

Aztalan goat farm application still alive ... for now

By Randy Radtke Special to the Union | Posted: Wednesday, February 17, 2016 10:49 am

AZTALAN — Despite a swirl of rumors to the contrary, a proposed goat farm that would house 9,000 goats in the Town of Aztalan remains alive in the application process at the Jefferson County Courthouse as of Wednesday morning.

“We haven’t received a formal notification asking us to withdraw the application as of yet,” said Rob Klotz, director of the Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Department. “We’re aware of the rumors, but until we get a formal request, the application still is being processed and it is still scheduled to go to a public hearing on March 17.”

According to the plans for the proposed farm on file with the zoning office, Drumlin Dairy LLC would include a fertilizer plant to process the goats’ manure. The farm would be located on vacant farmland owned by the Ardis M. Eilenfeldt Trust near the intersection of Harvey and Mansfield roads.

The application process moved to the county’s Planning and Zoning Department on Monday following a review of the application by the county’s Land Water Conservation Department.

“They’ve made the application and paid the fee and submitted the worksheets and the Land and Water Conservation Department staff has reviewed the worksheets and judged the application to be complete as required by ATCP 51,” said Klotz on Monday afternoon.

“We’ve gotten and accepted their findings that the application is complete and if the process continues it would go to a public hearing before the Planning and Zoning Committee on March 17 at 7 p.m. in the county board room on the second-floor of the courthouse on March 17 unless they pull or withdraw the application,” said Klotz.

The application’s petition was filed by Kenn Buelow of New Holstein. Buelow is listed in the application as a manager for Holsum Dairies. According to information submitted with the application, Holsum operates two large farms, Holsum-Irish and Holsum-Elm. Both farms house 4,200 cows while Holsum-Elm also has 2,500 calves.

The size and scope of the operations of the proposed farm have sparked concerns and opposition in the town and adjacent municipalities.

The application’s venue moved from the Aztalan Town Board of Supervisors to the county board on Feb. 1 when the board reversed a decision to deny the permit by the town’s planning

committee. On a 2-1 vote, the board voted to approve a conditional-use permit for the farm with several conditions designed to reimburse the town for road repairs for excessive wear and tear on Harvey and Mansfield roads due to increased semi-truck traffic, and to pay for any modifications or expansions necessary to accommodate the expected increase in truck traffic at the intersection of Harvey and Mansfield roads.

While the county is required to review the application, make sure it is complete and conduct a public hearing on it, siting and permitting a large livestock farm — of 500 or more animals — is governed by state statute, 93.90 and ATCP 51, the Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection’s administrative rule that builds on the statute.

The statute limits the exclusion of livestock facilities from agricultural zoning districts. The land the proposed farm would use is currently zoned A-1.

The law took effect in 2006 and Klotz said concerned residents and opponents of the proposed farm have had a tough time coming to grips with the fact that the county can do very little when it comes to modifying or denying an application like the one for the proposed goat farm.

“I’ve shown people this paragraph and their response is, ‘This can’t be right!’” said Klotz.

The paragraph Klotz was referring to is found in ATCP 51 and reads: “If you complete the application properly, the local government must approve the proposed livestock facility unless it finds, based on clear and convincing evidence in the local record that the facility fails to meet the state standards.”

“It’s been difficult to convince opponents that the county’s hands are essentially tied by ATCP 51,” added Klotz.

If the process continues, the next step would be the public hearing on March 17.

Klotz noted that the complete file for the application for the conditional use permit is available for public viewing in the county’s zoning office located on the second floor of the courthouse.