

Minnehaha County Board of Commissioners

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From the Desk of Commissioner Jeff Barth:

County government is often referred to as the “service station” for government. It is where you go to pay property tax, bail your college buddy out of jail, or get your marriage license (as you look forward to a life of wedded bliss). You don’t do those things in Pierre or at City Hall!

Sometimes people forget another vital county function; Planning and Zoning. It doesn’t seem that important until you need it or a zoning permit affects you. P&Z sets the rules for land use outside of cities and within our County. We ask ourselves, “What is the best use of this land?” It could be best as a residence, a farm, a fertilizer business, a landfill or a winery.

Without a “Plan”, everywhere could be a landfill, pawnshop or sewage lagoon. Minnehaha County has a Planning Commission and the County Commission as decision making bodies with a multi-step process. When an application is submitted for a zoning change or conditional use permit, staff reviews the application before it is heard by the Planning Commission and ultimately by the County Commission. The multiple steps that were just listed provide multiple opportunities for public input. We try to regulate land usage in accordance with state statute for the betterment of everyone. Our plan is not cut in stone. Changes are made to ordinances to it when needed as the years go by and new conditions and businesses emerge.

Change can often be stressful. People will argue, “A certain location has always been a tree farm. I don’t want a mini-storage business there.” The planning commission listens to proponents and opponents then makes a decision. Appeals go to the County Commission and potentially to circuit court. Change happens and while we cannot stop change, we can plan to keep it organized.

One of the biggest problems is someone may say, “The first I heard of this is when my other neighbor told me.” We place signs on property being re-zoned, send letters to the nearest neighbors and publish notice in newspapers. But notice does not make people happy and does not calm their fears. Talking face to face can help a lot.

It has been and continues to be an honor and privilege to be the County Commissioner who serves on the County Planning and Zoning Board. We do our best.

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