



Dane County Planning & Development Zoning Division

June 4, 2014

TO: Dane County Zoning and Land Regulation Committee members

FROM: Hans Hilbert, Assistant Zoning Administrator

RE: 2014 OA-023 Amending chapter 76 of the Dane County Code of Ordinances, regarding issuance of building numbers for parcels without a building.

ZLR Committee Members,

In response to the recent ordinance amendment introduced to change addressing procedures in Rural Dane County, the department would like to provide information related to the administration of the Rural Numbering System prior to any modifications. In addition to the rural numbering system, the County assigns Parcel Identification Numbers to all parcels of land in the county regardless of improvements. The parcel numbering system provides adequate identification of unimproved land for most purposes. The authority of the County to administer a rural numbering system is granted per Wisconsin State Statute 59.54:

(4) RURAL NAMING OR NUMBERING SYSTEM. The board may establish a rural naming or numbering system in towns for the purpose of aiding in fire protection, emergency services, and civil defense, and appropriate and expend money therefor, under which:

(a) Each rural road, home, business, farm or other establishment, may be assigned a name or number.

(b) The names or numbers may be displayed on uniform signs posted on rural roads and intersections, and at each home, business, farm or other establishment.

(4m) RURAL NAMING OR NUMBERING SYSTEM; TOWN COOPERATION. The rural naming or numbering system under sub. (4) may be carried out in cooperation with any town or towns in the county.

As you may be aware, the current County numbering system is designed to assign addresses (DCCO 76.05(4)) to:

“New Buildings. When a zoning permit is issued for any new residential or any new commercial, business or industrial location, a number shall be assigned to that location”

The ordinance provides a finite amount of addresses to be used in any given section of the county. Though rare, there are portions of the county where address numbers are not available to

assign addresses to new structures without changing existing addresses. Assigning addresses to unimproved parcels of land without a defined access location will increasingly limit the numbers available to be assigned to buildings and result in an increased and more frequent amount of address changes. While changes of address can help to correct out of sequence addressing problems, they do not resolve number quantity conflicts. In addition, the enforcement of address changes are difficult for the following reasons:

1. Address changes place a burden on a property owner who is often unhappy and reluctant to make a change.
 - Existing addresses are on letterheads, business documents, mortgages, checks, etc.
 - House numbers are carved in stone or other decorative displays.
 - Owners hold sentiment regarding their assigned address, especially long time residents.
 - Address change affects voter registration.
2. Address change notification is limited.
 - The department is able to coordinate with other county and local agencies, but it is impossible to scrub external databases.
 - While USPS maintains tracking of historic addresses, the forwarding of mail is limited to one year, and may restrict what mail is forwarded.
3. Changed addresses linger in external AMS databases.
 - While the County maintains current records other AMS and address verification services used by utilities, GPS software, and billing services are not updated causing confusion and/or multiple addresses associated with a single establishment.
 - The department is forced to retire previously used addresses as this lingering can exist for decades.
4. The Official County Address Map does not have a tracking system.
 - Many historic property records (zoning, environmental health, deeds, 911, Sherriff reports, taxes) are tied to either an address or a parcel number with no way to cross-reference to a new address.
5. An increased number of existing addresses and an increased frequency of address changes hinders the ability to administer the system.
 - An address that is assigned to vacant land could cover hundreds of acres, as opposed to a single structure. Future subdivision of the land for building sites results in fragmentation. Out of sequence addressing is likely especially if a subdivision consumes a large range of addresses.
 - Vacant properties may be accessed via an unnamed or dead end road, such an address would be provided via an adjoining highway. Future development on such a road would result in all addresses needing to be assigned to the road as opposed to the adjoin highway.

There are many instances where assigning a rural address to vacant land would not require address changes or cause an immediate shortage of numbers, however doing so would have a direct impact on the use of zoning to regulate land use. In general, the development process in rural Dane County begins with the issuance of a zoning permit. Almost all steps that follow the

issuance of a zoning permit require the use of an address. This includes town building permits, highway access permits, utility connections, phone service, and the delivery of mail and building materials. By assigning addresses through the zoning permit approval, our department is able to control the development process and prevent the illegal use of properties. Such control reduces the workload of county employees that could have been prevented.

The proposed ordinance amendment shines light on the seriousness of providing quick response to emergency situations, and the department is strongly committed to the safety of the public. At first appearance it may seem that addressing unimproved parcels will provide greater public safety, but the implementation of such a system, within our current system, is likely to result in the opposite. We feel strongly that rural addresses are effective means of locating an emergency at a specific structure, however fails to accomplish the task when large parcels of land are involved. With our modern 911 technology and predominance of cell phones the ability to triangulate the exact location of a reported emergency exists and this information can quickly be disseminated to first responders. Also parcel identification numbers currently exist that can be used the same way by dispatchers.

In conclusion, rural numbering is a very intricate system and as a result the administration is a complexity of internal workflows designed around the effective delivery of emergency and non-emergency services. When addresses are incorrect or out of sequence, they severely hamper the ability for quick response of our emergency workers. Any extra time spent looking for an address is crucial time lost. We are dedicated to public safety within the county, and feel clearly that other systems, besides rural addressing, should be utilized and enhanced to locate unimproved lands. If the committee still seeks to make the changes proposed in OA-023, the department respectfully requests ample time for the Zoning Administrator to make comprehensive amendment recommendations designed to limit negative impacts of such changes.