

January 11, 2007
Meeting Sponsored by American Association of University Women
Smart Growth or
Walworth County – Planning For The Future

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I would like to thank the American Association of University Women for providing this forum to discuss Smart Growth Planning in Walworth County.

To demonstrate the need for smart Growth Planning I would like to site a recent article that appeared in the American Planning Association Magazine titled “The Rise of the Megapolitans”. In this article, authored by Robert Lang and Arthur Nelson, who are co-directors of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech, they ask and answer the question as to where the 100 million additional people the United States will add to its population by 2040 will live. The answer according to the authors is in super regions that combine at least two, and often several, metropolitan areas. Which they call “megapolitan areas” or “megas” for short. Walworth County is located within the Lakefront Megaregion of the Great Lakes Megapolitan Area that is anchored by Chicago and Milwaukee.

Population projections for Walworth County prepared by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and the State Department of Administration project that Walworth County will experience an increase of 46.4 % or 44,400 persons between 2003 and 2035. To put that in perspective it will be like adding approximately the population of 7 cities of Lake Geneva to the existing county population of 99,761.

The increasing population will make our future land use decisions all that more important as we try to accommodate our new residents in orderly, efficient and affordable development patterns while at the same time preserving our rich and diversified natural, and cultural resource base. A resource base that includes highly productive farmland, lakes, streams, wetlands, drinkable ground water, woodlands, natural and critical species habitat areas, rare and beautiful geologic formations created by past glacial forces and our historic sites that not only connect us to the past but also help us figure out where we want to go from here.

I would like to talk about some the major issues that I believe will either influence or be part of the County Smart Growth Planning effort. Later we will ask you what you believe to be the important smart growth issues are and what direction the county should be taking on those issues.

Some of the major smart growth plan issues are:

- Dealing with increasing development pressures from both the primary and seasonal housing market.
- Identifying areas where development is suitable to take place and at what density depending on available services such as sewer, water, schools, police, fire and rescue and also based on limitations or restrictions the underlying natural resource base might impose such as floodplain, steep slopes, and resources identified for preservation.
- Provide a balance of housing options in a broad price range. In 2002 a Public Policy Forum analysis of Multiple Listing Service data reported that Walworth County was the only county in the Southeastern Wisconsin Region where every community's housing stock had a broad price range. The question for the smart growth plan is how do we maintain and/or improve that mix.

- Identifying the natural and cultural resources the community wishes to preserve and develop implementation strategies to accomplish those goals. Resource preservation is not only important for aesthetic and recreational reasons but it is also critical to the county's long-term economic vitality, given the important role tourism and agriculture plays in the local economy.
- Farmland Preservation requires setting standards for identifying and mapping the Prime Agricultural Land the county wishes to preserve. The County currently uses agricultural capability class soils I, II and III. Do we wish to continue to use the existing standards or do we want to develop new standards and new implementation strategies such as Purchase Development Rights (PDR) or Transfer Development Rights (TDR) programs. Most importantly what, if any, monetary resources will the community be willing to commit to these programs.
- Environmental Corridor preservation, which includes woodlands, wetlands, stream courses. Again this will entail evaluating our existing efforts such as the Conservation Development Design Requirements in the County Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance and determine what, if any, changes need to be made.
- Groundwater Protection: Waukesha County's problems have been in the news lately. What can we do to insure our residence will continue to have adequate and safe drinking water? What strategies will we implement out of the forthcoming groundwater study being developed by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

- Identify transition areas for future development. Remember this plan needs to accommodate forecasted growth to the year 2035. This is where Towns, Cities and Villages need to work together to identify future development areas and prepare joint service agreements and boundary agreements.

- Economic Development: Many of our Cities and Villages have successful economic development programs. What roll, if any, should the county take?
- Attempt to identify and address, when possible, conflicts that occur in areas of overlapping jurisdiction. These so called “Border Wars” generally occur as cities and villages grow and towns attempt to maintain their autonomy. Because cities and villages hold most of the power under the state law for annexations some towns are contemplating incorporation or pulling out of County Zoning to pursue more inventive ways to protect their borders. Unfortunately we are limited as to what we can do to address this issue, as the Comprehensive Planning Law did not change the current state laws, which mandate jurisdictional responsibilities and annexation authority. The Smart Growth Plan will provide additional information on which to base decisions and provide an opportunity for neighboring communities to identify and work cooperatively to resolve border issues.
- Balancing individual property rights with the neighbor’s property rights and also the community’s interests and goals.
- Implementation: Make sure there is consistency between the nine plan elements and the land use ordinances that will ultimately serve as the implementation tool for the Smart Growth Plan recommendations. Remember that plan recommendations will have to be implemented. Be realistic. Make sure the means to implement the plan are or will be put into place.

Smart Growth is many things to many different people.

- To a conservationist it may mean the preservation of natural resources.
- To a builder/developer it may mean more design flexibility and more certainty in the review and permitting process.
- To an elected or appointed government official it might mean having better information on which to base their land use decisions
- To a family it may mean affordable housing, good jobs, good schools and services such as: fire, rescue, law enforcement, and parks.

Smart Growth will ultimately be defined by the communities elected officials and citizens.

Questions / Answers and Input on what Smart Growth means to those in attendance at tonight’s meeting.