

Sawyer County Zoning Department – More than just pretty faces.

This is the first in a series of articles that will explain the responsibilities of the zoning department. This article will provide a summary of the department's overall responsibilities and give a brief overview of each of its applicable ordinances and by-laws. Additional in-depth information will be provided in future articles.

The mission statement of the department is: Within the unincorporated areas of Sawyer County - to protect and improve the quality of both publicly and privately owned lands and waters of Sawyer County and to enhance the quality of life and experiences of current and future users of those lands and waters by:

- Restricting development to appropriate areas,
- Ensuring compatibility of adjacent land uses,
- Regulating the division of lands,
- Minimizing the pollution of ground and surface waters, all
- Through the enforcement of ordinances adopted by the Sawyer County Board of Supervisors, by conducting information sessions and meetings and by soliciting public participation in the making land use decisions.

The department consists of seven employees: Zoning Administrator (Bill) , Deputy Administrator (Cindy), Sanitarian (Mac), Zoning and Sanitation Technician (Eric), Zoning and Non-metallic Mining Reclamation Secretary (Kitty), Permits Secretary (Deb) and a Soils and Sanitation Secretary (Kelly). During the summer the department utilizes a part-time Field Assistant (Kathy), whose primary responsibility is to visit those shoreline properties for which land use permits have been issued and to verify the condition of their shoreline buffer zones.

The Sawyer County Zoning Ordinance encompasses both shoreland and comprehensive land use requirements. Shoreland zoning consists of regulating those land areas that are located within 1,000 feet of lakes, ponds and flowages and those land areas within 300 feet of rivers and streams. Comprehensive zoning pertains to all other land areas. County zoning (shoreland and comprehensive) is not applicable in the City of Hayward and the Villages of Couderay, Radisson, Exeland and Winter. While County zoning is also not applied in the Town of Spider Lake, the Town has its own zoning ordinance and zoning administrator, the Town's ordinance must be at least as restrictive as the County's ordinance. Until the adoption of a county-wide land use plan, the zoning ordinance remains the County's primary land use regulation document. It establishes minimum requirements for the issue of land use permits (commonly but erroneously referred to as "building permits") and the creation/location of various types of land uses.(i.e., Where is it appropriate to have residences, businesses and retail shops, recreation services, farms, manufacturing facilities etc?).

The department also regulates the subdivision of land through the Sawyer County Subdivision Control/Condominium Ordinance. This ordinance establishes the requirements for certified survey maps (CSM) and plats and their review and approval process. Property proposed to be divided must be mapped (CSM or plat) if the result will be the creation of any lot of 19 acres or less in area.

The Sawyer County Floodplain Ordinance regulates development in the floodplain areas of the County. The floodplain is defined as “Land which has been or may be covered by flood water during the regional flood.” The term regional flood is also synonymous with “100-year flood.” The ordinance prescribes the uses that are permitted within the floodplain areas (i.e., Where is it suitable to have campgrounds, agricultural activities, homes, commercial uses etc?).

The Sawyer County Ordinance for Non-metallic Mining Reclamation contains the minimum standards for the permitting/approval and the reclamation of non-metallic mine sites. The most common non-metallic mines in Sawyer County produce stone, sand, gravel and topsoil. The ordinance contains minimum requirements for such mine related activities as the protection of surface waters, ground waters and wetlands; the management of topsoil – store a sufficient amount for reclamation purposes, grading, sloping and revegetation. The ordinance also specifies mine owner/operator requirements for providing financial assurance and reclamation plans.

Department activities are overseen by the Sawyer County Zoning Committee. The Committee consists of six members (five members and one alternate member) from the Sawyer County Board of Supervisors. The Committee members are elected officials. The Committee has many responsibilities such as the drafting of ordinances, review of proposed ordinance amendments to include zone district changes, decide on applications for conditional uses and oversee the department staff. The Committee has its own set of rules (Sawyer County Zoning Committee – Rules and By-laws) that prescribe its responsibilities, duties and powers. Most property owners are familiar with the Committee through the notifications that they receive from the department about applications for proposed neighborhood projects and the public hearing that is conducted by the Committee to act on those applications.

The department is also the office for the Sawyer County Board of Appeals (BOA). Like the Committee, the BOA also has its own set of rules – Sawyer County Board of Appeals – Rules and By-laws. The BOA consists of six members (five members and one alternate member), however, although the members are also appointed by the Chairperson, Sawyer County Board of Supervisors, they are not members (elected supervisors) of the County Board. The BOA’s primary responsibility is to hear and decide appeals of decisions made by the Zoning Committee and department staff and to decide on applications for variances to zoning ordinance requirements.

The Sawyer County Citation Ordinance 89-1 contains the citation fee schedule for violations of department ordinances. The citation fee is determined by the nature of the violation. Citation fees range from \$186 for failure to obtain a sign permit to \$879 for failure to obtain a conditional use permit prior to opening a salvage yard. In addition to the stated citation fee, fees may also be assessed daily until compliance is attained.

I hope that this article has given you a brief overview of what we do. The next article will focus on the zoning and subdivision control ordinances.