

## Wadena County Planning & Zoning

The purpose of Planning & Zoning is to provide for the orderly development of the County and to ensure that such development is not injurious to the overall health of the County's agricultural, recreational, and community areas. With this in mind, Wadena County adopted County-wide Zoning in 1971 and developed a Comprehensive Plan and County Zoning Ordinance at that time. In accordance with Section 19 of the Ordinance, "... no person shall erect, move in, alter in respect to height or area, any building or part thereof, or install, alter, or repair a sewage disposal unit without first securing a building permit...". Also, according to the Zoning Ordinance, any violation will be considered a separate offense for each day it exists and is considered a misdemeanor punishable under Minnesota law.

Because many of the building sites located in Wadena County existed prior to the adoption of our Zoning Ordinance, many of the building setback standards required today cannot be met by pre-existing structures. For this reason, Wadena County, as a part of its ordinance, has adopted a process for *variance* from the ordinance. In cases where a property owner wishes to add on to a pre-existing structure but cannot meet the required setbacks, a *variance application* may be submitted to the County's Adjustment Board for consideration. A public hearing would be held and it would be the task of the Adjustment Board to determine if a hardship exists and a variance could be granted.

Certain land uses may be permitted in a given zoning district without the need for special consideration. However, if a specific use is not listed in the zoning district, it may be treated as a *conditional use*. Through the conditional use process, an application for permit may be submitted to the County Planning Commission for consideration. A public hearing is held and a recommendation is made to the County Board of Commissioners to approve or deny the permit. An example might be a property owner wanting to

begin a retail garden shop in an agriculturally zoned district. This would not be a permitted use, but could be considered as a conditional use.

In addition to County-wide Zoning, Wadena County adopted a Subdivision Controls Ordinance in 1975 pertaining to property splitting and platting. This particular ordinance allows for one split of a full forty-acre parcel (quarter/quarter section) or government lot with the minimum split being 2.5 acres and having a width and depth of not less than 300 feet (the difference in square feet can be made up in width and/or depth). Any further division of property would have to be done through rezoning and the platting process. Rezoning and platting involve public hearings with the Wadena County Planning Commission whose honorable body will make a recommendation to the Wadena County Board of Commissioners to approve or deny the applications, with the County Board making the final decision. Keep in mind that our County Comprehensive Plan provides for residential development to occur in those areas designated by the County. These areas would be limited to R-1 Suburban Residential Districts and A-1 Transitional Agriculture Districts.

In order to obtain information regarding building permits, setback requirements, or permitted uses in the zone in which you reside, you may contact the Wadena County Planning & Zoning Department.

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### What about Septic Systems & Wells?

Wadena County does require that a septic system be brought up to date upon the transfer of property ownership. This may be negotiated between the buyer and the seller. Well and septic *disclosure* is also required. If a well is deemed to be abandoned, it will be required to be sealed by a licensed/certified well sealer. Programs are available through the SWCD for sealing abandoned wells, as well as upgrading failing sewage treatment systems. Wadena County does require a sewage system to be inspected for compliance, and upgraded, if necessary, upon application for a

building permit that will alter the footprint of the dwelling structure, excluding: decks, open-air porches, patios, and attached fences.

Permit applications for new septic systems are required and must be accompanied by a design from a licensed designer of sewage treatment systems. Once the system is permitted and installed, it must be inspected by the County and issued a Certificate of Compliance prior to it being covered.

Well testing in Wadena County is not mandatory, but is always a good idea, especially if you are just beginning occupancy in a home. Well testing services for coliform bacteria and nitrate are available through the Tri-County Hospital in Wadena, nitrate clinics sponsored by the Wadena County SWCD, and nitrate testing through Wadena County Public Health.

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### What things should I be doing to ensure the longevity of my new or existing sewage treatment system?

- Septic tanks should be pumped at a minimum of every two years with regular water use.
- Avoid putting foreign substances down the drain such as diapers, cigarette butts, coffee grounds, feminine hygiene products, greasy substances, etc.
- Never introduce hazardous substances to your system, i.e., paint, varnish, poison, used oil, etc.
- Monitor your water use and conserve wherever possible (shorter showers).
- Wash larger loads of laundry and spread out through the week instead of doing everything for the week in one day.
- Do not compact the soil in and around your system. Do not drive motor vehicles or ATV over the system or use it for a parking area.

### My property is in a shoreland/wetland area. What special considerations do I need to make?

In most cases, impacts through draining, filling, vegetative clearing, or excavation will require a permit or some other authorization in Minnesota, varying in scope from DNR, Army Corp. of Engineers, SWCD, or Local Unit of Government, wherever jurisdiction lies. It will be necessary for individuals to show efforts to avoid wetlands and they may be required to replace drained or filled wetland areas or replace shoreland vegetation.

Storm Water regulations are also a consideration in projects involving wetlands or shoreland. These regulations are a part of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). Under Phase I, operators of large construction activities disturbing five or more acres were required to apply for permit coverage. Phase II, effective March 10, 2003, was expanded to include small construction activity that results from in the disturbance of equal to or greater than one acre. Like the Phase I program, owners and operators of small construction sites need to obtain NPDES permit coverage and implement practices to minimize pollutant runoff from construction sites. MPCA currently handles the permitting process.

Before a project is started, a simple phone call to the Wadena County SWCD or the Planning & Zoning Office will help you get started by giving you appropriate guidance on the different steps that need to be taken. **At anytime remodeling or new construction is going to take place, care should be taken to minimize the effects on surface and ground waters. Your local SWCD or Zoning Office should be contacted to find out how you can do your part in protecting this valuable resource.**

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**What if I have, or want to start, a feedlot?**

Wadena County SWCD works with feedlot compliance in our county. Feedlot operations are regulated based on surface and ground water pollution, as well as the number of animal units. If you will be operating a feedlot, registration of the facility will be necessary. If special permits are required, the SWCD will be able to direct you appropriately.

**What are my responsibilities as a landowner where noxious weeds are concerned?**

State Statute, Section 18.78, states that noxious weeds be controlled to prevent the injurious effects to public health, the environment, public roads, livestock, and property. In short, *you are responsible for noxious weeds on your property.* By controlling the noxious weeds on your property, you can maintain a favorable relationship with your neighbors. The most productive way to get ahead of your noxious weed problem is to prevent the ripening and scattering of viable weed seeds. More information on types of noxious weeds and their control may be obtained from the Wadena County Extension Office or the Wadena County Soil & Water Office.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

**Wadena County Planning & Zoning**  
Room 234, Wadena County Courthouse  
415 Jefferson Street South  
Wadena, MN 56482  
Phone: (218) 631-7604 Fax: (218) 631-7652

**Soil & Water Conservation District Office**  
4 Alfred Street Northeast  
Wadena, MN 56482  
Phone: (218) 631-3195 Fax: (218) 631-1625

**Wadena County Public Health**  
22 Dayton Avenue Southeast  
Wadena, MN 56482  
Phone: (218) 631-7629 Fax: (218) 631-7632

**Wadena County Extension Office**  
221 Harry & Rich Drive  
Wadena, MN 56482  
Phone: (218) 631-7623 Fax: (218) 631-7625

**Minnesota Pollution Control Agency**  
7678 College Road, Suite 105  
Baxter, MN 56425  
Phone: (800) 657-3864 Fax: (218) 828-2594

**Department of Natural Resources  
Waters Office**  
1509 First Avenue North  
Fergus Falls, MN 56537  
Phone: (218) 739-7576 Fax: (218) 739-7601

**WADENA COUNTY**

*Working together to make  
our County a healthy,  
happy, and orderly  
place to live.*



***THANKS FOR YOUR  
COOPERATION!***

*Sponsored by the  
Wadena County Planning & Zoning Office*

**LIVING IN  
WADENA COUNTY**

**A Guide for  
Landowners**



**Always contact the County or other local offices in the area you live or wish to purchase property in to find out their rules and regulations. It may assist you in your decision making and we answer questions for FREE!**