

Riley County Vision 2025 Committee Meeting

February 15, 2007

7:30 – 9:30 p.m. Denison Fire Station

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome & Review of Public Comments

One comment was received from the last meeting and generally stated at the meeting. The precise comment is included here for reference:

“February meeting on Alternative Strategies/Property Rights should begin with what the economic strategies are for the future. What is the future economic growth pressure source & influence? A presentation by Chamber of Commerce, K-State, or Ft. Riley about how future growth really matters and if the Flint Hills plans to “sell” this area for future growth, then how does the community access/ engage the resource of the Flint Hills? This type of information would benefit the Alternate Strategy development and how/what rights are involved and also what the vision & goals should look like to represent the community/citizenry.”

2. Purpose and context for “Land Use Conflict”

- The challenge is to make recommendations regarding land use in Riley County that reflect members’ personal beliefs about property rights, community interests regarding land use, and stewardship of the County’s resources
- Deliberation was used because of likely competing approaches to solving these issues. Purpose of meeting was to identify group members’ common understanding on the issues, and identify where group members differed.

3. Viewed the DVD, “Land Use Conflict: When City and Country Clash” created by Ohio State University Extension as a project of the National Public Policy Education Committee in Cooperation with the Farm Foundation.

4. Values Line Exercise – Rationale: To make decisions and good recommendations, the group needs to resolve ambiguities, balance the advantages and drawbacks of alternative solutions, and project the likely consequences of a particular choice. Members were asked to place themselves on a value line according to the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with four options:

- Private property buyers and owners should determine the use of the land in accord with their own beliefs and objectives, and government intervention should be minimal.
- Prime farmland and open space should be protected from development using various government and private sector approaches.
- Blighted core areas of our central city (and rural main streets in nearby cities) should be rehabilitated to lessen the development pressure for expanding urban uses on the rural-urban fringe.
- Incentives and development standards should be designed to encourage developers to more efficiently utilize public resources, increase density, improve quality, and reduce farmland and open space conversion.

Members were asked to explain to each other where they stood and why on each option. A theme that emerged was that members were closer in agreement on various perspectives than previously thought and varied only in the intensity of agreement with each statement.

5. Details of the four options were presented and are included below for reference. Group discussion followed. The resulting comments regarding each option are also included below for reference.
6. Future meeting dates were announced and the purpose of the March meeting.
7. Adjourned.

LAND USE CONFLICT

Summary of Options

Option 1: Reestablish the Free Market

- In a free market, private property owners determine the use of the land. Government intervention is minimal.

What Can Be Done?

- Review purposes of legal barriers that constrain the operation of free and open markets and recommend changes to lawmakers.
- Make public actions such as condemnation, annexation, and takings more difficult. Enhance protections from nuisance suits.
- Reduce funding and authority for planning and zoning functions.
- Eliminate differential property tax incentives, transportation and housing development subsidies, and impact fees.

In Support

- Free markets and private enterprise represent the American way.
- The U.S. Constitution guarantees the rights of private property owners to manage their own properties without government interference.
- A market-oriented land use policy sends a clear message that our nation, state, and communities are probusiness, prodevelopment, and progrowth.
- If we allow the free markets to work, we become more efficient and competitive. Competitive prices ultimately make homes more affordable for consumers.

In Opposition

- Free market development costs both new residents and existing taxpayers more in the long run.
- Free markets waste more land resources and create more urban sprawl than other development systems.
- Government has a role in protecting the rights of existing property owners from the negative effects that often result from uncontrolled development.
- We don't have the right to destroy our environment. We need to protect it for future generations to enjoy.

A Likely Trade-off

- Government involvement in land use decisions and urban development declines, but unplanned urban sprawl and concerns over incompatible land uses on neighboring parcels are likely to increase.

LAND USE CONFLICT

Summary of Options Cont'd

Option 2: Protect Farmland and Open Space

- Prime farmland and open space is identified, prioritized, and protected from development using various government and private sector approaches.

What Can Be Done?

- Private sector organizations or individuals can purchase property or development rights, and provide perpetual care for designated open spaces.
- Use tax revenues to purchase development rights or require developers to buy development rights to protect other prime farmland and open space areas.
- Use zoning laws and create preservation districts to prevent urban encroachment into designated areas.
- Provide tax incentives to encourage landowners to keep land in farmland and open space uses.

In Support

- Protecting nonrenewable resources for future generations is simply the right thing to do.
- Food production is essential to the maintenance of life. Farmland must be protected because agriculture cannot compete with existing subsidies for urban development.
- Farming is inherently incompatible with urban development. These two uses should be kept separate.
- Sustaining a threshold level of agricultural activity on the rural-urban fringe requires protection of more than one parcel – it requires a large area.

In Opposition

- There is plenty of farmland available. The importance of farmland and open space protection is overblown.
- Most land protection programs are costly and ineffective.
- Farmland and open space protection programs don't stop sprawl. They only redirect development and, in some cases, they actually increase sprawl.
- It's wrong to halt development, frustrate potential homeowners, and drive more of a wedge between rural and urban citizens.

A Likely Trade-Off

- Agriculture and open space can be protected from sprawl, but the costs of doing so are so high and, depending on what approach to growth is used, may not reduce sprawl in the long run.

LAND USE CONFLICT

Summary of Options Cont'd

Option 3: Redevelop Central Cities

- If blighted central cities (and rural main streets) are revitalized, pressure for expanding development into the countryside declines.

What Can Be Done?

- The private sector and government should work together to rejuvenate downtown areas.
- Pay the costs of demolition and provide incentives for redevelopment in blighted downtown areas.
- Provide incentives for developers to infill open space lots in areas where infrastructure already exists.
- Provide incentives for rehabilitation of existing buildings, neighborhoods, and historic areas.

In Support

- Rejuvenating central cities and downtown main streets can reduce the pressures for urban sprawl.
- When the hidden costs are figured in, it is less expensive to infill and utilize existing infrastructure than to build new expansive systems of infrastructure.
- Redeveloping central cities will rejuvenate the business and economic environment, bringing a big economic boost to the region as a whole.
- If we don't reinvest in central cities, many services, amenities, and attractions that identify the region's culture and serve the larger metro area will cease to exist.

In Opposition

- It's the market that is fueling the outward expansion as people seek something the downtowns apparently cannot provide.
- The plan to lure people back to the inner city has failed in many cases. There is little reason to keep trying this approach.
- Redevelopment costs more – not less – than building on empty land. Open space land represents the least expensive option for developers and their customers.
- Cities have always grown from the center out, in ever-larger rings. That's the natural growth pattern. To force growth to go in another direction is not natural.

A Likely Trade-off

- Using more public resources to solve the problems in core downtown areas may divert resources from addressing the consequences of growth, urban sprawl, and incompatible land uses on the rural-urban fringe.

LAND USE CONFLICT

Summary of Options Cont'd

Option 4: Manage Growth on the Rural-Urban Fringe

- Under managed growth, standards and incentives are established to encourage developers to increase density, reduce open space conversion, and utilize public resources more efficiently.

What Can Be Done?

- Draw boundaries around prime areas for future development. Open areas outside this perimeter can be protected from development.
- Use zoning to impose mandatory residential density requirements and design standards for various subdivision types and land uses.
- Establish graduated subdivision impact fees to be paid by developers.
- Establish tax incentives to encourage higher-density development and to preserve farmland.

In Support

- Under this approach, markets still work efficiently, but there is some control over urban sprawl and arbitrary loss of prime areas of farmland and open space.
- Owners of private property are free to use their land as they see fit as long as the use is not inconsistent with community growth and preservation objectives.
- As development on the fringe becomes marginally more expensive, interest in downtown redevelopment and infill development automatically increases.
- Managed growth provides some flexibility for developers to respond to consumer tastes and preferences.

In Opposition

- Managed growth represents the heavy hand of government meddling with the free markets and property rights.
- Housing is made more expensive than it would be under free market conditions.
- Perfectly good farmland and open space areas are closed off from development and the potential to achieve their highest and best legal use.
- This approach adds more unnecessary layers of government.

A Likely Trade-off

- Managed growth can result in higher-density developments, greater utilization of existing infrastructure, and less conversion of farmland and open space, but it also means that landowners may have less individual freedom in using their land.

Committee Reactions to Land Use Conflict Options

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Option #1

Allows for voluntary choice/participation

Government involvement minimal

Great in ideal world, but needed (2)

Uncontrolled development is cause for concern

Like idea, but won't work without some regulations

Conservation easements part of free market

Where are we with free market in Riley County?

20 acre rule is against free market

Some Government interventions beyond county's control

Not a free market and charge of committee won't allow us to be a free market

Rural areas are operating in free market (to sell or not to sell?)

Reserving prime ag land is necessary (2)

Need to avoid building in floodplain – stop unreasonable developments

Option #2

Keep protection in perspective

Regulation of farmland should depend on use

Define prime farmland – maybe prime ag area cropland, pastureland

NRCS has a definition

Prime is relative

Landowner objectives differ and become an issue

Can't control what others do with their land

Possible taxation differences - don't tax unkept ag land @ ag rate

Criteria needed for developing prime farmland near urban areas

Consider Manhattan Area 20 yr plan

What is cost?

Open Space = Green Space

Option #3

Good idea, but how?

Could county go on record as supporting downtown development/revitalization?

County can't make regulations to control urban growth, but can provide incentives
(tax incentives) with zoning county areas

Some regulations discourage revitalizing older buildings (ADA)

Option #4

20 acres sites around city have restricted urban development

More restrictive than protecting farmland and open spaces

Blended approach – incentives, encourage urban development, protect farmland

County in position to help small communities fix infrastructures

Rural/urban subdivisions

What does it look like?

How do we blend?

Approach has potential

Options 2 and 4 – Blend

Option 3 as much as possible while keeping Option 1 in mind!