

Zipline, Climbing Wall Proposed for Downtown Mackinaw City

Business: From page 1

demand for added attractions in Mackinaw City.

A zip line and climbing wall at Historic Mill Creek just east of Mackinaw City has been a successful draw to that state park.

Mr. Lieghio's tower structure would replace the Dippin' Dots Ice Cream building on the corner of North Huron Avenue and Crossings Drive. A rock climbing wall would be attached to the northwest side of the tower.

The Mackinaw City Planning Commission tabled a special use permit for a second structure near the miniature golf course on South Huron Street. The commission was unable to reach a decision regarding where a fence would be placed to contain trash around the platform and operating area. The commission partially approved site plan revisions, but with the exception of the zip line operations structure.

The proposed building would be about 42 feet tall, with a zip line platform. The inside of the building contains office space and retail space.

The facility requires the Lieghio TBWC Family Limited Partnership to obtain a special use permit and is considered to be an open air business and must comply with rules to keep out blowing trash. t

Village Manager Jeff Lawson outlined three options the commis-

sion could consider to address the fencing requirements for open air businesses. The commission could follow the zoning ordinance, the property owner could apply for a variance, or the commission could change the language relating to the fencing requirement.

Changing the language of ordinances is normally performed to address a recurring issue, Mr. Lawson said. The village has seen few open air businesses in the past, and he said the zip line issue is unique.

In the case of a variance, one is normally granted when an applicant is "harshly affected" by the ordinance and the applicant's property is in some way unique. At the time of the meeting, the Lieghio family had not applied for a variance.

The rub of the matter concerning fencing is where trash could potentially be generated along the zip line. Chris Brown, representative of the Lieghio family, argued fences should only be required on the launching and landing areas of the zip line. With customers holding onto the zip line, there would be little chance of riders creating trash during the ride, he said. A fence had been planned for both landing and launching areas as a safety precaution, he said.

Food would not be sold at the zip line, which would reduce the potential of trash generation, Mr.

Brown said. Constructing a fence along the entire ride would look ugly, he added, and could look uninviting to customers.

The planning commission grappled with the wording of the ordinance and had difficulty reconciling its literal intention and how it would apply to a zip line. The commissioners agreed building a fence along the entire operating line of the ride would look unappealing and could be potentially expensive to construct.

Commissioner Rosada Mann said if a fence or wall were to be required along the entire operating area, the family could consider building natural berms. The berms would look pleasant from the air, she said, and would contain any trash. Mr. Brown replied the area over which the zip line is suspended could be used for potential development in the future, and he would prefer to fence the landing and launching areas.

Commission Chair Rob Most agreed a berm would look pleasant and may fit the fencing requirement. He suggested the Lieghio family could consider how to work a berm into the site plan to meet the fencing requirement while not interrupting any long term development goals.

As the meeting continued, commissioners reached an impasse on how to define the perimeter that should be fenced or walled. The

commission tabled the special use permit until the Thursday, December 10 meeting. Mr. Lawson said he would consult with the village attorney to see how the perimeter could be determined.

Lieghio Site Plan Revision Accepted Sans Zip Line Building

Following the special use permit discussion, the commission quickly approved several site plan revisions to the Mackinac Bay Trading Company at 312 South Huron Avenue in Mackinaw City. The revisions include the elimination of 2,500 square feet of outdoor dining area adjacent to Nona Lisa's restaurant, the conversion of 4,097 square feet of restaurant area to retail area, and the conversion of 1,412 square feet of retail area to indoor restaurant area.

Mr. Lieghio explained the Woodland Creek business consolidated its retail space, giving the family more room to use in the building. The dining area outside will be moved inside the building, he said, as customers seem to prefer dining inside.

The site plan revisions also included the construction of the zip line tower, but commissioners decided not to address it until the fencing issue is settled.

The revisions were submitted to the Mackinaw City Village Council meeting Thursday, December 3 and received final approval, except for the tower structure.

County Gets Legal Advice on Possible Withdrawal From LMAS

Health Board: From page 1

Commissioners voted the day before to separate from Luce, Alger, and Schoolcraft counties, the other three counties encompassed by the district health department.

Dawn Nelson, who chairs both the Mackinac County Board of Commissioners and the LMAS District Health Department's Board of Health, emphasized Monday that the process is only exploratory at this time and that Mackinac County has no timetable in mind for a separation.

Mackinac County's board discussed its frustrations with LMAS at a special meeting with its attorney Sunday, December 6, in St. Ignace, and voted to investigate what the cost and other liabilities of a separation would entail.

The attorney, Dave Stoker of Cohl, Stoker Toskey and McGlinchey, a law firm in Lansing, told the LMAS board Monday that Mackinac County is not comfortable with the management of the health department, nor is it comfortable with the financial and operational arrangements it shares with the other three counties.

"As I came out of that meeting," he said, "I was under the impression that the unanimous opinion of all of the Mackinac County board is that the citizens of Mackinac County would be better served in a different arrangement. The vote was to try to explore looking at a single county health department as the primary direction they would like to go."

Mr. Stoker has also been legal counsel to the LMAS Board of

Health, a potential conflict of interest that prompted the board last month to seek new counsel, resulting in the hiring Monday of Foster, Swift, Collins and Smith.

The LMAS District Health Department is responsible for environmental health, such as restaurant, food, and well water safety, as well as personal and family health, such as preventative medicine, including immunizations. It is governed by two county commissioners from each of its four member counties. Mrs. Nelson and Commissioner Calvin "Bucky" McPhee hold Mackinac County's two seats.

Michigan health departments, Mr. Stoker said, are loosely organized under a short, two-paragraph statute that essentially says a board has two members from each county and operates under a formula that the state approves. In the case of the LMAS district, the formula is based on population, each county contributing on a per capita basis.

"That's about all," he noted, and, therefore, there is virtually no documented relationship between the department and the counties it serves. If Mackinac County is to leave the district, the health department and each of the other counties involved will have to sort through property and inventory, debts and other financial matters, personnel, and even customers and allocate these resources among the four parties.

Above all, he noted, the counties will want to ensure that the people served by the district health department will see a smooth transition and that nobody will fall through the

cracks.

The statute also doesn't address how a county can separate from a district health department. A Michigan Attorney General opinion states that such action cannot be taken by the county, but must be taken by the board of health, which would "disband itself and then subsequently reorganize itself into a totally new district health department consisting of the other remaining counties."

Until that would happen, under the opinion, Mackinac County would not be able to receive state funding as a separate operation.

Whether that opinion, affirmed in 1995, still stands or has been superseded by the courts, he suggested that both a Mackinac County health department and the district health department organize under the Urban Cooperation Act, which would allow the organization to be documented, more like a charter, with shared responsibilities and other matters spelled out.

As for a LMAS committee to work with Mackinac County in exploring a split, Schoolcraft County representative George Ecclesine said he felt uncomfortable assembling a committee without having legal advice from its own counsel, and the board agreed to postponing such action.

Health Officer Nick Derusha agreed with the board's opinion, saying the new counsel may recommend appointing one representative from each of the remaining three counties on the committee or may want the entire board to be involved in the process.

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Michigan Politics

By
George Weeks



Ag Chief Touts a Growing Industry

Michigan's economic grief is underscored by slumping sales and jobs in the auto industry, which is replete with turnover of auto chief executives.

Seldom mentioned: Michigan's agri-food industry, which, according to the state's ag chief executive, contributes \$71.3 billion annually to the state's economy, "making it the state's second-largest economic driver."

Don Koivisto, the low-key director of the Department of Agriculture, is well credentialed in a state that produces more than 200 commodities on a commercial basis, second only to California in agricultural diversity.

Koivisto, 60, grew up on a farm near Ironwood in Gogebic County, westernmost in the Upper Peninsula, and now lives on a 160-acre Centennial Farm near Ellsworth in Antrim County, where he rents out land for others to grow corn, soybeans, and hay.

In the 1980s, Koivisto (D-Ironwood) was chairman of the state House Agriculture Committee, and in 1991-2002 was a state senator representing all but five U.P. counties.

At the outset of a phone interview last week, I noted that he lives in a district that will next year have an open Senate seat now held by term-limited Senator Jason Allen (R-Traverse City). He laughed off the idea of running again for the Legislature, this time below the bridge.

Nor was Koivisto about to weigh in on the controversy about Governor Jennifer Granholm's October 8 executive order that gave a governor power to appoint the ag director, now named by the gubernatorially-appointed five-member Commission of Agriculture, as Koivisto was in August 2007.

"To a degree I have stayed out of it," he said. "It's a no win to get into it." He added that he works well with Granholm, and "I do take some orders" from her.

A compromise was reached last week that clears the way for a revised Granholm executive order being implemented, without rejection by both houses of the Legislature, that includes her merger of the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Environmental Quality with power of the governor to appoint the director.

Her new order transfers back to the ag commission oversight powers to approve the rules and regulations promulgated by the director. While it does not reinstate the commission's authority to appoint the director, Michigan Farm Bureau President Wayne H. Wood said, "it addresses the bulk of the agriculture industry's concerns and is a far better option than what was originally proposed."

"...the new EO does grant the commission authority to conduct an annual performance review of the director. The performance appraisal will be reviewed by the Governor, and if the director receives a negative review, the MDA director must submit a corrective action plan to both the Governor and Agriculture Commission."

While I favor having governors, in the interest of accountability, appoint department directors, as do presidents, I'm impressed with effectiveness of the ag community in getting Granholm to slightly tweak her order after the GOP-ruled Senate rejected it.

True to his mission, Koivisto eschewed political talk in favor of expounding in the interview on how Michigan's agricultural economy expanded at a rate more than five times faster than the rate of the general economy (11.9% vs. 2%) between 2006 and 2007, "making agriculture a cornerstone to diversifying Michigan's economy in the future."

Fair enough. Having long ago

picked cherries by day and worked in a canning factory by night, I'm glad to note Koivisto's trumpeting that Michigan leads the nation in production of 19 commodities, including tart cherries, and ranks in the top 10 of 30 other commodities.

"There's a big demand for cherry products around the world," said Koivisto, who noted that Michigan exports about one-third of its agricultural commodities each year, the largest being soybean and soy products.

Founder Bob Sutherland of the Glen Arbor-based Cherry Republic, which also has retail outlets in Traverse City and Charlevoix for its 92 products, said \$2.5 million of its sales are in other states. That includes 60% of its online sales.

"There's a fever for cherries," said Sutherland, who recently took two truckloads of products to a show in Houston, Texas, where 50,000 people visited his booth.

Not bad for a fellow who started a business in 1989 selling T-shirts and moved into cookies, jams, and other cherry products in 1992.

Koivisto says that in addition to emerging small businesses and all of the Kelloggs, Gerbers, and other long-established food industry firms in Michigan's economy, there are "the 65 and growing" wineries fueling a surge in the state's agri-tourism.

Michigan, home to 56,014 farms, has about 10 million acres of farmland. Koivisto praised the conservancy movement across the state for efforts to preserve farmland. Asked for examples, he said: "The best is on the Leelanau Peninsula. (The Leelanau Conservancy) is the best model I can think of" in raising money and effectively using it for preservation.

I enjoyed dealing with straight-talking Koivisto during his legislative days in Lansing.

He's certainly pumped up for his current role down there.

Campaign Watch

In his quest for the 2010 Republican gubernatorial nomination, Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard has had some impressive endorsements, including Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson and former U.S. Senator Elizabeth Dole.

A buzz on the trail is whether these two endorsements telegraph where their husbands will be down the line: former Michigan First Lady Michelle Engler, wife of former Governor John Engler, who retains a keen interest in state politics, and Jane Abraham, wife of ex-U.S. Senator Spencer Abraham and former Republican state chairman.

Speaking of wives on the trail, there was this interesting Democratic fundraising e-mail pitch last week from one Pam Faris:

"A little over thirty one years ago, a man I met at a political fundraiser asked me out on a date. Of course, it was to another political fundraiser. We hit it off right away and were engaged to get married a few months later. We have been married 30 years now and politics is still a big part of our lives. The man who asked me out is my husband, Lieutenant Governor John Cherry."

She went on to rave about how "He loves Michigan with its beautiful Great Lakes, best-in-the nation public universities, cities that promote arts and culture, and beautiful state parks" and so on. After other raves, she urged recipients to "please encourage my husband to run for Governor with a contribution to People for Cherry."

Encouragement not needed. He's running.

George Weeks retired in 2006 after 22 years as political columnist for *The Detroit News*. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Cedarville Wind Turbine a Great Idea

To the Editor:

I think the wind turbine idea put forth [to locate the proposed structure in] downtown Cedarville is a great leap forward for our community. We already have the wide sidewalks and fancy streetlights to facilitate the traffic flow which will result from this endeavor.

Come on down, folks.

Douglas Smith
Cedarville

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and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave

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