

NR 115 SHORELAND ZONING PROTECTING OUR LAKES

By Ron Krueger

Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 115 establishes minimum standards required for each county's shoreland zoning ordinance. This code, which has remained relatively unchanged since its inception in the 1960s, is presently undergoing a review and revision process by a committee of people with diverse interests from across the state. To learn more about NR 115 and the revision process on the internet, go to <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/wm/dsfm/shore/news.htm>.

Revision of these requirements comes at a crucial time for the public and for waterfront property owners in Forest County. During 1998 and 1999 our county board unanimously passed a revised zoning ordinance that went well beyond the present NR 115 minimum standards. This action looked to the future and would help to protect both the Northwoods character of our lakeshores and our lakefront property values. Forest County had heeded the mistakes of the helter-skelter lakeshore development occurring over past decades in counties to our south and had actually taken a proactive stand to avoid the associated problems of over- and improper waterfront development. Since development pressure arrived later in our county, the board's forward thinking came in time to avoid most the headaches of the fix-it mode. Life was good, we thought.

But, we were wrong. Shortly after the board passed the new ordinance a new county zoning administrator was hired. She was inexperienced, but we were hopeful that she would learn and support the spirit of zoning. But, within a couple of months it became obvious she had a property rights agenda and the uncanny ability to cast a spell over the county board. The new ordinance was never even published. Sadly, the zoning administrator has convinced most of the county board members that pack-em-in and let-em-do-what-they-want development will enhance the county tax base! Many of the requirements of both the new and the old ordinance have since been discarded or disregarded. Lakeshore development has continued in our county, but with little regard for setback requirements and development density. Unless changes come soon, this does not bode well for any of us owning waterfront property in townships that do not have their own zoning. And, it will be a detriment to tourism, too.

Of all the issues FCAL has addressed over its eleven-year existence, shoreland protection through strict enforcement of appropriate development standards has become paramount to our future enjoyment and property values. The key words here are **enforcement** and **development standards** (zoning requirements).

It behooves each of us to talk to his county supervisor, whether or not we vote here, and ask him why he changed his position on the 1999 ordinance. Explain how much you pay in property taxes, and remind him that quality is better than quantity, and that uncontrolled, high density development will only urbanize our lakeshores and create problems much more expensive to solve than any short-term increase in tax base. We should attend town board meeting, too, and suggest that the town apply pressure against the county's complacency regarding zoning. After all, poor zoning has dollar implications to town budgets, too. Insist that the 1999 ordinance be published, as passed, and strictly enforced until the new NR 115 comes on line.

The DNR will be holding "listening sessions" regarding proposed revisions of NR 115 this fall. We can be sure that the property rights folks will be out in force at these sessions, so it's important that many of us turn out in support of rules that will preserve the public resource and protect our own interests. Our comments should also indicate that, without strong state backing of new regulations, it is doubtful that Forest County will take on that responsibility. The DNR web site noted above is frequently updated and should list the DNR listening session times and locations soon. Plan to attend one of the sessions and support strong shoreland zoning.