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Hearing is Tuesday on changes recommended by Plan Commission

Town of Belgium residents who want to keep a horse in their back yard or a pet pig in their house will have to obtain a conditional-use permit for the animals if changes to the town's zoning code recommended by the Plan Commission are approved.

A public hearing on the changes, which include limits on the number and types of structures allowed in various districts, will be held at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 6, prior to the 7 p.m. Town Board meeting. The changes could be adopted that night.

The meeting is on Tuesday instead of the first Monday of the month because July 5 is the Independence Day holiday.

Some changes are needed to bring the code in compliance with the Smart Growth plan adopted by the town and county, officials said.

Others would strengthen the goals of retaining the town's rural atmosphere and preserving agricultural land, Zoning Administrator Charles Parks said.

The commission recommended controlling the types of animals kept in a residential district by requiring non-typical pets and livestock be permitted as a conditional use. That allows town officials to consider the animal's impact on neighbors and to set conditions, such as the number of animals allowed, Plan Commission members said. Currently, there are no restrictions unless the animals are kept as a business.

The proposed changes emphasizes that only one primary structure is allowed on a parcel and adds the sentence "Mobile homes and recreational vehicles are not allowed" under site restrictions.

The new ordinance would also require driveways longer than 800 feet have a 20-foot-wide by l00-foot-long passing lane midway to provide better access for fire trucks and other emergency vehicles.

To be certain that conditions imposed for building permits and conditional-use permits are followed, the Plan Commission recommend an occupancy permit be required prior to use. An engineer's or land surveyor's report would be required for structures built in floodplains to ensure regulations are complied with prior to an occupancy permit being issued.

In an effort to prevent problems, the code change recommends that plans for residential construction or additions on substandard lots "may be reviewed by the Plan Commission to examine the impact on neighboring properties with regards to building height, stormwater runoff and drainage plans."

Any changes in operations for businesses in manufacturing and business districts must be reviewed by the Plan Commission under the proposed code.

Roof and billboard signs will no longer be allowed and construction signs must be removed when the work is completed.

Conditional uses in agricultural districts would be expanded to allow the storage of fireworks and seasonal storage in a completely enclosed structure.

Fences of any kind are not allowed on the beach or dune areas under the proposed ordinance.

Nonconforming structures will be allowed to be improved up to 50% of the assessed value under the new rule. Currently, the limit is 50% of the value when it was deemed a nonconforming structure. Most nonconforming structures are on substandard lots along Lake Michigan, Parks said.

In residential districts, a maximum of two storage sheds will be allowed in back yards and minor structures must be at least four feet from the lot line.