

Freedom Matters

A Weekly Newsletter

Dane County, Wisconsin

Vol. 2, No. 43

Friday, November 1, 2002

We are a free people in a republic, under a constitution which limits the powers of government to those necessary to secure the unalienable rights of each person to their life, liberty and property. Yet, when a legislature is in session, no one's life, liberty or property is safe. It's the curse of a democracy. That's why we have a republic instead. *Freedom Matters* dedicates itself to the fight to restore our republic. Most of the press and courts fail to do so. They've forgotten that freedom matters.

Dane County Regional Planning Commission

*Everything you suspected is actually worse
than you imagined...*

Our system of government is built upon representation. The representatives are chosen by the electorate and re-affirmed in their positions by facing those same voters in periodic subsequent elections. The voters can choose from all the candidates and it is understood that **the authority of the office they hold is accountable to those residents.** No effective government would be possible for long if the power of the politician were independent of the voter.

This is why the last thirty four years have been an exercise in frustration for those of us who believe in these principles in Dane County. That is because we have been living with a political entity which will be the legacy of one-time Wisconsin governor Warren Knowles. We are referring to our **Dane County Regional Planning Commission.** This commission exists by declaration of the governor since **there has never been an election to ask the electorate whether they even wanted it!** There has also never been a candidate running for any political office who even took a prominent stand one way or another concerning this commission.

The original statute creating regional planning commissions suggests that they are to be multi-county organizations who work on big picture plans that are stretching into the future measured in years and even decades. The RPC has been inserting itself in Dane County affairs all these years with the presumption that a multi-county planning commission was to be created.

Why that never seems to happen has a lot to do with the agenda of the single county planning commission which has been long recognized by the counties surrounding Dane. These collar counties figured out a long time ago that the single Dane County agenda was Madison-dominated and would probably be that way indefinitely.

Another perception held by many different observers is that the DCRPC is a victim of its own special "mission creep" which has enabled it to usurp the planning activities of many other governmental agencies.

Aside from those sad conclusions, **the voters ought to be concerned about the process by which the RPC is funded, since it appears that there really is no oversight of its rather sizeable budget.** According to the established practice, the RPC submits its budget to the county clerk who stamps it and sends it up to the controller. The county board has 20 days with which to review and accept (or dispute) the budget. What **really** happens is that no one on the county board has been receiving any information about that budget within that 20 days and sometimes there isn't even a county board meeting scheduled during that period in order to discuss it. To put it simply, no one (with the exception of a few county supervisors) regards that budget as something worth analyzing.

The RPC budget has been creeping towards one million dollars steadily, rising from a levied amount of \$437,528.00 in 2001 to \$630,000.00 in 2002. (There are additional funds dumped into the RPC by the federal government (6%), and the state of Wisconsin (6%).)

The terrible thing is that the duplication of services purchased by those dollars is apparent. Planning done at the RPC overlaps the work done by the regular Dane County Planning Department, The City of Madison Planning Department, The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and even the independent private planners and engineering firms hired by the individual towns, villages, cities and developers throughout the county. **It is amazing anything gets done at all and in fact some charge it doesn't.** The DCRPC has a reputation for dragging its pencils very slowly across a project they are philosophically against. They managed for example be party to stalling plans in the town of Burke for eleven years!

Several years ago 34 of the local governments tired of the RPC and petitioned the governor to withdraw. It is an open question why they are bound to pay any attention to the RPC at all since they thought they were free of them. **After all the law provides a mechanism to withdraw.** Ironically it does not provide a way for them to be free of the financial obligation...

Several times the RPC has been scheduled to exit the political stage but powerful friends in the government and then the courts have been breathing new life into it. In fact it is now supposed to be on life support since it was officially dissolved last fall by Governor Scott McCallum. The courts rescued the RPC a few days later and are "considering" the status of the agency.

Note to our upstate readers: Do you have planning commissions? How do you view them? Any tales you can pass along would be appreciated...

Readers' Bulletin Board. e-mail us your comments. Include your name, for publication by *Freedom Matters*

*** Published by Freedom Matters, Inc., Cross Plains, WI. 53528, Michael Byrne, Editor***
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