

Map of the future to evolve from a map of the past

By Sheila Landsverk

Reporter

Predicting the future is generally left to crystal balls – but Columbia County has been given a more accurate option.

The UW Stevens Point Center for Land Use Education (CLUE) has received a USDA National Research Initiative for Rural Development grant for \$380,000 to document and analyze the long-term trends in land subdivision in two Wisconsin counties, and three towns in each of those two counties.

Columbia County was chosen as one of the counties, as was Bayfield County in northern Wisconsin. The towns in Bayfield County have yet to be chosen. The towns chosen in Columbia county are: the Town of Lodi, the Town of Springvale, and the Town of West Point.

"I am excited for Columbia County to be chosen for this study," stated Kathleen Haas, UWEX CRD agent for Columbia County. "We applied jointly with the cooperation of our UWEX office, our Land Information Dept., our county Planning and Zoning Dept., and the Land and Water Conservation Dept. We knew there was tough competition statewide and feel honored that we were selected."

Haas is the Columbia County liaison and lead for the study, which has an official name of 'Factors Influencing land parcelization in amenity rich rural areas and the potential consequences of planning and policy variables.'

"Parcelization doesn't mean a lot to many people. But the study will look at historic land divisions in the three towns and link that information with regulatory and ordinance information. The hope is to develop a GIS database of the historic information and be able to 'forecast' the future given different ordinance scenarios," Haas added.

The faculty, staff and graduate students whom will be working on the project from CLUE came down to Portage on March 8th to publicly unveil the program and meet with county officials in the cooperating county departments and Lodi Town Chair Roger Wetzel, Springvale Town Chair John Healy, and West Point Chair, Dean Schwarz.

Anna Haines, Director of CLUE and a Assistant Professor of Land Use at UW –Stevens Point opened the meeting stating that the study would look at fragmentation of 'working landscapes,' such as farms and forests.

"There is a concern about smaller and smaller parcels and land regulation, subdivision and development. There has been a lot researched on land fragmentation but not parcelization. We are going to take a historic look at parcels and how a town has been carved up for a period of time since about the 1930s, maybe even farther back if we can. The other piece is we are trying to develop a statistical model of factors involved in land parcelization and the rate of parcelization. Once we have a historic model in place we will be able to project out – what could happen in the next 10, 20 or 30 years. And finally, working with the county and towns to continue to archive parcel data and assist with the planning process," Haines said.

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COVERING THE SCENIC LODI VALLEY SINCE

Lodi Enterprise 3/16/06

Hans Hilbert, a graduate student at UW Stevens Point, explained the county selection process. "We wanted rural counties with an outside source of development pressure. Bayfield County was chosen because it was rich in forestry, Columbia County because it was an agricultural rich county. Waupaca County was a finalist with Columbia. Once we chose Columbia, we looked for towns where there was a high, medium and low rate of parcelization – the mean parcel density. The Town of Lodi was chosen because it has a high rate, West Point has medium rate, and Springvale has a low rate."

Eric Olson, an Associate Professor at CLUE stated they will be reconstructing the historical parcel maps. The county has a role legally in maintaining land records but most of that is on paper.

"A unique aspect of this project is that the towns participating will have their historical parcels maps brought up into the digital age. We will be able to compare earlier historic times to more current times and try to determine what other conditions and/or variables do we know? Soils, slopes, distance to roads, infrastructure, we are going to map that – the infrastructure and roads will be different for the different time periods. Then we can move the model back and forward in time and ask ourselves, is that the parcel we would have predicted to split? How would it split? The shape and location, trying to come close."

Olson said they would also look at changing rules at the town, county and state levels for lake and highway regulation surrounding land subdivision. "What if the rules had been suspended? What would have happened? We don't know if state rules have made an impact or not. What about 2006-7 forward – what are the variables and conditions that will predict what will split in the future?" Olson queried the group. "If the current regulations at the county and state are left in place, here is what your town will look like in the future.... Does the view of the future meet the goals of your land use plan? If not, what regulations and roles would you need to have in place? We will look at likely scenarios and how they play out."

Roger Wetzel commented that he thought, "The study should help the town of Lodi be in a better position for land use issues in the future." John Healy said, "We are pretty much off the beaten path – we had a woodlot in Springvale divided into 28 parcels in 1968, the second house went in last year." Schwarz countered, "We are the beaten path. With Dane County having PDR [Purchase of Development Rights] programs and buying property development rights on the Hwy 12 corridor, West Point has record pressure on it."

Randy Thompson, a planner with Columbia County Planning and Zoning asked if they will look at how the ordinances have changed over the last 60 years – and suggested they go back in

time to when the dam was built, 1916. A question was also asked about land divisions that occur outside of the rules – like variances, etc. Haines reassured the group that "we will be interviewing local people in the towns to get their stories about how and why things happened and this will hopefully help us to get to the truth and explain anomalies."

Becky Roberts of CLUE explained the timeline. This is a three-year project. They will be beginning the project in Columbia County. First they will look at what county data is available. Then they will re-assess the local data. They will try and put together the historical paper record and then begin the interview of the long-term residents in the towns. It may take three months or longer with each town to get all the data collected. The first town(s) will probably take longer as they work out the protocol. When asked for a volunteer for who wants to be first, Schwarz raised his hand and volunteered West Point. "At this point we are optimistically hoping to have all the data from the three Columbia County towns collected by the late fall/early winter of 2006," Roberts said. "Phase II of the project will be to begin modeling the historical data. The last phases of the project will be community outreach on what the modeling shows, what could happen, potential policy development, and tools that are available like subdivision regulations. The hope is to wrap up Columbia County in mid-2007," Roberts said.

Olson added, "We want it to be as easy as possible for counties to be able to archive data layers in the future after this project. The hope is 30 years from now it will be there – the data – the county will have regular maps to show the towns on how they are growing and be able to keep their plans alive with historic continuity."

The GIS mapping of historical information will be supervised by Doug Miskowiak. Haines concluded, "Regarding proposed tools and implementation, it will not be the same old stuff. Bayfield has stated quite clearly, don't give us conservation subdivisions again. We want innovation. We will be looking around the United States at what is available and modifying it for Wisconsin." Olson added, "The vast amounts of land holdings in the United States are in 'terminal farming operations'. These are farms where there is not a younger generation following in the parents footsteps. This coincides with the retirement of the baby boom generation, and creates new and different land markets. Many baby boomers are cashing in their urban equity into rural land markets - what we see are demographics playing out at the land market." For further information on this study, contact Kathleen Haas at the Columbia County UW Extension office in Portage in the County Annex at – Kathleen.haas@ces.uwex.edu. The UW- Stevens Point CLUE web page is - <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/>