

## **Town of Maiden Rock Operating Ordinance Study Committee Minutes for July 1, 2024**

The Operating Ordinance Study Committee met at the Maiden Rock Town Hall on Monday, July 1, 2024. Maryanne called the meeting to order promptly at 6:30. Present were committee members Bruce Thomes, Terry Timm, Cindy Nelson and Judy Krohn. Not present were John Danneker and Kathy Arndt. Guests in attendance were Rob Meyer, Jerry Duden, Teresa Davis and Danny Akenson (via telephone).

The meeting was properly noticed in 3 locations by Bruce Thomes. The group recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Our first bit of business was to have a phone conversation with Danny Akenson, field organizer for Grass Roots Organizing for Western Wisconsin (GRO-WW). GRO-WW is a non-profit 501c4 advocacy organization representing citizens from 7 western Wisconsin counties. The organization became involved with the proposal for expansion of Ridge Breeze Dairy in 2023, when citizens asked for a County moratorium to study the impacts of such an expansion on the water quality of local surface, ground and well water for area residents, and testified to those concerns at Land Conservation Committee hearings last Spring. When the moratorium request failed to get past the Committee level, GRO-WW members began to consider adopting Operating Ordinances at the Township level, to help mitigate some of the potential harms. They are working with Lisa Doerr of Polk County (Protect Your Towns. Org) to help facilitate the work of township study committees such as ours.

Ridge Breeze has received conditional approval for an updated WPDES (Wisconsin Pollution Discharge Elimination System) Permit for expanding their dairy herd, buildings, lagoons, food storage, etc. from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The DNR will hold a hearing for public comments on July 11, 2024, at 4:00 p.m. The hearing will be virtual (via ZOOM), and GRO-WW is arranging for a in-person group viewing for sharing comments during the hearing. That viewing will take place at the Elmwood Village Hall.

GRO-WW members have been examining and cross-checking ownership of the farm fields Ridge Breeze has listed in their current Nutrient Management Plan, finding discrepancies in the amount of acreage they claim to be available for manure spreading; also studying the soil testing results to check for over-application of nutrients. This information has been communicated to the Land Conservation Director Rod Webb, Jeff Jackson, wastewater specialist for our area from WDNR, as well as our County Board Member Mel Pittman.

Teresa Davis of Rock Elm Township (civil engineer) reviewed an enlarged diagram of the Ridge Breeze expansion plans, helping us identify the location of new buildings, manure handling systems and storage areas. Concerns we brought up were building and lagoon construction, well & wetland locations on the property, emergency access, potential for an onsite digester and cement factory. Other items addressed included carcass disposal, well-head protection and air quality concerns; questions arose regarding the Dairy's fire safety plan for the 11.5 acre barn.

Cindy gave us a report on the county Groundwater Committee meeting she attended. That group heard a presentation by toxicologist and project manager for the Wisconsin Department of Health, Dr. Sarah Yang. Dr. Yang discussed the dangers of high nitrates in well water, particularly for infants and pregnant women and urged well testing for nitrates and bacteria

through the State Laboratory in Stevens Point. Nitrate contamination can come from excess fertilizer, animal manure and failing septic systems. Chloride can enter well water from road salt, and contamination from pesticides is also possible.

Cindy also told us about the St. Croix Citizens' Groundwater Monitoring Project that has been going on for 5 years...wells are tested and mapped throughout the study area. There are also long term studies of farmers and families in Iowa and North Carolina (both heavy swine production areas) that might shed light on additional health risks of CAFOs and farming.

Cindy also brought up the air quality issues of CAFOs—in Minnesota, agricultural activities contribute more greenhouse gases than any other source! Dust and aerosolized particles carry harmful substances and fine particulate matter far outside their source. There are testing mechanisms that test particulate matter (Purple Air), olfactometers and hydrogen sulfide monitors that can be installed to determine the amounts and extent of these hazards; however, cost can be a barrier to their use.

As a final part of her presentation, Cindy engaged us in a discussion of the threats of the H5N1 virus (Avian Influenza), which has appeared in dairy herds across the US. The fear is that many herds are not being tested so we don't yet know how far this has spread. It is believed to be spread from animal to animal through infected equipment, rather than from air transmission. Often dairy workers are undocumented and don't want to get tested, or take time off work to get tested. A concern is that the Avian virus might combine with a human influenza virus to create a new form that can spread among the human population.

We again discussed the upcoming public hearing (virtual) conducted by the WDNR concerning the WPDES permit for Ridge Breeze Dairy, and whether or not the Town Board should submit a statement of concern and opposition to the public hearing. Maryanne offered to write up a statement and circulate it to the group for approval or revision before the Town meeting on July 8. It was felt that a statement from a Town Board might carry more "weight" than a single person's opinion.

A couple of the committee members offered their opinions and suggestions to Judy for inclusion in the summary of statements gleaned from the Town Comprehensive plan that will become part of our suggested ordinance language.

Judy also suggested that the following statement be added to the postings of our Committee meetings: **"A quorum of Town Board members may or may not be present; however no official action will take place at this meeting."** Because one member of our committee is a Town Board member, another Board member may also attend if he/she wishes without being in violation of the Open Meeting Law.

Our next meeting will be moved to August 19, due to absences and conflicts among the committee members. On our agenda, we hope to have some information from Terry regarding fire & emergency training in dealing with CAFO operations, and—we hope—a set of findings of fact and maps to review at that time.

On a motion by Terry, seconded by Cindy, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Judy Krohn, Scribe