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THE PRESS

PELICAN RAPIDS, MINNESOTA

Year 123, No. 38

Otter Tail County

Single Copy \$1.25

September 18, 2019

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HUGE

Highway 108, 59 reconstruction possibly largest single public works project in Pelican Rapids history, impacting everything: Sewer-water, sidewalks-paths, vehicle traffic, Pelican-Maplewood trail--along with opportunities--and potential dangers--to downtown businesses

By Louis Hoglund

"Huge" is how the Highways 108 and 59 projects were described at the Sept. 10 Pelican Rapids city council meeting.

A newly constructed thoroughfare could be transformational for Pelican Rapids. But getting there comes with high dangers.

"About 25 city blocks will be impacted...it's a huge project," said Tom Pace, Detroit Lakes-based Minnesota Department of Transportation official. "Hang on...it will be a fun ride."

"Fun" wasn't the first thought on the mind of main street businessman Matt Strand, who was one of several who commented on the street-side-walk-bike path plan devised in connection with the 2024 highway reconstruction.

"The number one risk to mitigate is the project extending two years," said Strand. Completing the massive project through the heart of Pelican Rapids in one year is the intent, but if it ends up spanning 2024 and 2025, it will "kill business," said Strand.

Reconstruction of two major state highways is only part of the picture. Below the surface: Millions of dollars in city sewer-water replacement that are planned while the highways are torn apart. Sewer and water lines--some of them nearing a century old--will be replaced with the reconstruction.

If project spans two years, business could be "killed"

Strand's concern is the prospect that the project will be broken up, with Highway 59 in 2024 and Highway 108 in 2025.

Planning for the upheaval of downtown Pelican started early. The "com-

Cameras on north, south ends of town will record 'headcounts' as MnDOT plans for Hwys 108, 59 reconstruction

Smile...you're on candid camera... Camera installations, along Highway 59 in Pelican Rapids, have prompted curiosity in the community--even some suspicion, with its "Big Brother is Watching You" implications.

But the cameras have been placed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

The cameras will document pedestrian "head counts," explained Tom Pace, Mn DOT project manager at the Detroit Lakes regional office.

A camera was placed near the West Central Turkeys plant; and last week, it

was installed on the south end, by Dairy Queen.

These counts will be crucial as MnDOT plans for the Highways 108 and 59 reconstruction in 2024. The data collected could also play a major role in determining state funding, particularly for the pedestrian traffic associated with the highway project, noted Pace.



This solar powered camera is recording pedestrian traffic along the highway, as MnDOT gathers data for the scheduled 2024 Highway 108, 59 reconstruction.

Conceptual layouts for the highway reconstruction could be revealed to the community as early as summer of 2020, said Pace at the

Sept. 10 Pelican city council meeting. These will be followed by "lots of public meetings," said Pace.

plete streets" process started early this year, with a series of committee and public hearing sessions. The focus of the planning was pedestrian sidewalks, paths, landscaping and "streetscaping" that may take shape in conjunction with the highway reconstruction.

"Staging is crucial" said MnDOT's Tom Pace, "especially with all the city infrastructure plans that are in the project."

Opinions still vary over downtown sidewalk, paths

Community input was invited, not only for the central business district,

but also a half mile in all directions on highways 108 and 59. The completed concept was unveiled at the Sept. 10 council meeting.

Local opinions have differed, particularly in the downtown area. While the final concept product of paths and walkways has met with general approval, differences on downtown pedestrian and bike features are still simmering.

"The concensus in the business community...is to divert the bike

HUGE HIGHWAY PROJECT SET 2024
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Hall of Fame inductees named



Who are the first five named to the new Pelican Rapids school Hall of Fame?

Turn to page 6 for details



DOUBLE LIFE

Dr. Gottenborg: Chiropractor by day; apple producer the rest of the time

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More building on the Back 40?

With Pelican Lake to the east; farm and pasture all around; Scambler 'rural-urban' residential development debate could set township's course for decades to come

By Louis Hoglund

Rural? Urban?
Farm landscape?
Or suburban sprawl?

These were the underlying questions Sept. 12 at the Scambler Township Hall--located just down the road from fields of tall corn in one direction; highly developed Pelican Lake neighborhoods in the other. Undeveloped marsh and wetland to the north; a country cemetery just across the road.

"Discourage development on land not for agricultural purposes," that's how the Scambler Township comprehensive plan reads.

Problem: The plan was drafted nearly three decades ago.

"Classic" was the debate at the Scambler Township Board session...A classic, textbook case of land use planning in a traditional farm area--being slowly but steadily encroached by folks who desire a rural lifestyle.

The town hall was basically packed for a hearing on a proposal to modify and clarify the ordinance to allow building on parcels "no smaller" than 2.5 acres.

This is consistent with the Otter Tail County's standards for rural homesites, and Scambler board member Mike Johnson--who freely acknowledged he was leading the campaign to line up with the county.

"Do we want to control what everybody does with their land?" said Johnson. He was adamant that the township's restrictions are too extreme.

By relaxing the ordinance, Johnson believes it would provide opportunities for more people to live in Scambler--while still retaining township control and jurisdiction

over rampant, renegade development.

The 1991 comprehensive plan was likely inspired and written at a time when protecting farmland from development was a high profile topic, especially down in the sprawling Twin Cities Metro Area. So, most of Scambler's

land was identified as an "Agricultural Preservation District," and home-building is, in effect, limited to parcels of 20 acres.

"That's more acreage than we need to have in order to put a dwelling up," suggested town board chairman Dave Ritchie, who found himself moderating a "mob" discussion--thankfully it was a "Minnesota nice," polite and orderly mob. Public opinion was about half and half, as far as relaxing the ordinance for what could be more dense development. A show of hands was evidence of the fairly even split.

The stakes are potentially high, because any change could alter the complexion of the township for decades to come.

And--there are people watching and paying attention. Including lawyers.

Chairman Ritchie himself indicated that he had already received a call hinting at a legal threat.

Vote on ordinance revision tabled to November

After the wide ranging public hearing discussion wound down, the board voted at its regular meeting to delay a final vote on the matter to the November town board meeting.

MORE HOMES ON SCAMBLER'S FARMSCAPE?
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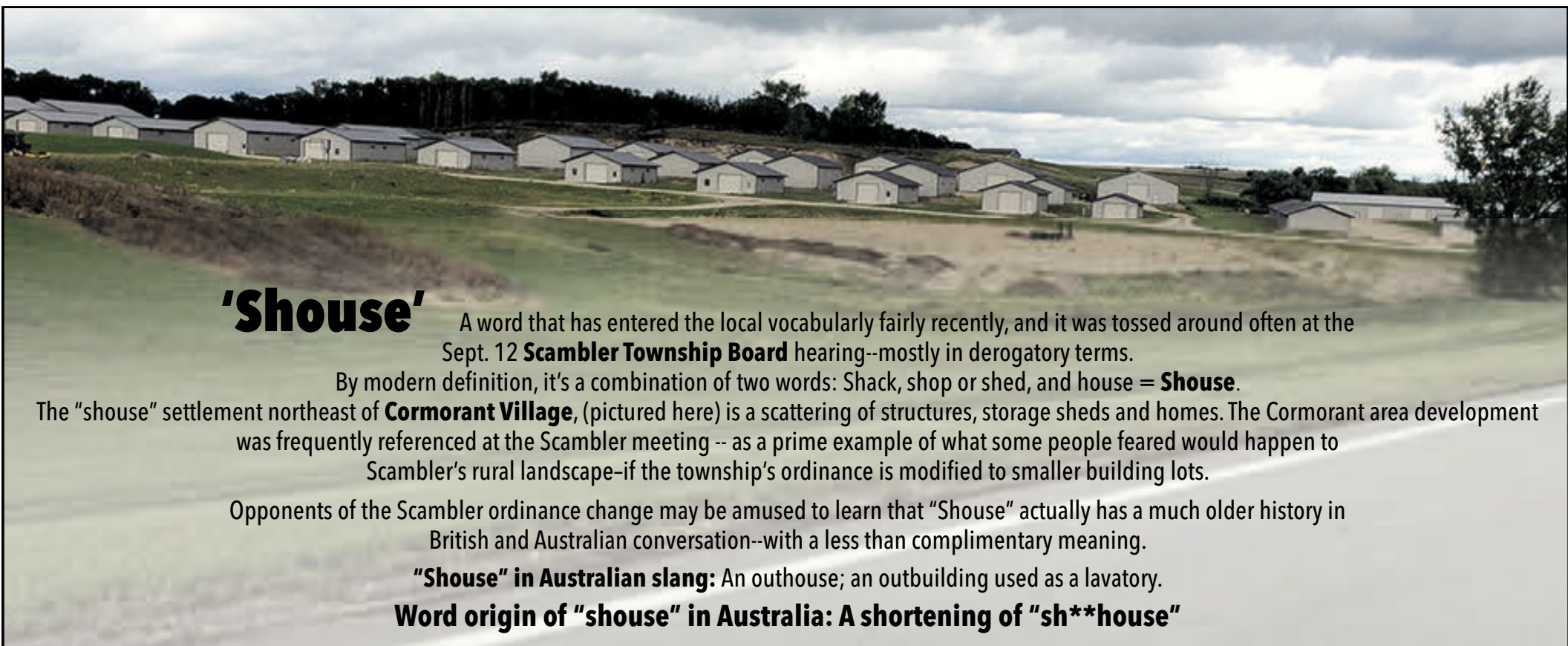
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'Shouse'

A word that has entered the local vocabulary fairly recently, and it was tossed around often at the Sept. 12 **Scambler Township Board** hearing--mostly in derogatory terms.

By modern definition, it's a combination of two words: Shack, shop or shed, and house = **Shouse**.

The "shouse" settlement northeast of **Cormorant Village**, (pictured here) is a scattering of structures, storage sheds and homes. The Cormorant area development was frequently referenced at the Scambler meeting -- as a prime example of what some people feared would happen to Scambler's rural landscape--if the township's ordinance is modified to smaller building lots.

Opponents of the Scambler ordinance change may be amused to learn that "Shouse" actually has a much older history in British and Australian conversation--with a less than complimentary meaning.

"Shouse" in Australian slang: An outhouse; an outbuilding used as a lavatory.

Word origin of "shouse" in Australia: A shortening of "shhouse"**

Building on the back 40: Scambler debate centers on 1991 township plan--which aimed at retaining 'rural character'

SCAMBLER TWSP. ZONING PUBLIC HEARING
Continued from page 1

But arriving at the decision of a two month "cooling off" period was preceded by lively discussion--including hints of "conflict of interest," concerns about real estate "speculators" and some obvious personality clashes.

Nearly 30 gathered for the hearing, and anybody who wanted to offer input was given the opportunity.

The fact that Scambler even has a local planning apparatus is unusual. The vast majority of townships simply leave planning and zoning to county jurisdiction.

But Scambler's reason for implementing local zoning back in the early 1990s was to prevent a "garbage dump" from coming in, said **lifelong township resident Philip Rotz**.

Local zoning also came into play a couple years ago, when an industrial-sized wind turbine--big enough to cast a shadow over the Grove Lake Lutheran Church steeple--was proposed.

"People were glad we had an ordinance at that time," said Rotz.

Ten-year **Scambler resident Peggy Gilbertson** viewed it differently, questioning whether the cost and resources of administering zoning at the township level were "fiscally responsible." Otter Tail County, which has zoning jurisdiction over nearly all townships, have the staff, resources, legal departments and the budget to administer zoning.

"This is the 21st century. Kids want to come to rural areas to have a slice of land...and Scambler reaps the benefits by increased tax revenue," said Gilbertson, who favored an ordinance more "friendly" to prospective homeowners. "We're stopping people from moving into the community."

Lakes to the east; farms and pasture all around make Scambler a unique township

Scambler, in some respects, is among the more unusual townships in the state.

To the east: A Minnetonka-like cocktail crowd on Pelican Lake.

To the west: Hills, dales, dusty trails and "Green Acres."

Fears of a densely-developed ghetto of storage sheds--like the array of garages, brick, mortar and roads northeast of **Cormorant village**--were expressed several times.

A relatively new word was tossed around at the meeting: "Shouse," meaning a storage shed, cleverly constructed to include bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchen facilities and barbeque decks.

It should be noted that the Cormorant "Shouse" village is actually across the border in **Lake Eunice Township**--not Cormorant Township. It was evidently developed by formal platting process through the Becker County Board.

"We want a country, rural lifestyle, that's what the ordinance is trying to preserve," said Rotz, who said "Shouse" developments can become an eyesore because of lack of mowing, weed overgrowth, excessive outdoor storage and general lack of maintenance.

"Ugly" is how one audience member described the Cormorant area shed and "shouse" development.

Does Scambler land use plan need to be re-evaluated, revised?

While many at the meeting acknowledged that the Scambler comprehensive plan may need an overhaul--there is little doubt that the original architects' intent of localized township zoning was this: Preserve the "rural character" of most of Scambler Township.

"If township residents want a change of this magnitude, we should re-write the ordinance...but at the time, a majority wanted this," said **Jim Lucking, a former township officer**, who favored a more thorough review of the comprehensive plan, rather than sporadic, line item revisions. "Right now, we're dealing with what we have on the books."

Stuart Restad was more blunt about the whole thing. He was a long time planning commission member, and frequently butted heads with town board officers and others.

A "wholesale and absolute" attack on the "heart and soul" of the township ordinance is how Restad described it. He accused some board members of "trying to ram something through" and not properly following the process and providing inadequate public notice of the proposed changes.

"When people drive to the township, they like what they see," said Restad, regarding the rural atmosphere. "That's what we have in Scambler-- and that's why Scambler has zoning."

An "absolute scam," said Restad, who invited other townsfolk to contact him. "I would be happy to explain how (the ordinance) works and the reasons it was put into place," said Restad, who then left the meeting after stating his piece.

Planning commission member Rotz also questioned previous actions, stating "the town board took it upon itself to make this change, without sending it through the planning commission."

But some of the five members of the



Scambler Township board member Mike Johnson left, has been the leading voice in modifying Scambler Township's zoning ordinance--which could open up more residential development, on smaller parcels of land. At right, town board chair Dave Ritchie.

Town board believe that good faith efforts were made to publicize the Sept. 12 hearing. Further, it was the second hearing, noted town **board member Erick Johnson**. At the first session, a majority of those attending favored smaller, 2.5 acre parcels for building, said Erick. (The proposed change requires five acres for a building site on parcels containing wetlands.)

Times they are a-changing in rural Otter Tail County

"There have been significant changes in land use" since the ordinance was established, said **Charles Kvale, a neighboring Dunn Township resident** and longtime town board member there, but who owns land in Scambler. He described a Dunn ag parcel, which was only generating about \$50 a year in tax revenue, that will now have a large home with high taxable value.

"It's hard for me to imagine that isn't good for the township," said Kvale.

The very fact that Scambler is even engaging in these discussions suggests that the township has changed substantially, said Adam Johnson, from the audience--suggesting that the comprehensive plan may need to change accordingly.

Board member Johnson offended by hints of "conflict of interest"

Board member Mike Johnson said a number of township property owners have approached him, requesting the ordinance change. He believes the township shouldn't have excessive restrictions on property owners rights.

He bristled at several hints made at the meeting, that suggested he was advocating the ordinance change for personal gain, because he wanted to sell off parcels.

"I'm grossly offended with the accusations that I have land sales lined up, and I'm profiting from this change," said Johnson, visibly upset by the conflict of interest allegations.

By the same token, Johnson insisted that, whether it was he or any other landowner, they should have the right to sell land, within reasonable limits of responsible land use and development.

"I don't want people to tell me what to do with my land," agreed **resident Andy Osterman**.

But Rotz noted that changes need to be considered carefully, because a plat of smaller lots could be "a chaotic mess" with potentially "64 houses on 160 acres."

Smaller lots in agricultural areas also pose some unanticipated questions, said Rotz. "Do we allow livestock...chickens... on these small parcels?"

Should question go to township-wide vote? Or does decision rest with elected board?

Township resident **Greg Hayes, from the Tamarac Lake area**, said it was "commendable that Scambler had a comprehensive plan and retained local control. But he also said it may be time to "take a look, tweak...and find some middle ground."

"This is not the same township I moved into 20 years ago," said Hayes. "Maybe the way it is now is not what the majority wants any more."

There was much discussion on whether some form of question should be on a township ballot; whether it should be reviewed at the annual meeting in March--or whether the decision should be simply made by the town board--with members who were duly elected to take care of township affairs.

"The taxpayers elected you to take care of the affairs of the township," reminded Kvale.

By tabling any decision until November, the board has an opportunity to more carefully consider all of the input.

Though there was some support of a township wide ballot or annual meeting tally, several town board members were leary about "government by referendum," which can be a cumbersome process for setting public policy--and a precedent that could come back to haunt an elected board when other issues surface.

"I don't really like the idea of voting at the annual meeting," said **board member Dennis Carlblom**. "It's like any decision an elected board makes, you're just not going to please everybody."



The five-member Scambler Township board is pictured here, Dennis Carlblom, Erick Johnson, Mike Johnson, Dave Ritchie and Todd Langseth; and secretary Sandy Tingelstad and treasurer David Pederson.



A near-full house crowd attended the Sept. 12 public hearing at Scambler Township Hall, regarding a controversial ordinance change that would, in effect, reduce the parcel size of residential building.

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