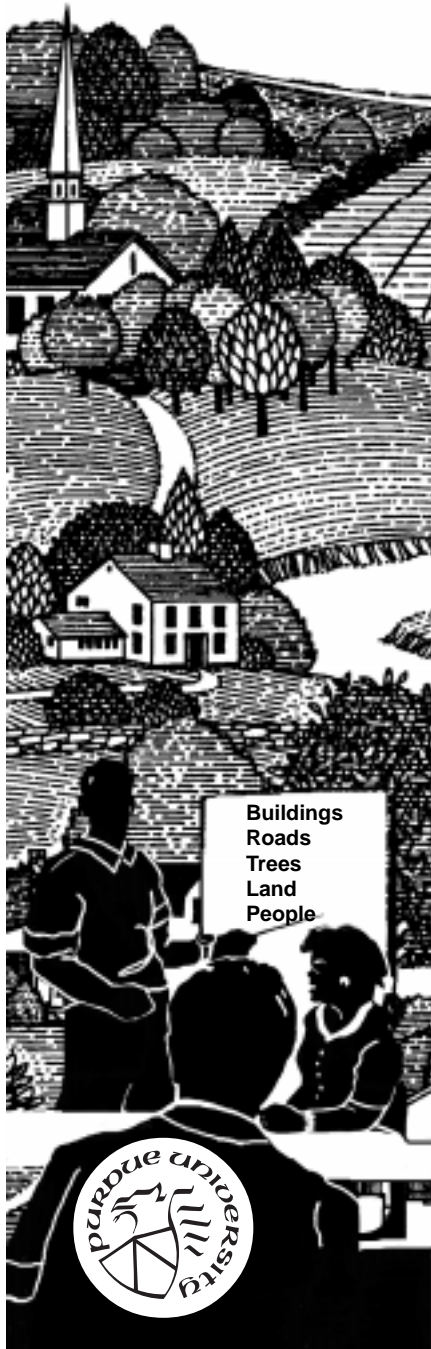


Citizen Participation in Land Use Planning

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Introduction

Communities are not made of just buildings, roads, trees, and land. Communities need people to complete their landscape. Communities need citizens who are interested in planning their future growth to list priorities and make choices.

If your county has a plan for growth, whether it is a comprehensive plan, a strategic plan, or a vision for the future, get a copy. If your county has planning and zoning, check out the subdivision ordinances and local zoning ordinances. These documents are the basis for any decisions made concerning land use. If there is no plan, work with local officials to begin the strategic planning process.

In creating a vision for your community, which is what a plan does, you need to discover the appropriate balance of land used for farms, industry, retail, recreation, and housing. It is also important to assess the infrastructure, current needs, and projected needs for your area. Remember, every citizen, business, and industry is affected by the choices and decisions made.

What Can You Do?

There are several way for you to become involved if you want to affect your community's future.

Be Aware of Local Development Patterns

Observe where and what type of growth is occurring. Ask what the effects of this growth are on your community. Read the local papers for notices of proposed changes in both zoning and zoning ordinances.

Attend Meetings About Land Use, Growth, & Planning

Meetings with land use, growth, and planning on their agendas may include city or county plan commission meetings, city or county council meetings, and county commissioner meetings. Learn how local land use decisions are made. Ask questions. How will the proposed change improve the community? Does this change follow the community's plan?

Most regular commission meetings have public comment periods. You will have an opportunity to respond to the proposed change at that time. Commissions have many rules that govern the way the hearing is conducted. They also have rules to follow regarding their decisions. In many cases, they base decisions on a set of criteria. If the criteria are met, they must make a favorable recommendation. If you are better organizing your thoughts on paper, you can also write the commission(s).

Talk to Elected Officials

Share your concerns and potential solutions with them. They are elected to serve the public, but they often hear only complaints and criticisms. You can be more effective by expressing your concerns and then suggesting alternative solutions. Be knowledgeable about your topic, and have accurate facts. However, remember that Indiana has a statute barring discussion of a specific request with a Board of Zoning Appeals or Plan Commission member, outside of the public hearing. Be certain your input is within legal limitations.

**Communities on Course
Land Use**

Get Informed
Get Involved

Communicate with Neighbors

Talk to other citizens about what you have learned. If others share similar views, gather information to develop alternative solutions.

Although an individual can make a difference, most efforts are more successful when people are organized.

Look for Solutions

If you are concerned about the current pattern of development in your community, identify other ways to accomplish your needs as well as community needs. Gather information from other communities. Learn about tools and techniques used in other states. What might work for your area? Research new techniques that are used in other states, such as the selling of development rights, the transfer of development rights, restrictive covenants, density rules, infrastructure access, and other measures designed to protect land when a community starts to go out of balance.

Value Community Consensus

We all depend on some degree of cooperation and common interest to accomplish broad community goals that are beyond the ability of individuals to accomplish. A community's values should reflect the values of its residents. Participation is the key to making your voice heard. The secret of success is being solution oriented, not problem oriented, and having faith that for every problem an inherent solution exists.

Conclusion

There are many ways to learn about planning, zoning, and development in your county. There are opportunities to make your concerns heard to your fellow citizens serving on plan commissions, boards of zoning appeals, and legislative bodies. If you have an interest in guiding the future of your town, city, or county, consider volunteering to serve on a commission or running for an office. Commission members' terms revolve on a regular basis, and interested, enthusiastic volunteers are always being sought.

References & Additional Resources

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Learn more about communities, land use, growth, and how you can be involved from your local office of Purdue Extension.