

From: Mayor
Sent: Monday, May 12, 2008 2:53 PM
To: 'Frances Johnson'; Pham-Remmele, Thuy
Cc: carpresponse@gmail.com
Subject: RE: CARPC

Dear Frances,

Thank you for your recent message regarding my appointments to the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission. First of all, let me say that this is not about the individuals involved. I like them. They're good people. After all, I appointed them in the first place.

This is about the recent action of CARPC with regard to how it considers urban service area expansions. I believe that was a bad decision for our environment. In addition, the process by which the decision was made has been damaging to the new CARPC as an institution. Let me expand on those themes.

We can all agree that compact development is better for our environment. As a matter of fact, I have spent most of my career working toward that very end. I have worked for Rep. Spencer Black when he was chair of the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, served as a board member of Wisconsin's Environmental Decade (now Clean Wisconsin), served as the first Government Relations Director for the Wisconsin Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, was co-founder of 1000 Friends of Wisconsin and served as its executive director for its first six years. I even served on the previous regional planning commission in the early 1990s. In fact, one of the primary reasons that I ran for Mayor of Madison was because I wanted to control sprawl by building a great city.

Since I have been Mayor we have passed a comprehensive plan under Wisconsin's Smart Growth law (which I helped write when I was at 1000 Friends). This plan identifies 100 places in our City where we want to encourage infill development and it calls for compact, mixed use, transit friendly New Urbanist development when we do develop on the periphery. Major infill developments already underway include Capitol West, Monroe Commons, Sequoya Commons, the Hilldale Mall and more.

In the area of water quality, we've established a 1000 Rain Gardens program, started to put rain gardens in street terraces, increased street sweeping, banned phosphorous fertilizers and signed an historic agreement with Dane County and the State to move forward together on improving our lakes.

Both in the areas of land use and water quality, most of these policies were put in place during the hiatus when no regional planning commission was in place. So, clearly the RPC was not necessary to encourage compact development or to improve water quality. Nonetheless, I certainly agree that having an RPC is an overall positive as long as it recognizes the pro-environmental policies of the municipalities it serves.

It has been a long-established and wise policy of the regional planning commission to encourage development within urban service areas. Development that takes place in urban areas is going to be more compact and it is more likely to be transit friendly.

The real threat to land use and water quality in Dane County is the widely scattered rural development taking place outside of urban service areas.

Did you know that over the last couple of decades the average number of acres added to urban service areas in a given year was less than the acres zoned from agricultural to development outside of them? The average number of acres added to urban service areas has been 825 acres per year while the average number of acres zoned for farming that have been rezoned for development outside of urban service areas is 1,280 acres.

What's worse every acre zoned for development outside of urban service areas is going to be used much less efficiently. It's not uncommon to have five, ten or more acres per lot. And every one of those homes will be absolutely auto dependent. Conversely, the acres developed within urban service areas will have many units per acre and the new residents will have options for bussing, biking and walking.

My point is that the best environmental policy is to encourage development within urban service areas. Yet the CARPC action is designed to make that harder by making municipalities jump through more bureaucratic hoops to expand urban service areas to capture more growth.

Even more egregious is the fact that the CARPC policy says nothing about the horrible chewing up of the landscape that is taking place outside of our cities through the steady addition of rezonings from Exclusive Agricultural Use to other uses.

Put simply, CARPC missed the point entirely and put in place a policy that is more likely to harm our environment than the previous policy.

My point on process is that the way in which CARPC made its decision has been damaging to the cause of regional planning that you and I support. On the evening that CARPC voted on this sweeping new policy three of the most articulate advocates for the other side were absent for various good reasons. I and the small cities and villages in Dane County had asked CARPC for a delay out of a sense of fair play, yet CARPC charged ahead with this policy. This has seriously undermined CARPC's image and credibility with the local units of government it serves. It was an unnecessarily hostile start for an organization just trying to reestablish itself as a partner, not a top-down manager.

So, what I am looking for in those I appoint to CARPC are individuals who understand how the responsible growth of cities benefits the environment and who understand that CARPC needs to earn the trust and support of the local governments it serves.

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to share my position on this issue.

Sincerely,

Dave Cieslewicz

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