

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.

Falk's "Attain Dane": Part 3. Falk's Fallacies as a Land Use Planner

by Bob Bowman
with data assistance by John Oltman

County Executive Kathleen Falk has held two of six public sessions around Dane County to hawk her land use agenda, "Attain Dane." For info, contact Elizabeth Kluesner, 266-4795 or at <kluesner@co.dane.wi.us>.

Falk's presentation has been riddled with fallacies, starting with misleading data. She said Dane County was the fastest growing county in Wisconsin, based on the raw number of people added in 1990 to 2000. Comparing apples to oranges is the oldest error in history, dating back almost to the oldest profession (yes, it seems the Garden of Eden was a one-stop fruit shop).

The fairest way to compare the growth in different counties is to compare population density: people per square mile. That avoids the bias of size differences between counties. The graph shown below compares all Wisconsin counties in growth rate, for the decade ending in 2000. Growth, as the number of people added per square mile, is shown as a function of the logarithm (log) of each county's population density in the year 2000 (a close enough relationship for here). Using a log function on the x-axis is a simple and common way to spread out the data points at the low density end of the graph.

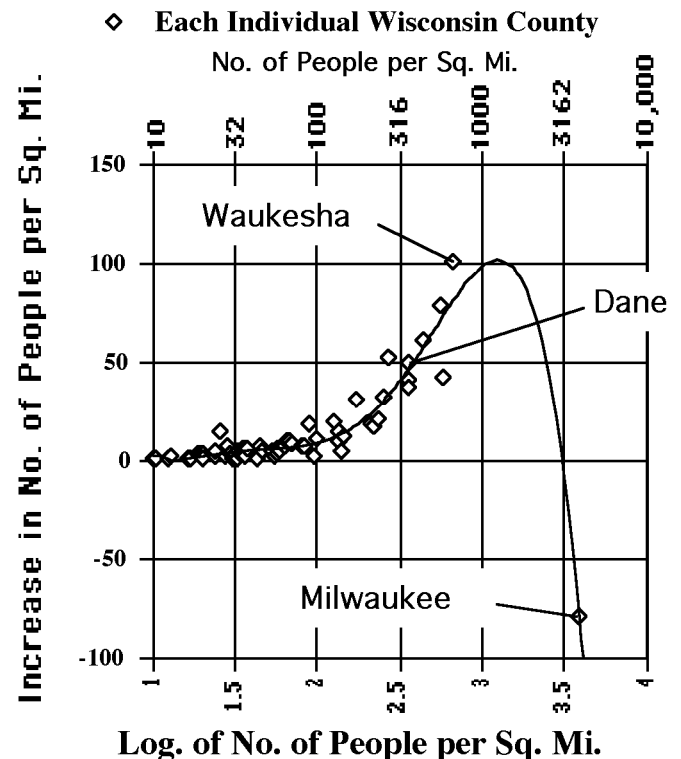
To help those not familiar with the logarithmic scale, the top of the graph also shows the arithmetic number of people per square mile. On the log scale, each unit of equal linear spacing goes up by ten-fold in arithmetic number. Hence, a log of 1 equals 10 people per square mile, a log of 2 equals 100 people per square mile, a log of 3 equals 1000 people per square mile, and a log of 4 equals 10,000 people per square mile. Note that Milwaukee County, at a log value of about 3.6 has 3,892 people per square mile. Dane County, at a log value of about 2.55, has 355 people per square mile. Waukesha, at a log value of about 2.8, has 649 people per square mile.

The data points thus obtained were fitted with a fifth order polynomial curve, since by trial and error it proved to be the best function for calculating a visually average track for all the data points. No other analytical claim is made for the polynomial function. The turnover in the curve at a density of about 1200 people per square

mile is based on only one county, Milwaukee County, which actually lost population between 1990 and 2000. It lost about 75 people per square mile. That might be a result of people fleeing high density living, or of de facto **urban growth boundaries** (Milwaukee is completely ringed by other urban areas and cannot grow by annexation), or of other causes. Madison's slowed growth suggests it may be starting to share Milwaukee's fate. In 2000, Madison had 208,054 people in 68.7 square miles, a density of 3028 people per square mile.

Note that expressing each county's population and growth in terms of density compares all counties on a common basis, yielding an orderly function. Note that the higher the density of a county in 1990-2000 (indicating a higher past growth rate), the higher the growth rate in the decade plotted here. Finally, note that Dane County has an average growth rate for a county having its density. **Four Wisconsin counties** had **faster** growth rates than Dane County's 50 people per square mile. Waukesha County grew twice as fast, adding 101 people per square mile. Thus, Falk talks like an extremist when she presents Dane County as a freak county growing at an abnormally fast rate.

Continued, next issue.



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