

Freedom Matters

A News & Opinion Paper

Dane County, Wisconsin

Preserving Property Rights

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Our republic limits government to securing individual unalienable rights to life, liberty, and property. These rights are eroded by legislatures, and by courts complicit with them. To encourage wise jurists and journalists to help, Freedom Matters dedicates itself to the fight to restore that republic.

A Move to Repeal "Smart Growth" - Your Editor's Opinion -

by Mike Byrne

When the joint finance committee voted last week to cancel smart growth, they stepped up to the plate and did the right thing. Predictably, there are those that are unhappy about this news. Some of them are making ridiculous comments about it. When the spokesman for the Sierra Club said that now decisions would be made about development "behind closed doors" and "in secret," I thought to myself, "isn't that the pot calling the kettle black!"

Many of us are concerned that the whole idea of smart growth was hatched behind closed doors by lobbyists. We also feel that the method by which the law was passed -- it was done without floor debate by putting it in the budget bill, and by the margin of a single vote, and by shepherding it through behind closed doors all the way and at times in secret meetings -- doomed the law from day one. It has taken all these years since then for the unworkability of the law to be revealed. Moreover, much of the efforts undertaken to comply with the law have been conducted quietly in meetings that were sparsely attended and only minimally publicized. I have been to meetings where they couldn't even get a quorum of the committee together. County staffs statewide appear at these meetings with thick reams of paper, all suspiciously alike for these widely differing townships, and spend their time trying to pass this work off as a consensus effort by "the community."

The suspicious aspect of these planning efforts surfaces from time to time when you see the same cast of characters appear all over the state promoting the law and the language they are trying to get governments to adopt is frighteningly similar. Not only is it similar in intent, which is decidedly anti-growth, but also in result, which is blatantly confiscatory. The property whose value has been either destroyed completely or at best greatly diminished is usually owned by an innocent rural resident who had no idea these meetings were going on or that his property was the subject of the discussion. In fact, no notices were ever sent to most of them by registered mail or any other certifiable method that would truly verify that they knew their future economic security was the subject of intense "planning."

Another part of this tragedy is the fact that the law was specifically designed to encourage public input. Also, the same lobbying groups who complained that the funding is terminated can't account for how the money has been spent so far, nor how many "public" individuals were aware of or in attendance at any of the planning sessions. Indeed, many of these meetings were attended mostly by people employed by the government, or worse, unelected individuals employed by groups like the Sierra Club who can always find the time to attend a meeting to confiscate land. I'm sorry to tell the truth about the entire situation, but happy that the situation might temporarily be halted. For, of course, if you think this is the end of smart growth, I have a bridge to sell you...but don't call me about it. Instead, meet me at the local cafe at high noon and we'll whisper about it in the corner...

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