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Smart Growth Plans Progress

Smart Growth Plans in Racine and Kenosha Counties have made remarkable progress in the past 18 months. Yorkville and Raymond passed mandatory conservation subdivision ordinances with five- and six-acre density respectively. The Town of Burlington adopted a similar cluster development ordinance, and Dover is considering whether to adopt a conservation subdivision ordinance. The Yorkville and Raymond plans require that 60 percent of the land being developed be maintained as natural areas and permanently protected from further development. Prior to passing the ordinances, both towns invited the Kenosha/Racine Land Trust to present our experiences with six conservation subdivisions in Caledonia and one in Dover.

By the way, those seven conservation easements protect 150 acres, and the Land Trust is working on sixteen more developments where several hundred additional acres would be covered by easements. Obviously, conservation development has become a powerful land protection tool in SE Wisconsin.

Randall Initiates Farmland Protection

The Town of Randall, located near Twin Lakes in Kenosha County, is yet another community awakening to the importance of having a plan to manage development. Located on the Illinois state line, Randall has seen first hand the ill effects of unplanned, rapid development across the border and is starting to experience the same pains. Just drive a few miles down Highways 45 or 83 into northern Illinois and you will understand their concern. To the dismay of current residents, these areas are not only losing their rural character; they are also experiencing large tax increases to pay for expanded fire and police protection, new schools, and other government services required by the newcomers.

To avoid the same pitfalls, Randall is moving to quickly complete its Comprehensive Smart Growth Plan. The town is completing a Conservation Subdivision Ordinance and, for those farmers who want to continue farming, it has adopted a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR): Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program.

Only two other communities in Wisconsin have PDR programs, and each has long waiting lists of farmers eager to participate. In such a program, the town purchases development rights from willing farmers. Farmers are paid the development portion of property value, but keep the land and continue farming. For example, if someone would pay \$2000 per acre to purchase land for farming and a developer \$10,000 to build a subdivision, under the PDR program the farmer would receive the \$8000 difference, which is the development value.

PDR programs benefit a community by maintaining open space and rural character. In addition, they slow the rate of growth of services required by a larger population and thus hold down taxes.

The Town of Randall and K/RLT have signed a memorandum of understanding wherein the Land Trust and Town will co-hold conservation easements purchased under the PDR program. A similar arrangement is planned for conservation easements, once the town's Conservation Subdivision Ordinance is in place.

Sprawl is Unrelenting

While K/RLT supports use of conservation subdivisions to build more livable communities and preserve open space, we recognize that such subdivisions do not stop the sprawl plaguing most of Wisconsin.

Throughout Wisconsin the migration to rural areas continues to gobble up thousands of acres of natural and agricultural land each year. Encouraged by road building and other indirect government incentives, the move to the country is relentless. In spite of recent rapid increases in home and vehicle fuel prices, average new home size has grown to over 2600 square feet and average commute times continue to increase as people move farther away from where they work.

Taking a more enlightened approach, many European and Asian countries adopt and maintain policies which strongly encourage people to live in urban centers. Mass transportation and other amenities are designed to make urban living comfortable and affordable. So who do you think will be better prepared for the inevitable \$100 plus per barrel oil? Pasteur said "Chance favors the prepared man," which is why K/RLT strongly advocates for local and regional planning. Without sensible planning and government policies, Wisconsin residents will be at a huge disadvantage for the many challenges as we approach the post oil economy.

To learn more about land use planning and Wisconsin's Smart Growth Law, visit the website of 1000 Friends of Wisconsin (www.1kfriends.org). 1000 Friends was started by people concerned about keeping the things that make Wisconsin Wisconsin. It is a strong advocate for local people deciding how they want their communities to grow and look.

Conservation Buyers Answer the Call

In my August article, I invited potential conservation buyers to contact K/RLT. A conservation buyer purchases large acreage, builds a home, and then permanently protects the remainder of the land from further development. Encouragingly, six couples replied. Although no land has come on the market yet, it will be sooner or later.

Interested conservation buyers should contact Chuck Haubrich at 262-534-5116 for additional information.

