Legislative Update: HF268
Seeks to Eliminate Smart Planning Principles and Comprehensive Guidelines from the Iowa Code

It’s been said the best way to promote positive behavior is not to reward bad behavior with attention. Lest you be confused, this is a legislative update not a parenting column.

Since smart planning language was added to the Iowa Code in 2010, 1000 Friends of Iowa has quietly watched the ongoing effort by House Republicans to remove smart planning language. This session HF11, sponsored by Representatives Dawn Pettengill and Ralph Watt, asked to eliminate smart planning principles and other local comprehensive development guidelines from the code.

It was not surprising when a sub-committee approved and sent the bill to the House Local Government Committee where it was re-numbered HF268. In February the bill passed out of committee with Democrats requesting House leadership conduct a public hearing before HF268 was brought to the floor for debate and a vote. At an early-morning public hearing Tuesday, March 19, no one spoke in favor of the legislation.

The House Local Government Committee heard from local government officials who argued against House File 268, saying there is no good reason to remove smart planning principles from Iowa law. Iowa law requires that the 10 principles be considered in making planning, development and zoning decisions. The principles have been condemned by some Republicans who claim they are part of a United Nations-backed Agenda 21 plan to erode American sovereignty.

Les Beck, Linn County Planning & Development director, in written testimony said the principles provide a framework for decision making and added “The Iowa Smart Planning Principles can guide such a discussion; HF 268 seeks to stifle it.”

Carlisle mayor, Ruth Randleman has worked at the local and regional planning levels, served at the state level as co-chair of the Governor’s Smart Planning Task Force and at the national level with the bipartisan Local Leaders Advisory Council for Smart Growth America. continued page 2

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Randleman, who ran as a conservative candidate at the primary level for a House seat in 2012, tried to address concerns that smart planning language in the Iowa Code could somehow prove harmful to Iowa communities or Iowa taxpayers. She stated her personal experience as Mayor has proven that much of our suburban development is a product of previous heavy-handed government policies... “government gone bad” policies the smart planning principles attempt to correct.

Randleman went on to say “While these principles, applied electively, support my conservative values, I fail to understand why these discussions have somehow taken on political ideology when the principles are not intrinsically conservative or liberal in nature. As former co-chair of the Smart Planning Task Force, which included bipartisan representation by State Legislators, representation from numerous state agencies and the Iowa League of Cities, I offer that the concern of onerous mandates and regulations did not materialize during that process. A conscious decision was made to not recommend that approach, but to offer options and awareness. Also, that effort and every planning process I have ever been a part of, has incorporated extensive citizen input. I believe citizens have the right to participate in the future of their community, and community planning affords that opportunity. I have personally participated in numerous discussions with citizens in backyards and on front sidewalks regarding direct effects to them. Failing to plan is planning to fail and taxpayers are ill served without a wise vision for the future. We need more conversation around the framework in Chapter 18B, not less. As a taxpayer myself, I would feel cheated if my elected officials did not wisely anticipate the future needs of my community and address them in a cost effective manner. I speak against HF 268.”

The Quad-City Times reported, “There is no public benefit in removing the smart planning principles from the code, but there are many benefits in keeping them,” said Bret VandeLune, Polk County planning and development manager and president of the County Zoning Officials of Iowa, which is part of the Iowa State Association of Counties.

So, smart planning language sits on the legislative chopping block and we wait until leadership announces when it will be debated on the House.

Showing of Symphony of the Soil to be part of annual meeting

In March 1000 Friends of Iowa led a collaborative effort with Raccoon River Watershed Association (RCWA), Sierra Club, Transition Des Moines, and Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom to bring a showing of the yet unreleased documentary Symphony of the Soil to Drake University in Des Moines. Both the Friday evening showing, and the Raccoon RCWA’s annual meeting sessions the following day were well attended. Filmed on four continents, Symphony of the Soil explores the miraculous living organism that sustains life on Earth. With a skillful mix of art and science, Deborah Koons Garcia’s film describes how soil forms, its life cycle, and its role in global issues like climate change, dead zones and the future of our food supply.

1000 Friends of Iowa will again show Symphony of the Soil during our annual meeting June 8, 2013 near Madrid, IA at the Iowa Arboretum. We hope to see you there!
A proposed rezoning of 90 acres of farmland into a 70 house development on Newport Road near Iowa City is threatening the urban-rural balance of Johnson County.

A meeting held on March 12, 2013 was attended by bicyclists, geologists, farmers, Farm Bureau representatives, the Sierra Club, Human Rights groups, business owners – many people from many walks of life added their testimony opposing rezoning and building on Newport Road. Unfortunately, their opposition and arguments against rezoning were not given consideration. Most of the county supervisors had already decided in favor of rezoning and building, and, in spite of hours of thoughtful, educated opposing testimony from a variety of local and statewide citizens and experts, voted in favor of the rezoning.

Two priorities stated in the Johnson County Land Use Plan are preservation of agricultural land and a preference for infill development. The elimination of 90 acres of prime farmland clearly does not preserve agricultural land. The location of this property, a few miles from the city limits, is not infill, but rather a rural subdivision development that creates incompatible land uses between neighbors. There are 1,604 vacant, plotted lots already equipped with city services and ready for homes in rural Johnson County. These empty lots should be developed before any consideration is given to rezoning additional farmland. There is no need to increase the already large inventory of rural lots ready for construction.

The county receives the same amount of tax money for a home built in Iowa City, Coralville, or North Liberty, as it does for a home built in rural Johnson County (with the exception of the relatively small rural road levy.) Encouraging construction of more homes in a rural area has no compelling financial benefit to the county. The infrastructure to support this rezoning will have negative effects on neighbors and on municipalities.

Water levels, emergency response times, additional strain on the school district, concerns about bicyclists’ safety – there are so many arguments against rezoning and developing the Dooley Farm, we don’t have the room to include them all in one article. Supervisors discount much of the opposition as NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) mentality of those who currently have homes in the area rather than recognizing the opposition includes local, county wide and state wide residents, neighbors, professionals and leaders.

1000 Friends of Iowa provided one resident with a smart growth scorecard and checklist (both available for download at www.1000friendsofiowa.org) to assist in demonstrating the many ways county supervisors are NOT making smart growth a priority in considering this proposal. Newport Road has been very proactive over the past two decades. One more reading of the proposal will take place. It remains to be seen if representative government will listen to the constituents or approve a subdivision that doesn't live up to the Johnson County Land Use Plan or the scorecard for smart growth.
1000 Friends established the annual Best Development Awards in 2001 to showcase development projects and programs in Iowa that best reflect the principles of smart growth and sustainability and to recognize the efforts of the businesses, developers, cities, organizations, and individuals that are responsible for these projects. The winners of Best Development Awards are models of how responsible development practices provide benefits to the community, the environment, and quality of life for future generations. Nominations for the 2013 Best Development Awards are now being accepted. If there is a project in your community you believe deserves recognition, please visit our website to learn more about the nomination process!

Judges selected this year’s recipients according to how well each project met criteria for smart growth and sustainability. Each recipient was presented with a plaque recognizing their achievement during the Best Development Awards Ceremony at our 2012 Annual Meeting in Mason City. Please join us in congratulating recipients of the 2012 Best Development Awards!

**New Residential:**
Flood Recovery Infill, Cedar Rapids

1000 Friends of Iowa recognized the City of Cedar Rapids and Skogman Homes for the Flood Recovery Infill project with the 2012 Best Development Award under the category of Best New Residential. The Flood Recovery Infill Project puts Smart Planning principles into practice. The project provided a much needed answer to new affordable housing that fits the existing turn of the century neighborhood fabric.

**New Commercial/Civic:**
Historic Millwork District Complete Streets, Dubuque

The City of Dubuque received the 2012 Best Development Award under the category of Best New Commercial/Civic for the Historic Millwork District Complete Streets project. Including shared bike lanes, reuse of historic pavers and train track, locally produced streetscape amenities by local artists and metalworkers, LED street lights and widened sidewalks—the project is a wonderful example of Smart Planning principles. Visit [http://www.cityofdubuque.org/](http://www.cityofdubuque.org/) to learn more.
Renovated Residential:
Riverpoint Lofts, Des Moines

Hubbell Realty Company received the 2012 Best Development Award under the category of Best Renovated Residential for the Riverpoint Lofts project in Des Moines. As one of the first projects to revitalize the neighborhood south of MLK Parkway, the Riverpoint Lofts has incorporated many Smart Planning principles. The Riverpoint lofts integrate housing within walking distance of employment, entertainment, education and public transportation.


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Renovated Commercial/Civic:
The IVCCD Orpheum Theater Center, Marshalltown

1000 Friends recognized the IVCCD Orpheum Theater Center for the Orpheum Theater Renovation with the 2012 Best Development Award under the category of Best Renovated Commercial/Civic. Started by a grassroots effort that took eleven years to complete, this restoration and renovation project is a great example of community and stakeholder collaboration. The building provides mixed uses including learning studios, movie house, black box theater, and a coffee shop. By creating a great sense of place, it strengthens the downtown and community. Visit [http://www.orpheumtheatercenter.com/new/](http://www.orpheumtheatercenter.com/new/) to learn more about the IVCCD Orpheum Theater Center!
The 2012 Best Development Award under the category of Leadership was awarded to the Czech Village/New Bohemia Main Street District in Cedar Rapids. The leadership directed development toward the existing community by encouraging public-private partnerships to work together and rebuild the district overcome by the catastrophic floods of 2008. The leadership led by example and became catalysts for restoration and rebuilding that fostered a distinctive, attractive, strong community. Learn more at http://crmainstreet.org/.

Mixed Use:
Riverworks Development, Dubuque

The 2012 Best Development Award under the category of Best Mixed-Use went to Chatham Bay Group and Miller Development Group for the Riverworks Development in Dubuque. The project embraces Smart Planning principles with beauty and function by providing a mixed use project that creatively reuses a historically significant building to address the need for high density living in Dubuque. Visit http://www.riverworks-dubuque.com/.

Leadership:
Czech Village/New Bohemia Urban Main Street District, Cedar Rapids

The 2012 Best Development Award under the category of Leadership was awarded to the Czech Village/New Bohemia Main Street District in Cedar Rapids. The leadership directed development toward the existing community by encouraging public-private partnerships to work together and rebuild the district overcome by the catastrophic floods of 2008. The leadership led by example and became catalysts for restoration and rebuilding that fostered a distinctive, attractive, strong community. Learn more at http://crmainstreet.org/.
**Iowa City**—“ECO Iowa City” revised program coming soon!

Jennifer Jordon, City of Iowa City and Kristin Simon, East Central Iowa Council of Governments are reviving “ECO Iowa City”, a successful partnership between the Iowa City Landfill and Recycling Center and the Iowa City Public Library. Before funding ended in 2010, ECO Iowa City worked to help residents become more sustainable; funding was used to provide free or subsidized items to help people move further toward sustainability.

The new effort will be similar to the original, with a few improvements including: expanding to the entire service area, working with libraries in the county to share programs, working with business to reach out to employees, regular emails with information, tips, quotes, events, etc. Four units in 2-month blocks will help people take concrete steps to living more sustainable lives through events, programs and networking.

Visit ECO Iowa City’s website at [www.icgov.org/eco](http://www.icgov.org/eco) for additional information, the latest calendar of events, and to sign up for the ECO Iowa City list serve. 1000 Friends will also update our website and calendar with new information as it becomes available.

**Ames**—“Preserve Roosevelt” effort continues

In our Fall 2012 Land Use Bulletin we honored Dr. Sue Crull, recipient of our 2012 “Above and Beyond” award, and Erv Klaas, recipient of our 2012 “Distinguished Service” award. Both Dr. Crull and Mr. Klaas, in collaboration with others, have spent several years working to save Roosevelt School in Ames. Thanks to Dr. Crull, the building is listed in the National Register of Historical Places. Local support for saving the building and reusing it, rather than demolishing it, continues to grow. Visit the website they, with the help of Sharon Wirth and a local high school student, created for additional information, how you can help and to join their email list: [www.preserveroosevelt.org](http://www.preserveroosevelt.org).

**Pocahontas County**—Questions about MidAmerican’s wind farm property tax

Greg Heide, a farmer from Pocahontas County and author of the Iowa Renewable Energy Blog, attempted to determine if MidAmerican Energy Company paid the correct amount of property tax on their wind farm property in Pocahontas County a few years ago. He renewed his effort when the county supervisors proposed creation of a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district around MidAmerican’s wind project. The county’s proposal, if successful, would divert wind farm property tax away from Pocahontas school district, the fire department, etc.

At least seven counties have created TIF districts around a wind farm. When counties do TIF a wind farm, even two years after the facilities are finished, all or most of the taxable value will be counted as a TIF increment because the taxable value (other than the land) in the base year will be zero under Iowa law providing for wind farm incentives through reduced assessments. See Land Use Bulletin issue 86, available at [http://www.1000friendsofiowa.org/images/PDF/LUB/lub_issue%2086.pdf](http://www.1000friendsofiowa.org/images/PDF/LUB/lub_issue%2086.pdf) for more on TIF abuse.

While this is an example of the need for TIF reform, Mr. Heide’s focus is if MidAmerican Energy Company is paying the correct amount of property tax and ensuring the school district is receiving the correct amount of revenue from MidAmerican Energy Company’s wind property. 1000 Friends of Iowa will publish any updates to this issue on our website and in the next issue of the Land Use Bulletin. In the meantime follow Mr. Heide’s progress by visiting [http://renewablefarmer.blogspot.com/](http://renewablefarmer.blogspot.com/).
SAVE THE DATE!

1000 Friends of Iowa Annual Meeting
“Iowa—Beautiful Land”
Farmland and Natural Areas in Iowa
When: Saturday, June 8, 2013
Where: Iowa Arboretum, Madrid, IA

1000 Friends of Iowa will hold the 2013 Annual Meeting at the Iowa Arboretum in Madrid, IA on Saturday, June 8th.

Details will be posted to our website as they are finalized. Visit www.1000friendsofiowa.org for the latest updates, mark your calendars and join us on June 8th in Madrid, IA!