

Commissioners favor County Planning Commission

Written by

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Prompted by issues brought forth by Debbie Schreiber and Diana Green concerning policies and procedures for subdividing land, the Commissioners agreed that the time has come to revisit the issue of establishing a County Planning Commission. Back in 1996, a County Planning Commission (CPC) was established but not without controversy and substantial opposition. In April of 1997, a newly elected Board of Commissioners did away with the CPC.

Commissioner John Mishler pointed to the issue as one of the key planks in his platform as a candidate. "Now is the time for a County Planning Commission to be formed." said Mishler. As outlined in a subsequent telephone interview, a CPC would be appointed and that group would oversee the development of a county-wide land usage plan. The makeup of the CPC is yet undetermined but one suggestion floating around is to have a representative from each of the townships in the county to be appointed.

Due to its physical size (one of the largest Indiana counties in terms of square miles) and the community diversity of Washington County, making sure that all stakeholders will be represented is the challenge. Obviously, a plan focused on the needs of the western-most townships of the county would not necessarily be a good model for the central or southeastern areas. In a January interview with Commissioner David Brown, the issue of diverse needs and interests in different parts of the county were address. According to Brown, a comprehensive land usage plan is definitely needed. However, Brown went on to cite studies done by Purdue University that the concept of "spot zoning" is very ineffective in meeting the needs and expectations of the agricultural, industrial, business, and residential constituencies within a county. An overall, county-wide plan that takes into consideration the needs and expectations of these various groups will be the challenge as Brown sees it.

In a telephone interview, Commissioner Lana Sullivan emphasized the importance of an informed, deliberate, and quite possibly lengthy process to determine what would be the best way to deal with the issues surrounding the subject of land use planning. Sullivan went on to say that she is in favor of proceeding in a conscientious manner in order to make sure that everyone has all the facts and that the will of people is honored.

At the next regularly scheduled meeting at 3pm on Wednesday, February 18, the public is invited by the Board of Commissioners to comment on the issue and to relay any concerns, questions, or ideas concerning the concept of a county wide land usage plan.. The Board of Commissioners regular meeting location is in the conference room on the lower level of the County Government Building on Old Martinsburg Road.

As this governmental process continues, The Washington County Edition plans to not only cover the proceedings but to also publish a series of informative articles delving into the concepts behind land usage planning in other Indiana counties, along with hard evidence, both pro and con about the results of those efforts, to help Washington County residents be more informed about the issue.