

Manitoba Planners Conference Feb 23-25, 2012
“Beyond Surviving: Planning To Thrive”

Title of presentation: The Subdivision Process: Understanding Provincial Interests

Presented by: Les Mitchell

Date: February 24th, 2012

I readily identified with this presentation because my background is in planning. As the presenter was taking us through the process it strikes a chord with me; the presentation was straight to the point and very businesslike with no room for humour or side attraction. The importance of land subdivision as a cogent part of land management cannot be overemphasized.

Les Mitchell, a land-use specialist with Land Use Planning Knowledge Centre, Manitoba Food and Rural Infrastructure (MAFRI), delivered this presentation. The author's aim was to let us know what they do, how they do it and why they do it. His goal was to take us through the application and approval process. Les Mitchell said he grew up on the farm and this made him recognize the importance of rural land and how it influenced his choice of profession. He oversees and reviews subdivision applications in 59 municipalities in the West, Central and Eastern part of Manitoba.

Les identified the main concerns of MAFRI on land use which include:

- Fragmentation and loss of prime agricultural land and viable lower class land.
- Encroachment and restriction of existing agricultural activities by other land uses.

Prime agricultural land is land that is important for crop production, while viable lower class lands are important for forage production and grazing. He said losses of land are inevitable especially due to urban expansion and other activities encroaching on agricultural land. In order for MAFRI to reduce and/or stop the loss of land they work within a policy framework which employs both the provincial land use policies and development plans of the individual municipality. Some of the goals of the policy framework include:

- Protecting prime agricultural land and viable lower class land.
- Protecting existing agricultural activities.
- Making sure agricultural lands are kept in parcels of 80 acres or more. (Specialized agriculture may be accommodated on parcels less than 80 acres provided that they are commercial in nature, i.e.: apiaries, nurseries and greenhouses).

- Allowing mutual separation and distances between agricultural and non-agricultural uses.
- Having a standard allowance for a limited number of non-agricultural uses. Non-agricultural uses may include commercial or industrial uses that directly serve agricultural operations. Also, residential uses for retiring farmers, surplus farmsteads, or individual actively involved in farming operations.

Les Mitchell identified the role of MAFRI to include the review of Provincial Land Use Policies, Municipality's Development Plans, Zoning By-Laws, and Subdivision Applications. He elaborated on the subdivision application procedure since this was the main purpose of the presentation. The proposal must be fully understood and be in agreement with the following evaluation parameters:

- Does the application observe the objectives, policies and intent of the development plan?
- Does it meet the objectives of the Development Plan and Zoning By-Law?
- Determination of the soil type, quality and level of soil mapping, detailed level mapping sufficient for site-specific decisions and reconnaissance level mapping and series of site visitation may be accommodated.
- Determination of the potential for conflicts between non-compatible land uses
- Impact assessment on existing agricultural activities in the area.

The author observed that after an application has been evaluated, MAFRI decides to support (with or without recommendation(s)) or not to support an application. I was very impressed to find out that there are steps for complaint if a party was not satisfied with the outcome. Generally the presentation was interesting and it enlightened those of us at the conference, of what it entails to carry out a land use subdivision exercise. I believe this kind of awareness is necessary; especially at a planning conference to get people informed and to understand that land as a non renewable commodity, needs to be used with extreme care just like any natural non – renewable resources.

Summarized by:

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