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Planning as Power Politics: Plunder & Blunder

by Bob Bowman

With **coos of cooperation**, Dane County cajoled 14 municipalities, including 7 towns, to join it in a comprehensive planning grant application. Upon its award in 2002, the county executive signed a contract affirming that the county zoning agency would appoint the steering committee to direct the planning effort.

From the get-go, the county scammed the agreement. The county executive signed a county board resolution establishing the planning process, in which the planning authority of the county zoning agency was compromised by making it "coequal" with the board's Strategic Growth Committee in appointing a Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee (CPSC). The CPSC then set up three work groups to address the nine elements required in the plan, organized around Housing, Transportation and Land Use. The work groups brought in volunteer citizen input, in addition to voting members appointed to the groups.

This whole cumbersome process then lumbered its way forward, mostly under the hand and behest of the Chair of Strategic Growth, whose job with the Sierra Club gave him the time to devote to the Club's interest in such legislation. The experts the CPSC brought in for advice and information were all pretty much extreme partisans of government planning.

Note that this planning system follows the soviet model of socialist governance. A soviet, as a dictionary will tell you, is an elected council with administrative or legislative powers. Such councils operate at all levels of a socialist state (shades of Mary Parker Follett, you might say). That is the planning system that destroyed the economy and the existence of one socialist or communist country after another, right up to the demise of the behemoth of them all, the U.S.S.R. How curious, to see that form of government now being instituted in Wisconsin as the comprehensive planning process. It's like we are ignoring our history lessons.

As an observer of that CPSC planning effort from its inception onwards, as time permitted me, I have thus seen it proceed along its elitist, dubious and ultimately destructive course here in staid Dane County. In evaluating such planning, one must not lose sight of its track record of inherent failure and collapse.

Approaching midway in this planning effort came the 2004 county board elections, and the left wing of the board increased its vote advantage to 19 versus 18. But the headiness of that control went to their heads, and in an amazing display of ineptness, they managed to lose at electing the county board chair, at appointing the controlling vote on the county zoning agency, and at electing the officers of the CPSC.

With planning and zoning under control of a centrist moderate-conservative coalition, the board's leftists turned to truly desperate measures to try to seize control of planning all to themselves. Their towering goals of "economic equality" (oh what an oxymoron), "social justice" (what other kind is there???) and "sustainable development" (the refuge of the scoundrel) were threatened at seeing a rational, mainstream leadership at the helm of comprehensive planning.

To seize control, the leftists are trying to reverse another loss they took when the county board organized on April 20, 2004. Then, they had tried to take comprehensive planning away from the county zoning agency (the ZLR) and give it to the so-called Environment, Agriculture and Natural Resources (EANR) committee. However, corporation counsel had ruled that that was illegal, and the provision was stricken from the organizing ordinance before it was enacted.

No matter. On September 23, 2004, the bloc of 19 leftists enacted Resolution 70, sub C, 19-17, to put comprehensive planning solely under the EANR committee, and to dissolve CPSC and reconstitute it with members appointed by the EANR chair.

Next issue FM will continue with this sorry tale.

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< <http://www.takebackwisconsin.com/> >
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