

## Economic Development Insight

### Elections are Over, Now What?

By Joan Bethell

I've been out of state this week, helping a dear friend with the aftermath of her husband's death. We've been digging around in her garages, workshop, home office, sheds and basement trying to weed through over two decades of accumulation. The process is slow and arduous but requires ruthlessness when it comes to discarding or disposing of those things that are no longer needed, in other words part of her past but not her future.

It's the same process for Greene County. The economy was dying and some parts of it were even dead. Now is the task of weeding through what was done in the past to determine if it's still needed or would a new approach better equip us for our future?

The outcome at the polls earlier this week revealed that Greene County is ready to grasp its present and steer it toward the future of our dreams, not let others (state and federal agencies, neighboring community policies, etc.) decide for us.

Regardless of your individual political affiliation or preferences, our new leadership has been determined and we need now to encourage and support them as they learn about and begin to address the many issues we face. The bible indicates we should "pray for those in leadership, so that we may lead a peaceable and godly life in the sight of all men." It's time to reconcile our differences and seek unity and consensus on any dividing issues.

During the recent campaign, there was much discussion about zoning and it was a very divisive topic. What I discovered was that folks held a variety of beliefs about it, many of which were based on misperceptions and misinformation. Here are some of the most common:

Planning and zoning are two different topics and what most people seem to be concerned with is not even zoning but the associated ordinances. They don't want to be told what they can and can't do with their property but they do want protection from potential 'bad' neighbors who would do something to damage or contaminate neighboring properties in addition to their own.

Also, some don't want their agricultural land to be restricted from alternative development. They recognize that land zoned as industrial, commercial or residential has greater potential for development and so may appraise at a higher value per acre. However, developers typically prefer to work with communities with defined land uses and controls. These tools help to ensure ease of development, avoid future issues and protect their investment. For example, residential developers who have built homes near a horse or cattle ranch have later found themselves dealing with irate homeowners who have discovered that livestock are accompanied by flies and associated odors.

The land use maps that are part of the Greene County comprehensive plan identify highest and best uses for the land (zones). These zones are based upon sound planning principles that factor things like topography, current and potential usage, surrounding developments and availability of

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utilities, to name a few. Even more important is the direct input from the public, which is highly valued and factored into the final land use decisions.

Unless Greene County later decides to create a set of ordinances that are customized for each type of zone, then the land use map will remain simply an unfulfilled vision for the future.

The various zones each require different ordinances. Obviously, agriculture zones, which are controlled by the farmers (who have been wise stewards of the land for centuries), do not need the type of ordinances that would pertain to an industrial use. Similarly, certain commercial uses require ordinances that address the burden of increased traffic on the surrounding roads and infrastructure. Clearly, this differs from low-traffic 'mom-n-pop' home-based businesses.

Finally, if you live in one of the seven Greene County incorporated communities of Bloomfield, Jasonville, Linton, Lyons, Newberry, Switz City or Worthington, then your property is already subject to and protected by the ordinances of your town or city, NOT those that may be applied to unincorporated areas. In addition, your ordinances are enforced by your local town/city Council, NOT the Greene County Commissioners.

The essence of the issue is not about government control of your land but protection of your land and your financial investment. In counties that have conducted planning activities and subsequently adopted zoning to ensure the desired development, property values have increased. Correspondingly, business retention, expansion and attraction efforts have been enhanced, leading to more quality jobs being created and, ultimately, a better quality of life.

United we stand, divided we fall. So, let's work together to ensure we develop an accurate vision and plan for our future and then let's empower our leadership to protect our plan, our future AND our property.

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