

Stoney Creek farming not ruled out

Written by MARK JAEGER

Wednesday, 15 June 2011 15:08

Developer says plan to plant alfalfa aimed at reducing costs, taxes

Developer Phil Lundman told the Village of Fredonia Plan Commission the motivation behind his plan to grow alfalfa on three vacant lots in the Stoney Creek Meadow subdivision is two-pronged — to eliminate the cost of mowing the parcels and to reduce his property tax bill.

Lundman's plan to grow alfalfa on the empty lots was first considered by the Village Board last month, spurring a letter from the village attorney asking that the agricultural effort be halted until it could be reviewed further.

Residents of the subdivision protested the plan at the board meeting, and they returned when Lundman appeared before the commission on Monday.

"I don't know that it will have a negative impact on property values, but this development was sold as a residential community. By allowing farming, isn't it misrepresentation?" asked Stoney Creek Lane resident Pat Geraghty.

He said neighbors were concerned about the safety of having farm equipment working in the subdivision and possibly damaging curbs and gutters already installed in the development.

Lundman said 28 lots in the subdivision remain unsold, leaving him with a heavy financial burden during a real-estate market in which there is little activity.

"I am trying to cut my costs. We have been mowing the grass pretty good to make the development look nice," he said.

Lundman said maintaining the subdivision grounds has cost as much as \$20,000 a year, but he said the greater expense is the approximately \$28,000 a year he has been paying in property taxes to the village.

By farming on the vacant lots, the rationale is that the property taxes would be assessed at the lower agricultural rate of about \$200 a lot.

Lundman said farming is allowed in or adjacent to several subdivisions in the village. Specifically, he pointed to the stymied Village Green subdivision, which MasterCraft has turned over to M&I Bank.

"I have a lot invested in this subdivision and I would like to hold onto it until the market turns around," Lundman said.

"In this economy, you are not going to sell 28 lots unless you drop the price to next to nothing. Then an investor will come in and sit on the lots, and it will end up looking like the MasterCraft project."

Lundman's contention that no-till farming would not harm the environment was supported by

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Town of Fredonia farmer Mike Paulus.

“You’ll probably have greater problems with pollens and allergies if the land is left to weeds. No-till farming is a very safe practice. It is neat and green,” Paulus said.

He said the alfalfa would probably need to be cut only two or three times a year, minimizing the neighborhood’s exposure to farming equipment.

Village President Chuck Lopicola, chairman of the Plan Commission, said before farming could be allowed on the lots a public hearing on the use would be needed, along with approval from the Village Board.

“I understand these are tough times. We would like to help you without hurting the neighbors. It is a problem developers are facing nationwide,” Lopicola said.

Lundman was urged to work with neighbors before returning with a land-use change request.

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