

Town wants input on farmland preservation

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM

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Feedback at Monday meeting will help Port board decide if it should change land-use plan to comply with county's

Town of Port Washington officials are seeking input from residents to decide whether to amend the town's land use plan to comply with Ozaukee County's plan — a decision that will determine whether town residents can participate in the state's revised farmland preservation program.

The Town Board will hold a special meeting Monday that will include a farmland preservation presentation at about 8 p.m.

"We want to hear from the people this affects the most before we spend the money to amend our plan," Town Chairman Jim Melichar said.

The town sent 36 letters out to landowners who have been involved in the farmland preservation program, he said, although it's not known if all of these residents continue to participate in the program.

Unless the town amends its ordinances to match the county's, landowners won't be able to participate in the farmland preservation program, Melichar said.

At issue is the town's conservation subdivision ordinance, Melichar said.

The town's zoning ordinances include a formula allowing development on a sliding scale, with a minimum lot size of 3-1/2 acres, he said.

"We spent three to five years developing our formula," Melichar said. "We put a lot of thought and effort into determining what's best for the landowners in our town."

No one has used the conservation subdivision ordinance yet, Melichar said, noting it took effect just as the housing market slowed.

The county and state's new farmland preservation rules allow development on one acre of land for every 20 acres that's preserved, he said.

The town must make a decision on the land use plan by the end of the year.

"We'll see what the response is at the meeting Monday and go from there," Melichar said.

The Town Board is also poised to award contracts for ditch mowing, the replacement of three culverts and surface paving on Willow Road — highway items that in other years would have been handled through the Ozaukee County Highway Department, Melichar said.

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Contractors have until Monday to submit bids for the work.

“From what I’ve heard, there are quite a few private contractors interested in the work,” Melichar said. “I’ve heard that private contractors are bidding at the break-even point just so they have work. We’ll see what happens.”

The town sought a cost estimate from the county for the work, he said.

“It went up quite a bit from last year,” Melichar said. “I thought it was a good time to look at it (private bids).”

By seeking bids, he and the Town Board are fulfilling an election promise to seek competitive bidding on highway work, he noted.