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Local communities embark on urban growth plan

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As a result of a recent round of approvals for the Bishops Bay subdivision, four communities north of Lake Mendota have begun to plan together for new urban development.

Officials from Middleton, Springfield, Waunakee and Westport have embarked on what is termed FUDA planning – determining the most opportune Future Urban Development Areas.

Together, the city, village and townships are studying environmental, agriculture, traffic and other factors in an effort to locate the most suitable locations for new development.

Last year, when the Capital Area Regional Plan Commission (CARPC) considered extending the urban service area – allowing for water and sewer to accommodate the massive Bishops Bay subdivision plan – some asked why no such urban development planning had been done.

Commission members said there simply hadn't been time to complete the planning process, said Tom Wilson, Westport Town administrator, attorney and clerk-treasurer.

Wilson said municipal officials north of the lake – in Springfield, Waunakee, Middleton and Westport – decided they could begin to undertake such planning.

That way, if the municipalities had development proposals that required urban service area extensions, they could approach the CARPC with Future Urban Development Area (FUDA) plans in place, Wilson said.

"It's also coming at a time when our comprehensive plans have been around for while," Wilson said. "It seems like this might be an opportunity to use FUDA to be able to work together on growth plans."

Federal funds available

The municipalities' effort to plan together has even garnered federal funds, Wilson said.

According to Steve Steinhoff, CARPC senior planner, that regional plan commission was the lead agency in the grant application for a consortium comprising 25 governmental, business and nonprofit entities.

In October, CARPC received the \$2 million Sustainable Community Regional Planning Grant awarded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Department of Transportation.

The grant will allow the consortium members, including the local communities, to undertake a variety of projects to promote sustainable regional development, Steinhoff said.

In particular, it will help the Future Urban

Grant to fund a number of efforts

Waunakee's Future Urban Development Area planning process is just one of many efforts that will be funded by the \$2 million Sustainable Communities grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Led by the Capital Area Regional Plan Commission, a consortium of 25 governmental, business and nonprofit organizations will utilize the three-year grant.

"One of the most exciting things is the consortium is broad based," said Steve Steinhoff, senior planner with CARPC. He noted that the members include environmental groups, business leaders and nonprofits.

The federal grant will fund staffing and consultant work to:

- Explore the potential for enhanced bus and rail transit and transit-oriented development along regional transportation corridors and prepare transit-oriented development concept plans.
 - Conduct multi-jurisdictional planning for sustainable development in various areas of the county.
 - Assist the City of Madison's Sustainability Commerce Center with business planning and site preparation.
 - Develop strategies and best management practices for capturing 100 percent of stormwater on a higher-density, transit-friendly development in Fitchburg.
 - Study the feasibility of developing a fresh market vegetable packing house in the region to connect local produce growers to high-volume buyers.
 - Prepare a business plan for a new fresh food market in the South Madison area lacking a nearby grocery store.
 - Develop a regional housing strategy.
 - Establish air quality and greenhouse gas emission reduction goals and strategies.
 - Develop strategies for incorporating equity into regional and local plans and for full participation by under-represented groups.
- Consortium members have committed \$1.8 million in matching funds and in-kind contributions. In addition to the City of Middleton, towns of Westport and Springfield, and Village of Waunakee, the members include:
- The Madison Area Transportation Planning Board, City of Madison, Dane County, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District, Madison Metro, cities of Fitchburg and Monona, towns of Windsor,

Development Area planning effort by providing three and a half new staff positions, including planners, a designer, ecologist and market analysts to examine potential demand for various types of housing and commercial growth.

The FUDA plan process

Steinhoff said the communities have just appointed a steering committee.

"The next step is to prepare an environmental conditions report, an inventory and assessment of existing conditions looking at natural resources, water resources in particular," Steinhoff said.

That will include surface water, streams, wetlands and groundwater, along with water habitat and agricultural resources, he said.

"The overall purpose of the urban planning is to better manage growth for environmental protection and agricultural preservation, and more efficient development through cooperative planning," he said.

CARPC has promoted this sort of planning so that long-term regional growth can occur while preserving water quality. FUDA planning is also aimed at making the urban service area extension process more efficient and friendly, Steinhoff said.

"After the environmental conditions report, the next step is scenario planning," Steinhoff said. "This will identify the different scenarios of future growth."

Levels of density and development patterns will be examined, along with their impact. In the process, public input will be sought on a preferred option for the local governments to review.

Dunn, and Sun Prairie, United Way of Dane County, Urban League of Greater Madison, Latino Support Network, Capital Region Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability (CRANES), Dane County Housing Authority, Wisconsin Partnership for Housing Development, Project Home, M&I Bank, Home Savings Bank, Madison Area Builders Association, UW-Madison Department of Urban and Regional Planning, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Local planning

"Once completed, the goal is to have a FUDA plan be incorporated into local comprehensive plans," Steinhoff said.

While all the municipalities have comprehensive plans, Steinhoff said they did not get into the level of detail or analysis and environmental planning as the FUDA plans will.

FUDA planning examines details such as inventory and assessment, the carrying capacity of streams and rivers, wetlands and farmland.

"It estimates more impacts of growth and presents the public and local decision makers with better decision making based on better information," Steinhoff said.

The process will also help the local communities update their comprehensive plans as the state requires and bring more experts to the table.

Spirit of cooperation

Another huge plus is the cooperative planning effort.

"It's another excuse for the four communities to sit down and talk," Wilson said. "Regional cooperation in our little corner of the world is good for our citizens and good for the community."

Sherri Endres, Springfield Town Clerk, said the detailed information on traffic and demographics can be incorporated into the town's comprehensive plan, last revised in 2007.

It also helps to know what neighboring communities have in mind.

"It's always a plus to work with our neighbors," Endres said. "Any time we can get together and have joint meeting about areas of concern is a win-win for everybody."

Todd Schmidt, Waunakee village administrator, added that the village is also excited to plan from a regional perspective and to work with its neighbors.

Schmidt added that the North Mendota Parkway may become part of the discussion.

"That's something that could gain even more attention out of this process, another level of analysis or agreement on what that should be, and hopefully that adds steam to the project," Schmidt said, though he added that the planning is about more than transportation.

Like Springfield and Westport, Waunakee will benefit from the planning expertise and funding at a time when the village's comprehensive plan is due for an update, Schmidt said.

"Work done through FUDA is going to dovetail into an update of the comprehensive plan," Schmidt said.

Steinhoff said that as the Madison area competes with other U.S. regions, it's important for leaders to collaboratively address regional issues that reach beyond municipal borders.

"Protecting the environment, transportation corridors, agricultural preservation – these are all related," Steinhoff said. "Both the FUDA and the Sustainable Communities grant is an opportunity to build collaboration to address those regional challenges."

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