

News from the Rum River Watershed

Development in Isanti County

Volume #2 Issue #6
November/December 2006

Contents:

- This Issue: Three Perspectives on Development in Isanti County
- Vision/Mission Statements of NRRW and FRR
- Signing up for the NRRW newsletter
- Internet link to the NRRW newsletter

Upcoming Issues:

- January/February: Special Creativity Issue!
- March/April: Phenology! On the Timing of Things
- May/June: Environmental Groups in the Rum River Watershed and Neighboring Watersheds

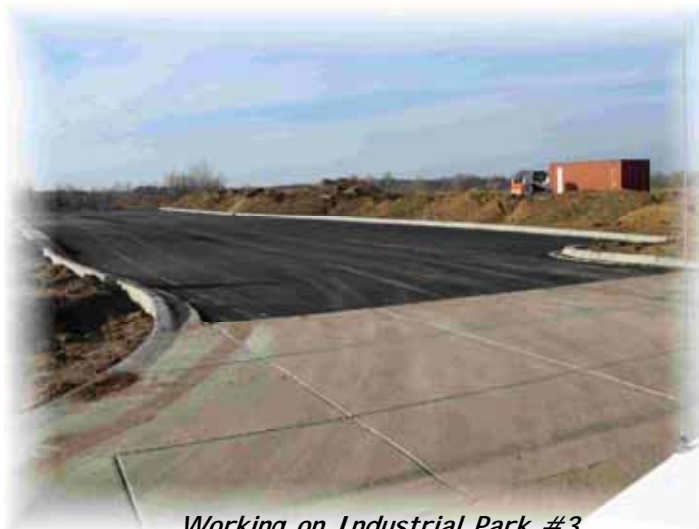
From the Editor:

How will we cope as the world's population approaches 7 billion, or even the 9 billion predicted within our lifetimes? How do we maintain the agricultural and natural resources necessary to sustain life, given such population pressures? Do we control population pressure by giving in to allowing genocide or letting other people populations become devastated by hunger and disease? I am sure none of us really think so – but what is the solution?

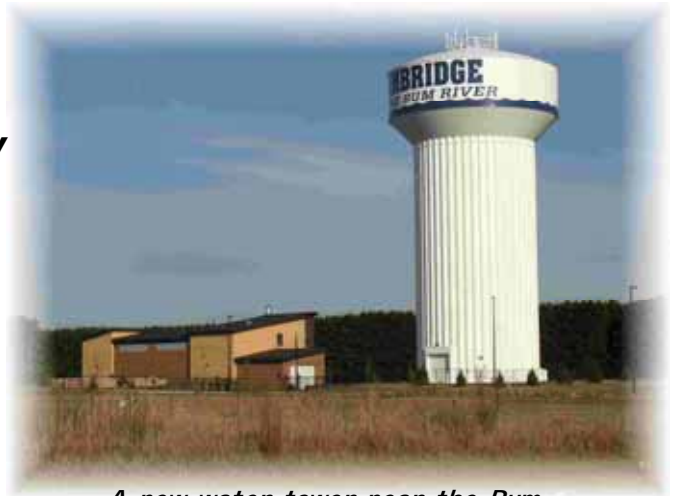
I didn't pose these questions in exactly this form to the following three writers. I only asked them to analyze the impact of development on Isanti County from their own vantage-points. This editorial just crystallized as I was trying to fall asleep tonight – and couldn't! You know how that goes. But, these are the concerns I think we all need to address in some way or another in our personal lives.

I think even more important than "saving the world" is each person's personal battle and victory in working to figure things out and act where he or she is. We may not be able to solve the problems of the whole world, but in solving some of our own challenges at the personal and local level, the world will benefit. Remember, each little watershed ties into a larger one, and the largest one of all is our Earth.

As Hillary Clinton once said... "It takes a village..."



*Working on Industrial Park #3
in Cambridge*



A new water tower near the Rum

Views from the Community

John Schlagel

John Schlagel is well known throughout the Isanti County community – most often seen washing up the dishes at the numerous community fundraisers held at the Christ the King Parish Hall in Cambridge. He was responsible for founding and developing “Schlagel Inc.”, and in his retirement does such things as sit on the Cambridge City Council and, on the side, has posed for a calendar...

When Kriste Ericsson contacted me about writing this article, I asked her what she was wanted the article to cover. She asked that I write the article from the viewpoint of being an elected city official and how I view the following:

- The advantages and disadvantages of development
- Development in general
- How development affects the environment and the health of our watershed area

So to start off, I am a member of the city council in Cambridge. Please keep in mind as you read this that I am **NOT speaking** for the Cambridge city council nor the City of Cambridge. I am only giving my personal opinions.

When a city official is elected, they take an oath of office. A condensed version of that oath is: “I solemnly swear to support the Constitution of the United States, the Constitution of the State of Minnesota, and to discharge faithfully the duties of the office of this city to the best of my judgment and ability, so help me God.”

From the League of Minnesota Cities handbook you will find the following: “Council members should devote their official time to problems of basic policy and act as liaisons between the city and the general public. Council members should be concerned, not only with the conduct of daily affairs, but also with the future development of the city.”

So what does this mean? To me it means that I am responsible to the City of Cambridge first, in accordance with the laws of our nation and our state. If I was a township supervisor then I would be responsible to my township first, in accordance with the laws of our nation and our state. Neither of these mean that an elected official shouldn't also look at the “bigger picture”, indeed we should.

The advantages and disadvantages of development.

If you think about where you or others you know work and shop, the most likely answer will be in a city. For thousands of years cities have been the centers for areas such as trade, education, and health care. The higher densities of both population and land use in cities create a natural attraction for these. A rule of thumb for non-Metro counties is that 2/3rds of the population chooses to live in a rural area and 1/3rd in an urban (city) area. Even if you choose to live in a rural area, you would find it difficult to live without the amenities and jobs a city provides.

Most every city wants to attract businesses and, if they are large enough, will devote some city staff time towards this. Some cities do actively work to attract residential development but normally this only occurs because the city is in an area that is losing population.

In Minnesota, for every dollar value of your home, a business typically pays 50% more in property tax for that same dollar value. This means that if you paid \$2,000 in property taxes, a business worth the exact same amount as your home would pay \$3,000. That same business will normally have much less service needs than the residential home so you can see why most

everyone wants to attract businesses. To attract the typical business you need to have a labor force (employees) and customers. This means that business and residential development normally occur together.

Development in general.

When a typical development occurs, the developer contacts city staff to find out things like zoning, access to water and sewer, building requirements, etc. This is true whether it is a residential, commercial, or industrial development. The developer is only looking to build because of a real or perceived need. The staff gives the developer the information based on the various local and state requirements. There is no involvement by elected officials (city council) or appointed officials (planning commission) until later in the process.

Suppose you wanted to build a \$160,000 house and you went to the appropriate government unit in charge of zoning and planning in your area. Let's say you are told the following:

- There will be a \$2,770 building permit fee
- There will be a \$1,560 park dedication fee
- There will be a \$2,163 sewer access charge and a \$1,958 water access charge
- You must provide a complete set of drawings, including showing where water drainage from your property will go and that it won't harm other property owners
- Etc., etc., etc. (there will be LOTS of etc.)

So you leave mad, confused, and frustrated. You complain about the bureaucracy of it all, that they are just trying to get rich, that they don't want development, and finally "I am going to build someplace else!" I only use this example so you can see that if you make things more restrictive and expensive than other communities, then you as a community are not competitive and you probably will not attract development. It also means that you as an elected official or government employee have a fine line to walk and it always comes down to some type of compromise between money, environment, and personal freedom.

How development affects the environment and the health of our watershed area.

It may exist but I cannot think of how any development cannot have a negative effect on the environment and our watershed. This is true for any development, be it commercial, residential, farming, and so on. If you live along a river or lake, is that water really better off because you and other houses built next to it? If you build a house or business and have rain running off it and your driveway or parking area, where do you think the water finally ends up? Do you think the entire state of Minnesota should be the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness? If you think development is just bad, do you think the state or federal government is going to pass a law forbidding development?

When a county, township, or city official is elected, I am not aware of any mandatory training or existing experience required that will help them in carrying out their duties. If you are willing and able, you can attend workshops, where you can learn more about specific subjects. You can try to be proactive and visionary but this almost always takes money (taxes) and will result in some loss of personal freedom (no, you can't just do whatever you want.)

To me, public opinion is really the main influence as to what we as elected officials do. If the public says we need to do a better job protecting the environment, then most likely that will indeed happen. If the public says nothing, then we will assume things must be okay.

I think a great example of "public opinion" was when the lake associations near Cambridge complained about city development occurring near their respective lakes. While they may still feel frustrated, they still brought about change. The City of Cambridge did adopt higher

standards than required by the state, and elected officials and staff are more knowledgeable about the issue.

I will end by restating the two most important things I wrote in this article.

- Public opinion is really the main influence
- It always comes down to some type of compromise between money, environment, and personal freedom

George Johnson

George Johnson is a developer par excellence in the Cambridge area. He is also co-founder and on the board of READ Ministries, a group which helps churches in the Ukraine establish libraries of religious literature used by ministers and the public. As a hobby he lends a hand providing building materials for log cabins at Trout Lake Camp, located north of Lake Mille Lacs.

In 2005 the City of Cambridge commissioned the demographer most frequently used by commercial developers and leading retailers to study the future growth potential of the greater Cambridge area retail market, and area that includes Pine, Kanabec and Isanti Counties, and portions of Mille Lacs, Anoka and Chisago Counties. The report projected substantial growth over the next decade.

Households in the retail trade area have increased steadily over the past thirty years. This trend continued between 2000 and 2004 when households increased from 30,749 to 36,430, and annual growth rates of 4.33%. Between 2004 and 2009, households are expected to increase to 46,105, a growth rate of 4.82 percent. Beyond 2009 growth will continue.

Residential growth drives the need for infrastructure such as water, sewer, storm drainage as well as schools, medical, professional and other services. Developers need to know as much as possible about future growth trends to determine when a market is ready to support a particular kind of business.

People often ask “when we will have an Olive Garden, Red Lobster, Kohl’s, or Best Buy?”

The answer is, “As soon as the market can support it. We’re getting closer.” Office Max is building now. County Market is changing to a full-blown CUB. Isanti has some very choice commercial sites. Some of the commercial development that will be serving this area will locate in Isanti. A new McDonalds and motel are on the drawing board and new banks are opening soon in Isanti. There will be more commercial development in both Cambridge and Isanti.

Commercial development is significant because that segment of the economy yields far more tax revenue than the costs of servicing. Communities with little commercial tax base will have fewer services or higher taxes or both.

On the other hand, residential development has a negative tax/cost ratio. It generally costs more to provide services from the Cities, Townships, County and School District than the residential sector provides. A community that has a large, growing commercial sector alleviates tax burden on its residents, and provides the funds needed for services that would not otherwise be available.

Cambridge also has a very substantial industrial sector. THE CAMBRIDGE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COMPANY was established in 1956, just 50 years ago. This group of interested community leaders have acquired three different industrial parks and provided the foundation for steady growth in good manufacturing jobs for the region. Industry not only provides much needed tax base, but our manufacturing jobs provide the source of revenue to

sustain the economy as a whole. Every manufacturing job supports several jobs in the service, education and professional sectors.

In recent years the cities of Cambridge and Isanti have worked to develop provide sites and other support for industrial growth. That planning has paid off with a steadily growing industrial sector. Two new industrial buildings are under construction in Cambridge. Each will bring new jobs and families to the area to sustain a steady, healthy growth.

Some of the earlier industries to come to Cambridge were Schlager Inc., TEAM Industries, VanPro, Cambridge Metal and Plastics, Arrow Tank, and Utility Chemical. These all started with three to six employees. Today these and other industries in Cambridge provide thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in payroll that flows through the entire local economy.

Environmental Impact

Is development polluting our rivers and lakes? Fortunately the DNR and the cities that issue permits for development are looking after the environment. Developers are required to provide erosion control, adequate sewage disposal and to manage rainwater run-off to prevent negative impact on the ecosystem. Everywhere you see significant residential, commercial or industrial development you are likely to see either a natural holding pond or a man-made pond that has been designed into the project to control run-off. The ponds function to control the flow of run-off, thus preventing overburdening of city storm water systems. They also serve as settling ponds, allowing the heavier contaminants to sink so the run-off that finds its way to our rivers and streams is cleaner.

County Economic Development Authority

Some of the choicest industrial sites in Isanti County are not in any incorporated city. Some industry needs rail siding. All industry needs good all-weather roads, and adequate water for fire protection. The incorporated cities cannot provide those infrastructure needs outside of their corporate limits.

It is very gratifying to know that Isanti County is moving toward the establishment of a County E.D.A. The County can now participate in nurturing the growth of industry and jobs in an orderly and controlled fashion that also protects our quality of life.

Some observations by Aldo Leopold:

"We Americans have not yet experienced a bearless, wolfless, eagleless, catless woods. We yearn for more deer and more pines, and we will probably get them. But do we realize that to get them, as the Germans have, at the expense of their wild environment and their wild enemies, is to get very little indeed?" (1936) - 7

Leopold, Aldo. 1936. *Naturschutz in Germany*. *Birdlore* 38:102-111.

In September (of 1936) Leopold took a pack trip along the Rio Gavilán in the Chihuahua sierra of northern Mexico. "It was here that I first clearly realized that land is an organism, that all my life I had seen only sick land, whereas here was a biota still in perfect aboriginal health. The term 'unspoiled wilderness' took on a new meaning."

Leopold, Aldo. *Forward*. Unpublished manuscript, Aldo Leopold papers, Series 6, Box 17. University Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

George Wimmer

George Wimmer is a relative new-comer to Isanti County, but has become very active at the local level, participating on the Isanti City Council, and now mayor-elect for that City. He was once co-chair of the Isanti/Cambridge Bike/Walk Trail Committee, and tells me he was a sponsor for the Artic Plunge Fund Raiser (the what?!! Tell us more, George!)

Isanti County is a partially blank canvas that many developers, cities, property owners and the County Government are all painting on. One may paint a residential development here and an industrial park there with a commercial zone thrown in. Developers and private business need to maximize profits and landowners are looking to cash out and live off of the nest egg they have been nurturing. The City and County Governments are trying to plan for “sustainable development”.

That term “sustainable development” is difficult to define. When we add environmental concerns to the mix it gets even tougher. I have been working on the Isanti City Council and Planning Commission as we have been shaping our comprehensive plan. Areas of land are being zoned as residential, industrial, commercial, public/semi-public and open-space/wetland.

The tough part is open space, including wetlands, which may affect landowner's property value. This is where government entities have to put their money where the priorities are. There are numerous programs I will not go into at this point that help compensate landowners for property left in a natural state.

Now we are back to that pesky term of “sustainable development.” The City of Isanti is currently not land-locked by other municipalities. This has opened up a wide range of territory to develop. The only current boundaries are the lines of demarcation with Cambridge and the Rum River. The Rum could be crossed but the cost is prohibitive. This has led to some expansion to the north and south of the City core and dramatic potential future growth to the east of Highway 65. The limit on growth is currently viewed in light of the sewer and water capacity standard.

Sustainable growth must be married to a livable community. We could easily put row after row of high density housing along our streets. It would be easy to service and maintain. This, however, would not be a livable community. That type of city would eventually crumble under its own weight.

A livable community must incorporate open space and bring balance to our need for housing and the natural environment around us. Any future development must provide a functioning ecosystem that helps protect our drinking water and natural resources.

Isanti is blessed with several brooks that flow through the city to the Rum River. This gives nice natural buffers between some developments. We need to extend and increase these natural areas throughout the city and especially as we grow east of Highway 65.

As a city, Isanti can work with developers to create model developments. An example would be light commercial development abutting County Road 5, blending into town homes, with open space and wildlife corridors buffering single family homes. The open spaces and wildlife corridors need to connect throughout the city of Isanti and eventually meet up with the Rum River. This is a working example of sustainable development.

Having open-space abut residential areas will help maintain property values. This leads us into a critical part of sustainable communities. A city or county must generate enough of a tax base to pay for the services needed by residents. Commercial and industrial development provides the majority of this tax base in a financially healthy community. Commercial and industrial development can also do their part to ensure ecologically sound practices. Rain gardens, green roofs and renewable energy sources can all be part of sustainable business development.

We need to remember that once a building is constructed, that parcel of land will more than likely never be reverted to open space again. Ensuring open spaces today will not only protect our environment but will also have strong financial benefits by maintaining property values. We must always keep in mind what we want our community to look like for generations to come.

In the 1940s an older and wiser Leopold understood that the preservation of a few museum pieces is not enough. He challenged us to a radical change in our thinking.

As we all know, the first rule in successful tinkering is to save all the parts. Wilderness may be an uneconomic part, but it is not unimportant. "(R)aw wilderness," wrote Leopold, gives definition and meaning to human enterprise." (see page 8 for citation.)

***Now accepting submissions for our
Annual Creativity Issue!***

*Coming out in January/February 2007
We take submissions from all readers -
anything that can be put in a newsletter -
drawings, photos, prose and poetry -
you name it!*

*We have eight pages - if submissions snowball, we'll
look for a place to include yours in upcoming issues.*

***Submissions due by January 7, 2007.
For more information contact
Kriste at RumRiverNews@Yahoo.com.***

A Couple of Definitions from the Internet

Sustainable Development: Development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Development that is not detrimental to earth's natural resources, or one which makes the use of renewable energy sources such as wind energy or solar energy.

www.csbsju.edu/environmentalstudies/curriculum/greenbuildingplan/Green%20Building%20Plan%20p12.htm

Open Space: An undeveloped piece of land adding ecological, scenic or recreational value to an urban area. Open space can be public or private. Examples include forests, marshes and wildlife sanctuaries.

www.opb.org/programs/oregonstory/land_trusts/glossary/

The main objective of a two-day conference in Paraguay, South America, was to clarify the difference in the meanings of the two Spanish words 'sustainable' and 'sostenible', and determine which would be the better word to use when dealing with development issues. "What is the American opinion?" - I was asked.

"Well, actually we have only one word to use for both in English...." I replied ... KE - 2001

Friends of the Rum River meeting: PANCAKE BRUNCH!! Saturday, January 13, 10:00 – Noon, K-BOBs Cafe in Princeton (109 RumRiver Drive, or Main Street) This month special speaker will be Len Price, Executive Director of the “Minnesota Conservation Corps”!! He will speak on their work with youth throughout Minnesota, and we hear provide suggestions on how their group can dovetail projects with FRR in the future! If you can’t make the morning meeting, join us after for a hike along the Rum River in Pioneer Park, south of the bridge in Princeton, down to the Princeton Middle School. Weather-permitting, we may even ski and snowshoe the Rum! For more details contact Kriste at RumRiverNews@yahoo.com, 612-309-5838.

“(A) system of conservation based only on economic self-interest is hopelessly lopsided. It tends to ignore, and thus eventually to eliminate, many elements in the land community that lack commercial value.... It assumes falsely, I think, that the economic parts of the biotic clock will function without the uneconomic parts.” Aldo Leopold, in the essay “The Land Ethic”

Leopold, Aldo, 1970: *A Sand County Almanac: With Essays on Conservation from Round River*. Sierra Club/Ballantine Books, New York, New York. Original work published in 1949 and 1953. (Also source of quote on page 7.)*

*All quotes regarding Leopold in this issue of NRRW were obtained from Craig W. Allen's essay, *The Leopold Legacy and American Wilderness*, pp.25-38, found in:

Thomas Tanner, Ed. 1995. *Aldo Leopold: The Man and His Legacy*. Soil and Water Conservation Society, Ankeny, Iowa. 50th Anniversary Edition, 175 pp.

Mission Statement:

To provide a base of knowledge that we can use to make wise decisions concerning the Rum River Watershed, and to preserve, enhance, and enjoy its resources.

Vision Statement

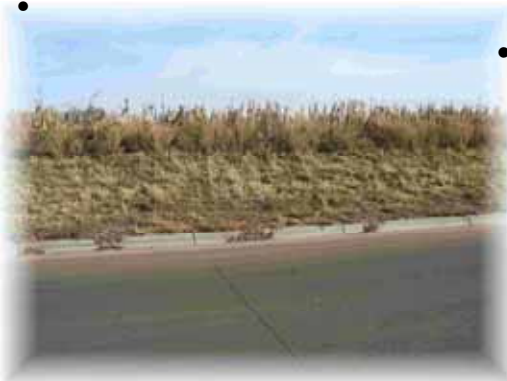
To improve our ability to care for the Rum River Watershed and all of the associated watersheds that make up the Mississippi River system.

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Cornfield targeted for development

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Online link to the newsletter:

www.millelacsswcd.org/water_group_news.htm



Holding pond behind Menards in Cambridge