

## Thoughts on the 2007 NCC Comprehensive Development Plan Process and a Call for Increased Civic Involvement

As we consider the upcoming update of the New Castle County Comprehensive Development Plan to be kicked off on September 26, 2005, we must keep focus on the recent budget realities for transportation, wastewater, school, stormwater management and other infrastructure and services that subsidize the excessive over development of the State of Delaware at the tax payer's expense.

Nearly all developments in Delaware receive significant subsidies from the public sector in the form of infrastructure, services, or direct assistance.

Government agencies (especially local) are often very eager to increase their tax base or receive windfalls from transfer taxes or impact fees, with little meaningful information about the cost & benefits of their choices. This usually occurs because infrastructure costs for development are shifted to a different level of government (such as state absorption of transportation costs).

The role of all levels of government in Delaware's land use and economic development process is currently limited to facilitation of the vision and plans of developers, rather than a public vision and plan developed with the input of a wide range of stakeholders. The public pays but rarely receives benefits from this process.

This fiscal inequity is caused by a short sighted and ineffective perspective of land use and economic development. While these development projects are usually heavily subsidized by taxpayer dollars, they produce decidedly mixed and often detrimental results for the affected public, with disproportionately worse impacts on low to moderate income people (especially related to the affordable housing crises in Delaware).

As we consider Comprehensive Planning and the large scale expenditures of public funds to support the development often promoted in this process, we must ask a number of important questions.

- ? What ultimate buildout density is acceptable and how fast should it be allowed to occur?
- ? What is the role of government in guiding growth?
- ? How much should tax payers have to pay to support this growth?
- ? What information is truly needed for government and community stakeholders to make informed decisions and how do we get this information out to those who need it?
- ? How can communities take advantage or benefit from the enormous amount of public money spend to promote development?

- ? What conditions or performance measures should be attached to the public subsidies and major land use entitlements that promote growth?
- ? How do we maximize democratic, civic participation in the economic and land development process?

We must actively advocate for a change in the comprehensive planning process that centers on a public policy of “community benefits”. This is a very simple proposition that the main purpose of land use and development planning is to bring measurable, permanent improvements to the lives of the affected residents, not just developers.

To accomplish this, it is essential that a well organized and dominant number of civic and community members engage and stay the course throughout the comprehensive plan development for the 2007 New Castle County Comprehensive Plan Update.

Please attend the meeting on September 26, push to be put on one of the four planning committees, and advocate continuously for the development of a comprehensive plan that benefits our communities. Also, please encourage any residents of incorporated Cities or Towns to also directly engage to help ensure the coordination of our County Plan with our incorporated towns in an effort to advocate for better regional planning.

Let’s work hard to ensure that the County Plan and resulting county process facilitates a public vision and plan developed by the people, and is no longer limited to the government’s facilitation of the visions and plans of developers.