

“Smart Growth”

What is “smart growth”? “Smart growth” is development that serves the economy, the community, and the environment. It provides a framework for communities to make informed decisions about how and where they grow. “Smart growth” makes it possible for communities to grow in ways that support economic development and jobs; create strong neighborhoods with a range of housing, commercial, and transportation options; and achieve healthy communities that provide families with a clean environment.

I asked several people what “smart growth” meant to them. The typical public perception of “smart growth” centered around being the remedy for our fast-paced residential development. High density and open spaces for some, others think of developments that are established on 2/3 acres per lot. I found the term “smart growth” has a different meaning to almost every person. It is important for us to remember that while many people refer to residential development as growth, residential development and growth are two very different things. Growth is making sure jobs are available , roads are upgraded, providing good educational opportunities, transportation options, etc. In this area of “smart growth” Medina County has been very active. A few examples of this is our work in public/ private partnership with the Medina County Economic Development Corporation in bringing good clean manufacturing and commercial industry into the county and in turn creating new jobs. We have a public transportation program that continues to grow in rider-ship. Recently commissioners were contacted to possibly expand our transit services into a county-wide program including Brunswick and Wadsworth. And we are currently involved in the planning process of building an Akron University Campus and new technology park in Lafayette Township.

A friend told me that it's always amusing to her that during election years candidates running for Commissioner always start talking about how Commissioners are allowing too many houses to be built, that we are allowing too much growth in Medina County. She said that It's amusing to her because it's not truly growth they are concerned about but residential development and it's obvious they don't know much about what Commissioners are able to do.

When it comes to residential development, county commissioners have no real authority. The density and design of residential development is completely within the authority of the local level, the township trustees or village and city councils. The rate of residential development is market driven and as you all know, Medina County is a good market.

What commissioners can do regarding residential development is fund or provide tools on a county wide basis that aid local officials in making planning decisions.

I believe the most important tool that commissioners fund and provide is the county's Planning Services Department. This department of 4 planners are available to assist all townships, villages and cities in the county. Their basic services include helping local governments update their zoning maps and the planners go to the communities and meet with the officials to provide research materials that are helpful in making decisions on future development of their communities.

Commissioners realize the basics in planning is for community officials to have educational opportunities. Through this department Growth Management forums were established and over the years on a continual basis educational workshops for elected officials and zoning meetings for zoning inspectors have been provided. Such topics as "Basics of Zoning", an intro to zoning for newly appointed zoning inspectors and newly elected officials. Workshops on "Signage",

presenting codes and certain case law as to what can and cannot be done with signs. We have even presented a mock hearing of the Board of Zoning Appeals so officials can see first hand the procedures of the hearing and what to expect at these hearings. Communities have learned through this department to look at their local planning and zoning decisions from a regional perspective. It is important for them to understand how their decisions affect the communities around them. These workshop programs have been in partnership with the Prosecutors Office as well as OSU Extension. Our planning staff has also been working with several county agencies including the Highway Engineer, Soil & Water, and Emergency Management trying to obtain funding from an FEMA grant to update our flood plain maps so that homes and subdivisions are not placed in harms way, not built in flood plains.

Commissioners appropriated \$25,000 this year to fund a new planning tool, a Comprehensive Plan Grant Assistance Program. This was done in an effort to motivate or give an incentive to help communities with their residential development planning. Many of our local governments may have a development policy plan or comprehensive plan but don't keep it up to date or choose not to follow it as new board members are elected and have different viewpoints or may not even be aware they have a plan or what it does. We're hoping to help communities like this pick up the old plan and rewrite it or start anew and with input from local residents decide what they want their community to look like 10 - 20 years from now. Townships, villages, or cities may apply for a matching grant of up to \$5,000 for this purpose. Local communities were recently notified of this new grant program and applications are expected back by June 18th. Grant recipients will be able to contract with the County Planning Services department or a private firm for their project. According to our Director of Planning Services, Patrice Theiken, Medina County is the only county in the state that she is aware of providing grants to encourage

comprehensive planning and she feels this is a “big deal” for the county. Commissioners are pleased to take that leadership role.

The county also in an effort to be involved in local planning partnered financially with the Townships of Medina, Montville and York and the city of Medina for a cost of services study. They are using the study to determine their financial futures.

Another tool we provide is the NOACA 208 Water Quality Report which designates where and to what extent sewer and water lines can be extended over the next 20 years which also helps local authorities make informed planning decisions.

These are just a few of the tools that Commissioners make available to our communities to assist them in residential planning. We are certainly involved in “Smart Growth” in Medina County. Commissioners will continue to encourage and assist communities in their local planning efforts as we care very much about the quality of life that planning can bring our communities!.