ADA compliance.

Public comment opens and closes 6:53pm

Mrs. Birnbaum makes a motion to approve the request as submitted. Seconded by Mr. Lueck.

Vote 6-0. Motion Passes

CONSIDERATION OF A REQUEST BY JUSTIS JEDLICKI FOR A PUBLIC ROAD FRONTAGE VARIANCE

Mr. Hayes reads the staff report.

No written comment.

Applicant isn't present.

Public comment opens and closes 6:55pm

Mr. Lueck makes a motion to approve the request as submitted. Seconded by Mr. Carlson.

Vote 6-0. Motion Passes

CONSIDERATION OF A REQUEST BY GEORGE SELL FOR A SINGLE-FAMILY DWELLING ADDITION VARIANCE

Mr. Hayes reads the staff report.

No written comment.

George Sell; 20390 Contrast Rd, the contractor for the property owner, is present to discuss the non-conforming single-family dwelling addition. They intend to move the front door from the north side, which is lake side, to the south side because of the high winds coming off the lake.

Public comment opens and closes 6:58pm

Mrs. Soderberg makes a motion to approve the request as submitted. Seconded by Mr. Braun.

Vote 6-0. Motion Passes

OTHER BUSINESS:

None

ADJOURNMENT.

Mrs. Birnbaum makes a motion to adjourn at 6:58 pm and is seconded by Mr. Carlson
Motion carried unanimously 6-0.