



THE LAND USE BULLETIN

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Legislative session concludes with a few surprises

The 2004 session of the Iowa Legislature came to an end on April 20, lasting exactly 100 days. As can often happen in a process that is sometimes described as “making sausage”, several unexpected items related to land use arose the final two weeks of session. (As evidence of just how broad land-use issues can be, please note that our members have opinions on both sides of some of these issues.)

Tax abatement for renovation Tax abatement is certainly being abused across Iowa. Many new, even wealthy homes and businesses receive this tax break, which often amounts to a tax shift to other taxpayers. But abatement for renovation encourages smart growth by providing an incentive to rehab existing properties in older neighborhoods. This year, SF 2291 passed unanimously. The bill offers two new abatement options for abandoned properties that are being renovated. The first extends over 16 years, with 80% of the value of the improvements exempt the first year, phasing out over the next 15 years. The second option allows a full exemption for five years.

Public transit Transit advocates have reason to celebrate for a change. State support for public transit had declined from \$14 million to \$8 million in recent years. This year, state investment in mass transit will rise to an estimated \$10.5 - \$11 million. This is in part because of increased car sales, gas taxes and vehicle registrations (a portion of which goes to transit), and largely due to a legislative decision two years ago to prevent transit money from being moved out of the Road Use Tax Fund into the general fund, where it was subject to budget cuts.

Vision Iowa and Community Attraction & Tourism (CAT) Grants Out of the blue, the House approved bonding for \$60 million in new Vision Iowa money. The Senate had other ideas

and instead gave \$72 million to the CAT program, which comes from two sources: the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund (RIIF) and bank franchise taxes. Critics contend that this shift in revenue may mean (1) less money for the environmental programs funded by RIIF, such as Loess Hills preservation, Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) and air quality monitoring, and (2) because of the loss of bank franchise taxes to the general fund, less revenue for education, public safety, health care and other general purposes. Supporters of increased CAT funding feel the state's investment will pay off with higher tax revenues and local and regional quality-of-life enhancements in years to come.

Gambling HF 2302 allows the Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission to authorize new casino licenses. It is uncertain how many licenses will be issued, but counties that have already indicated

Continued on page 5

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

“The Big Picture”	Page 2
FAIR! Works for Johnson County	Page 3
Smart Growth Works for Ames	Page 3
Smart Growth Essays Issues	Page 3
Take the Bus to Wal-Mart	Page 4
Burlington Wins Main Street Award	Page 4
Community Garden Sprouts	Page 4
“Buy Into the Circle” Campaign Begins	Page 4
Victory in Des Moines	Page 4
Taking the High Road	Page 5
Another Golf Course for Des Moines?	Page 5
Family Farmer Alternative Marketing Project	Page 6
Voters in Los Angeles Suburb say “No” to Wal-Mart	Page 6
Decision Rendered in Jordan Creek Appeal	Page 6
Growth Management Conference Proves Helpful	Page 7

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The mission of 1000 Friends of Iowa is to educate the citizens of our state about the long-term benefits of halting urban sprawl, conserving and protecting our agricultural and natural resources, and revitalizing our cities and towns.

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The Big Picture

Rural Advocacy—Pulling Together for Iowa

by LaVon Griffieon



Lots of opportunities arise for an organization such as ours, and prioritizing them can be tough. Rural Advocacy is one opportunity I'm grateful I made time for when the invitation to join came to 1000 Friends three years ago. The benefits of belonging to this group have been many.

Rural Advocacy is a coalition of religious, environmental, citizen, health, farm and human service organizations committed to dialogue, education, social action and political action regarding rural Iowa. The coalition of 35 members work together for the renewal and preservation of sustainable independent agricultural systems including livestock production, non-farm enterprises and the well-being of the rural communities. The group advocates public policies that will bring sustainable economic opportunities to rural Iowa, an improved quality of life to rural people, safe nutritious food to consumers and an ecologically sound environment to our state.

Each year, Rural Advocacy meets to create policy recommendations that each coalition member may or may not choose to support. (Because of the breadth of interests represented, it is understood that not all of the participating organizations necessarily support each of the recommendations.) These recommendations are then shared with state lawmakers. This year, we authored nine position papers on community development, rights of agricultural workers, energy policy, rural health policy, genetically modified organisms, community food security, standards for industrial livestock production, antibiotic resistance and agriculture, and land-use policy.

Sharing ideas with people of such diverse expertise has been rewarding, both personally and in my work with 1000 Friends. Where else could I learn about mental health parity, wind generation, and the air-quality matrix? Where else could I espouse my ideas about land use and have twenty different voices tell me how the idea could be improved or revised? Where else could I discover the breadth of policy changes proposed and the potential impact they might have on my rural friends and neighbors?

Rural Advocacy illuminates the interconnectedness of issues. On more than one occasion, my eyes have been opened on issues I thought I was up to speed on. It is unfortunate that the coalition doesn't have the resources necessary to share its ideas with more Iowans. Most member groups struggle just to carve two hours out of their monthly schedules to attend the meeting,

Continued on page 3

FAIR! Works for Johnson County

A new organization called FAIR! is working to address local land-use issues in Johnson County, including concerns related to proposed growth in the north corridor. FAIR! believes in social, economic and environmental justice, promotes fair and accountable government, and builds community by strengthened local democratic practices. FAIR! had a success recently, when the candidate it endorsed (Regenia Bailey) won election to the Iowa City Council.

You can read a report written by FAIR! member Colin Gordon, which shows the hidden impact of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts on Johnson County residents, at http://www.geocities.com/jcfair2000/who_pays.doc.

To join FAIR!, or to get more information, please write to FAIR!, P.O. Box 1812, Iowa City, IA 52244-1812 or email Dale Shultz at dfs001@yahoo.com. Check out the website at www.jcfair.org.

Smart Growth Essays Issued

The Elm Street Writers Group has issued a new collection of essays on smart growth. Its editors describe the 15 essays as continuing to chronicle "the decade-old national Smart Growth movement, which is doing so much to make America a better place."

They continue to say the articles "describe something rare in American politics—the joining of liberals and conservatives, blacks and whites, and suburban and rural residents to rebuild and celebrate cities, invest taxpayer dollars more efficiently, conserve natural resources, and encourage transportation that builds rather than ruins communities."

The articles also report on what the editors call "the cynical, ill-informed, and arrogant attack on Smart Growth from the American right."

The Elm Street Writers Group is a project of the Michigan Land Use Institute.

You can read all of the Elm Street writers group pieces online at www.mlui.org. Download this collection of 15 essays by selecting Elm Street Writers Group: Collected Essays 2002-2003 under "Downloads."

Smart Growth Works for Ames

For 13 months, 1000 Friends of Iowa worked with political representatives, community groups, student organizations, and local businesses to address concerns over a new mall proposed by a developer from Tennessee, James "Bucky" Wolford, to be built at the intersection of I-35 and 13th Street in Ames.

The Ames Smart Growth Committee grew out of that effort and has really taken off. It continues to intensify the discussion of smart growth and the future development of Ames to a level that could very well influence local elections and planning initiatives from this point onward.

Its new website includes an event calendar, announcements, FAQs (frequently asked questions), an opinion poll, bulletin boards and photo albums. The site is dynamic. Once you sign up for your login, you should be able to comment on announcements and stories. Check it out at www.AmesSmartGrowth.org.

If you are interested in helping add content to the site, or in helping to maintain the email list, please contact Jim Popken at jim@jscada.com.

Thanks to the generosity of one of our members, 1000 Friends will be mentioned several times in June on WOI-FM (90.1 on the radio dial), and 30 times between Sept. 15 and Oct. 14.

Rural Advocacy

Continued from page 2

let alone find time to move more than a handful of the ideas forward. We have, however, been able to manage a website: <http://www.ncrlc.com/ruraladvocacy2003.html>.

I hope more rural (and urban!) Iowans learn about Rural Advocacy. Their policy initiatives are common sense solutions that could enhance locally-owned economic development and provide a better quality of life for rural Iowa.

Rural Iowa – and all of Iowa – needs the kinds of solutions that Rural Advocacy proposes, solutions that promise to build on rural Iowa's strengths, not exploit her weakness.

Take the Bus to Wal-Mart

Last year, the Cedar Falls Wal-Mart moved to the very south edge of town and built a super-center on farmland. Now the City Council has approved funding a new bus route to connect the city to the new Wal-Mart. The route is estimated to cost \$124,000 for a one-year pilot project, with fares covering \$27,000. A federal grant and city taxpayers will pick up the rest of the cost.

Several council members criticized the route, saying it amounts to a city subsidy for Wal-Mart. Councilman Kamyar Enshayan, the lone dissenting vote, points out that it was Wal-Mart's choice to relocate to the south edge of town.

Burlington Wins Main Street Award

Burlington is one of five winners of the 2004 Great American Main Street Award. In recognition of its successful efforts in revitalizing its downtown area through historic preservation, the city received a \$2,500 cash prize to further its revitalization efforts, a bronze plaque commemorating its award, road signs, and a certificate.

This is the highest honor bestowed upon Main Street programs by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Burlington has participated in the program since 1986, and was a semi-finalist in the 1990s.

Out of 50 communities nationwide to have won this award, Burlington is the seventh Iowa winner. Congratulations, Burlington!

Details are given in the press release at www.nationaltrust.org/news/docs/20040510_Burlington_IA.html.

Community Garden Sprouts

An urban redevelopment project we helped initiate 4 years ago continues to make progress. In the next issue of the Land Use Bulletin, we'll discuss the 7th St. Community Garden project in Des Moines, and how it's building a more sustainable urban neighborhood while creating valuable links to rural Iowa.

"Buy Into the Circle" Campaign Begins

In a campaign called "Buy Into the Circle", the Greater Des Moines Partnership is encouraging its members to do more business locally. The campaign is aimed at any business that pays taxes and salaries in the Des Moines area.

Business transactions outside of the metro area account for a yearly loss of \$7.2 billion. The project's goal is for companies to shift 5 percent of their out-of-area purchases back to the local economy, resulting in a \$360 million infusion into the local economy.

While the metro area has made great efforts to attract outside business, it has seldom looked at how to improve things internally. Success in this campaign can make that effort more productive while it assists state and local governments in times of tighter budgets. Results from this kind of campaign can be felt all the way down to the individual's shopping cart. locust St., Suite 100, DM 50309 or at 515-286-4950.

Learn more at www.buyintotheircle.com or by contacting the Greater Des Moines Partnership at 700 Locust St., Suite 100, Des Moines, IA 50309, or at (515) 286-4950.

Victory in Des Moines

Developers of a proposed auto salvage yard in the 1800 block of Euclid Avenue have withdrawn their plans after significant public opposition.

Pick N Payless Auto Dismantlers of Jasper County had asked the city to rezone 18 acres of land partially in a flood plain near the Des Moines River to allow for the salvage yard. The city's plan and zoning commission public hearing attracted so many people in opposition that only standing room was available. Developers watched a live broadcast of the hearing at which no one spoke in support of the plan.

The commission delayed its decision until a later meeting to allow the developer to present its plan, but the developer is no longer interested in the face of so much neighborhood opposition.

Taking the High Road

High road is usually defined as the most positive, diplomatic, or ethical course. The American Legislative Issue Campaign Exchange (ALICE) defines *high road* as “high-wage, low-waste, worker-friendly, publicly-accountable economic development.”

ALICE’s website is designed to serve as a clearinghouse and legislative hub for local activists, organizations, experts and elected officials who want a map and vehicle to take the high road. ALICE

shares these policy ideas and exposes harmful trends. It offers a toolbox of practical research documents, including background, case studies and lessons learned.

Members of the network receive the newsletter and can access back issues at the website. One back issue of particular interest is Issue 10 from March 24, 2004—a special Wal-Mart edition. Take a look at this fascinating collection of Wal-Mart practices, ordinances to stop big box stores, local battles, resources and links to Wal-Mart watching web sites. You can join the network at www.highroadnow.org.

Legislative Session

Continued from page 1

they want a new casino include Palo Alto, Worth, Blackhawk, Webster, Wapello and Franklin. Why is this a land-use issue? Many people fear that new casinos could provide justification for condemning farmland and building new lakes. In Des Moines, a broad coalition of interested groups and individuals working on downtown revitalization are dead-set against a casino in the downtown area, and in fact HF 2302 specifically prevents a casino from being located there. Interestingly, as an indication of the diversity of opinion on this issue, in Waterloo a casino in the downtown area is proposed as a way to enhance downtown revitalization efforts.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Toward the end of session, a promising proposal surfaced to remove the school foundation levy from future TIF districts. This would have saved the state \$30 million each year to reimburse school districts for revenue they lose to local TIF districts. Lawmakers backed off this proposal upon objections from the Iowa League of Cities and development interests. As a result, no action was taken on TIF this year.

Jay Howe Confirmed to City Development Board Last year, former 1000 Friends of Iowa board member, Jay Howe, was appointed by Governor Vilsack to the City Development Board, which is the five-member board overseeing annexations across the state. Gubernatorial appointees need to be confirmed by a 2/3rds vote of the Iowa Senate, and Jay came through the process without opposition. (Note of historical interest: Our board president, LaVon Griffieon, was similarly appointed to the City Development Board in 2001, and after a very contentious hearing in which the Iowa Chamber Alliance, Bill Knapp and the Iowa League of Cities opposed her, her confirmation was defeated by one vote.)

Does Des Moines Need Another Golf Course?

Water Works Park in the heart of Des Moines is one of the largest city parks in the U.S. The park is home to bird watching, biking, camping, fishing, picnicking, scout jamborees, concerts, bow hunting, frisbee, Holly Jolly Lights and much, much more. It’s also home to a wide diversity of birds and animals, made possible by the large tracts of park left in a natural state.

According to a 2001 survey of park users, this is how most of park’s users like it. In fact, they would

prefer *more* amenities related to nature, not less. Yet significant damage will occur to the park if a proposal to build a golf course is approved.

Concerned residents are organizing to express their views and suggest alternatives. Iowa already has an abundance of golf courses, yet ranks last in the nation in natural areas. Across the country, cities are buying-up urban green space to enhance quality of life and preserve public land for future generations.

Contact Teresa Jensen at treesjen@msn.com for more information.

Family Farmer Alternative Marketing Project

In an age of frozen chicken nuggets and microwave ready meals, we get focused on the convenience, the uniformity, or the pretty packaging and lose track of where our food is coming from.

So where does our food come from? And more importantly, does it really matter? The choices we make at the grocery store have far reaching implications for rural economies, our environment, human health and food safety.

Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (CCI) has identified 13 family farmers who are interested in directly marketing their products to the

public. CCI interviewed the farmers and created a directory that highlights each farmer and the products that farmer has for sale.

If you would like to connect with one or more of these farmers, contact Iowa CCI. This is a good way to support style of agriculture that is good for people and good for Iowa, and you'll be buying a product that just plain tastes better!

To get a copy of Iowa CCI's family farmer directory or to learn more about the Family Farmer Alternative Marketing Project, contact Iowa CCI, 2001 Forest Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50311, (515) 282-0484, iowacci@iowacci.org.

Voters in Los Angeles Suburb Say "No" to Wal-Mart

In an April 6 election, Inglewood, Calif, voters rejected a ballot initiative to permit the building of a 60-acre Wal-Mart shopping complex exempt from state and local regulation.

Wal-Mart had proposed converting 60 acres of barren concrete to a megastore and collection of chain shops and restaurants. The City Council blocked the proposed development last year, citing environmental, traffic, labor, public safety and economic concerns.

In a test of its political and marketing muscle, Wal-Mart blanketed the community with mailers, telephone calls and broadcast advertisements to collect over 10,000 signatures that put the issue to voters. While Wal-Mart has often used the ballot to win the right to build its giant stores, the Inglewood initiative was significantly different. The proposal essentially exempted Wal-Mart from the city's planning, zoning and environmental regulations, creating a city-within-a-city subject only to its own rules.

This initiative shows that Wal-Mart is not invincible. For more information on the Inglewood situation, see www.laane.org/pressroom/index.html.

"Eighteen percent of Americans consider sprawl/development/traffic the most important issue facing their community."

—Smart Growth America (www.smartgrowthamerica.com)

Decision Rendered in Jordan Creek Appeal

On April 13, the 8th Circuit Court voided a district court decision to dismiss the lawsuit brought by 1000 Friends of Iowa and others regarding the new Jordan Creek Mall in West Des Moines. The circuit court found that there is no case or controversy for the court to resolve at this time, because construction on the interchange projects was completed while the appeal was pending.

The suit said that the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Iowa Department of Transportation and the city of West Des Moines failed to conduct a comprehensive environmental review of the highway interchange projects needed to accommodate the mall. Instead of looking at the entire development project and the ramifications of such a huge retail development on both farmland and existing businesses, they segmented the area being evaluated and failed to analyze the big picture.

Convinced that Jordan Creek Mall will contribute significantly to urban sprawl and the loss of small businesses throughout the Des Moines metro region, 1000 Friends appealed the decision to the circuit court. The appeal concerned the extensive public subsidies for transportation infrastructure being built to access the mall. The basis for the appeal was that the district court wrongly decided the merits of the environmental issues and erred in dismissing this case.

Growth Management Conference Proves Helpful

by Ed Fallon

The Growth Management Leadership Alliance (GMLA) is a national coalition of 37 land-use organizations from 31 states. It meets twice each year to bring together the best and brightest land-use experts from across the U.S. I have attended GMLA meetings since 2000 and have always brought home ideas and information that are relevant to the land-use issues we face across Iowa.

The most recent meeting was in Charleston, South Carolina. Community leaders there have done an amazing job of capitalizing upon the city's unique historic identity. It was inspiring to see what can be accomplished with hard work, a forward thinking plan, and buy-in from both the general public and the city's elected and civic leadership. It made me aware of how much more we could be doing in Iowa, and grateful for the rich diversity of culture and history we still have in our state.

The conference itself offered a number of interesting presentations. Most useful was learning about the efforts of Piedmont Environmental Council

(PEC), who have brought smart growth into focus through two successful road projects: the Beaverdam Creek Historic Roads District and the redesign of Highway 50, which was slated to become a four-lane highway that would have bypassed several towns and their business districts.

In Iowa, the work of PEC is particularly relevant to efforts to establish a scenic roads ordinance in Johnson County, though this approach to promoting responsible land use has relevance in many areas of our fair state.

For more information about PEC's initiatives, consult www.loudoun.gov/b&d/beaverdam.htm

Quote this ...

"Sprawl is not a faceless force over which we have no control. It is the composite of hundreds of decisions made daily by county and city councils, planning commissions, school boards, and state departments of transportation. Improving those decisions is precisely what it will take to improve the future of our communities."

—Dana Beach, Director of the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League

MEMBERSHIP

We are gearing up to make our name a reality. We now have 990 members in 75 counties. We hope to have 1,000 \$100 Founding Friends, giving us an operating budget of \$100,000 — a solid position from which to move forward in our work.

If you would like to be a Founding Friend, but can't afford a lump sum contribution of \$100, we have a monthly pledge program for \$8.75 a month. Of course, we gratefully accept annual members at \$20 and up as well.

**Clip and mail with your tax deductible check, payable to 1000 Friends of Iowa.
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MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

Student/Senior ☐ \$20 Founding Friend ☐ \$100

Individual ☐ \$35 Sustaining Friend ☐ \$1,000
(or more)

Family ☐ \$45 Other ☐ \$_____

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with a few surprises.
...details inside*

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Northern Polk County/Ankeny Smart Growth Project

by Stephanie Weisenbach, Smart Growth Program Consultant

Our efforts in northern Polk County have shown that there is great concern about the growth that is happening there, and people are looking for solutions. 1000 Friends of Iowa has created literature about Ankeny's growth. So many stories are surfacing about how the growth is affecting older neighborhoods, newer neighborhoods, business owners, rural residents, farmers, the Four Mile Creek watershed, and more. These stories tie into a bigger picture that will unite a broad range of people to strive for the common goal of smart growth for Ankeny and the surrounding area.

The growth in Ankeny is tied to a proposal for a northeastern beltway that would be a catalyst for urban sprawl, providing a new highway from Altoona to Polk City. Rural residents seeking to preserve their way of life are connecting with their neighbors to create a movement to stop the beltway. With continued effort, we hope that the merging of urban and rural concerns will create an alternative model for community development that can serve as an example elsewhere in Iowa.

