

Economic Development Insight

Okay - Let's talk about ***ing

By Joan Bethell

Recently, it has been stated by some that the only topic I'm interested in is zoning. Forgive me for using the word or, rather than using a forbidden word, perhaps I should say "***ing", as one resident referred to it in an email I received.

First, let's talk about planning, which is a separate but related topic. Two of the three topics chosen by the public for GCEDC to focus on are Tourism Industry development and Land Use. The foundation of tourism includes community branding, infrastructure, funding and marketing and GCEDC has formed task forces to begin to address those. As for land use, countywide efforts are underway to develop a Greene County comprehensive plan (that includes land use and tourism strategy), and an I-69 Corridor plan.

Community planning is an ongoing activity, being conducted at all levels of government. Some examples are federal plans related to interstate travel (road, rail, and air), use of natural resources, and utility infrastructure. State agencies have state and regional (interstate and intrastate) plans for development related to its core mission. Counties and incorporated communities are each responsible for their own interior planning.

What's happening in Greene County

The larger incorporated communities in Greene County have already completed some level of planning. Linton has a comprehensive plan, Bloomfield is developing one, Jasonville has an economic development strategic plan, and Worthington has a downtown revitalization plan. Greene County's plans simply mirror those efforts but reflect the vision for the entire county.

Once the vision, and corresponding guidelines and policies, is created, it is the responsibility of the respective governing body to ensure that future development aligns with the plan. In other words that everyone is reading from the same page and playing the same game with a fair set of rules.

Indiana University, in the September-October 2008 edition of its *InContext* publication, reports that unincorporated areas have grown faster than cities and towns since 2000 but, since 2005, in general that trend is reversed.

However, Monroe County's growth reflects a continuing favor toward unincorporated areas, representing 70% of its growth in that time span. The overflow from this trend is evidenced in both Owen and, especially, Greene counties. However, both counties show faster overall *decline* since 2005.

It's similar to a whirlpool that gathers momentum as the volume diminishes.

If Monroe is overflowing into Greene and yet our growth rate is declining, with the rate of -1.1% a year, we're obviously losing more residents than we're gaining. So, we have to ask ourselves the questions: Who are we gaining? And, who are we losing?

The planning process needs to assess the impacts of the in-migration and out-migration trends. Then, any subsequent land use controls need to effectively address those impacts, particularly any negative ones.

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Land use controls are the mechanisms used to ensure that any future development is orderly, sustainable and beneficial to the residents.

Study on Impacts of Zoning

The International Economic Development Corporation's *E.D. Journal*, Summer 2006 edition, reports on research into the economic development benefits of zoning in rural areas, using Georgia's 159 counties as its study area. (Georgia has more counties than other states, with the exception of Texas.) Most had land use plans but 63 mostly rural counties had not implemented the plans through zoning or other land use control mechanisms.

A review of the experiences of 57 rural communities across Georgia, including 14 that had more than 20 years experience with zoning, confirmed the need. A comparison of all rural counties with a zoning policy to all counties without one revealed that zoned counties have the tendency to have greater economic positioning than non-zoned counties. To them, land use planning, subsequently supported by zoning has significant and positive impacts.

Self-sufficiency tendencies are gauged by looking at factors like per capita income, average manufacturing wage and food stamp participation. The data revealed that rural counties with zoning tend to have a higher (median) per capita income by about 5%, higher average manufacturing wage rate by about 10%, and lower food stamp participation by about 38%.

Employment tendencies are gauged using factors such as employment (the number of people working – not living – in a community), unemployment rate (percentage of labor force not employed) and labor force participation (percentage of working-age residents working or actively seeking employment.) Employment increased approximately 82%, unemployment rate was reduced by about 16%, and labor force participation increased by 6%.

A third indicator of increased quality of life is assessed property values. In Georgia, the average property value for counties with a zoning policy is more than *double* than that for counties without such a policy.

So now, we need to ask some final questions. Do we want to continue declining while letting everyone else plan for us and determine our future? Or, are we finally ready to make some changes that will improve the quality of life for *all* residents in Greene County?

Joan Bethell is the executive director at Greene County Economic Development Corporation and can be reached at (812) 847-4500 or jbethell@gcedc.us.