

## Extension's Part in Better Communities: A Case Study

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*A need to make land-use controls work and become development policy that serve as guidelines for zoning ordinances prompted Delaware Extension Service to launch an all-out effort to reach a goal of better planned communities. Vaughn presents the USDA-University of Delaware project to demonstrate the process used and shares the recommendations of their Extension advisory committees. He discusses how various segments of the population in Delaware's counties were approached to enable the goal of community improvement to be reached. He also cites the positive results of 15 years of work, while at the same time indicating "land-use planning unfortunately has done little for meaningfully improving the lives of people in hard-core poverty—despite claims to the contrary." Do you agree with him?*

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Delaware is a coastal state, small in area. We've been called "a state with three counties, except at high tide when it only has two." Our land resources aren't abundant nor of unique high quality, except for the ocean beaches.

However, in our favor we have that most valuable characteristic of an economic land resource—advantageous location. Delaware sits near the heart of "Megalopolis"—the great urbanizing belt between Richmond and Boston. This locational advantage has brought rapid population growth, generating significant land-use changes in all three counties.

New Castle County's population soared from 180,000 in 1940 to 386,000 in 1970. In Kent County, population jumped from 34,000 to 82,000. The Sussex County population rose from 53,000 to 80,000. While this growth has been largely industry-induced in our northernmost county (New Castle), in Kent County it's probably due more to the opening of Dover Air Force Base during the early 1950s and in Sussex County to the increasing economic impact of our seashore resort areas.

Northern Delaware has suffered from most of the problems of metropolitan expansion in some

form. In 1954, New Castle County—which has had a regional planning commission since 1931—adopted its first zoning ordinance to try to solve a host of these problems. Rural Kent and Sussex Counties—though urbanizing—haven't felt the extreme pressures from development that permeated throughout New Castle County. Therefore, a moderate concern for land-use planning emerged downstate.

### **Extension's Role and Activities**

The land-use problems of New Castle County and those of Kent and Sussex Counties differ only by degree of urgency for solution. The difference is important, though. It has prompted different approaches in the kind of help the Delaware Cooperative Extension Service and Delaware Agricultural Experiment Station gave each county.

### **Metropolitan County—New Castle**

In New Castle County, Extension's role was to provide information stressing improved functioning and maturing of the planning process. It was apparent early that despite the initiation of land-use controls, little improvement in development patterns had occurred. The county land-use plan prepared between 1954 and 1958 (*following* adoption of the zoning ordinance, instead of preceding it) bore little relationship to the zoning maps and didn't become development policy. Rather than Extension seeking to

inform the citizenry on fundamental needs for planning, zoning, etc., it was equally apparent that educational effort should be directed toward making land-use controls *work* now that we had them.

From our first Extension conference on land-use planning (1956), it became clear we needed added land-use research to bolster New Castle County's planning program. Lack of funding and staff delayed this research, but in 1960 the USDA-University of Delaware project began. Our work dealt largely with "rural-urban fringe," land-use classification in the first 18 months. During the second 18 months we analyzed the factors generating land development in many parts of New Castle County as well as factors precluding development in other parts (idle or bypassed land).

Extension quickly helped disseminate the findings. As a basis for other community planning presentations, we reported the project's results at Farm and Home Week programs in 1962 and 1963. In 1962, we presented a seminar on land-use classification for professional planning personnel. We received outstanding newspaper coverage in 1962-1963 and developed an excellent day-to-day working relationship with the county regional planning commission.

By the end of 1963, the New Castle County government launched a thorough revision of its planning and zoning process, producing a substantially more workable operation.

Extension's timely efforts during 1956-1963 (and continuing into the 1970s, as noted later) have been instrumental in aiding improvement in the county's planning and zoning.

#### **Rural Counties—Kent and Sussex**

In Kent and Sussex Counties, Extension's emphasis was on first showing the need for effective county planning. Land-use planning for these largely agricultural counties came into focus at a 1958 Extension program on the "Future of Agriculture in the Urbanizing Northeast."

From 1959 to 1961, county agricultural agents attended conferences and studied information on rural planning programs throughout the nation. In 1961, the Kent County agent was granted a 10-week sabbatical to visit Western Europe in search of new approaches to community planning that fully consider agricultural production. Also, a seminar on "Principles of Agricultural Zoning" was sponsored by the university's School of Agriculture in 1961.

In 1962, we developed a report on land-use in each of the three counties—titled *Land Use in Delaware*. Part of the annual training conference for Extension staff in 1962 was devoted to "Resource Development in Delaware," so that our agricultural, home economics, and 4-H staff would be better able to discuss planning and zoning downstate.

We produced, in 1963, a conference session on "Delaware's

Growing Communities—How Fast and How Far?" We also arranged a Grange-hosted luncheon in Kent County on land-use planning.

In 1963 and 1964, Kent and Sussex Counties formed committees to prepare overall economic development plans (OEDP). Our county agricultural agents were active members of the committees, and the OEDPs solidly recommended planning and zoning.

Attention focused, in 1965 and 1966, on legislation introduced to create planning and zoning operations in these counties. It failed to pass in the General Assembly due to still insufficient citizen support and opposition from one of the leading farm organizations concerned that zoning would precede planning as in New Castle County.

Educational work continued with Extension presentations on "Wildlands Ecology and Conservation," "Community Beautification," and "Urban Pressures on Delaware Agriculture." County planning study committees were formed, with close cooperation from our county agricultural agents. In mid-winter 1966, the Kent County agent took citizens from southern Delaware on a tour to the infant "new city" of Columbia in Howard County, Maryland.

Early in 1967, an Extension-sponsored conference ("Developing the Delmarva Peninsula") and luncheon brought together key Delaware agricultural leaders and the director of the State Planning Office. Within a month, the farm organization that had opposed legislation

for downstate planning and zoning in 1965 and 1966 asked for Extension's assistance in reevaluating the proposition. Within another month, Extension also held five meetings on planning and zoning with Kent County's homemakers' clubs.

Legislation was reintroduced and enacted in 1967 to enable planning and zoning in Kent and Sussex Counties. Both counties now have appointed planning/zoning commissions and undertaken needed planning studies. Kent County has adopted subdivision regulations and an interim zoning ordinance pending completion of its land-use plan, and Sussex County—where a land-use plan has been completed—has adopted a final zoning ordinance.

### **Approaches to Planning and Zoning**

Our county agricultural agents in all three counties deserve much praise at this point. They did the legwork; preparation of materials; day-to-day talking with Extension advisory councils, Granges, chambers of commerce, and other groups and individuals; and everything else necessary to help the people of Delaware learn about planning and zoning.

We found a variety of useful approaches. We wisely followed the recommendations of Extension advisory committees, which agreed that more information should be made available on planning and zoning but urged: "Sell planning and zoning first to our community

leaders; try not to make a big splash, but work with small groups and get people involved in the process."

People understood the concept when we compared planning and zoning to designing a house. In constructing a home, one part is planned to be the living room, another part the dining room, a third part the bedrooms, a fourth part the kitchen, a fifth part the bathroom, and other parts are set aside for a den, recreation room, etc.

A *county* is like a giant house, shared by thousands of people. Guiding the development of this giant house for the best use and convenience of its occupants begins through planning and zoning. Some parts of the county are best suited for residences; others have locational advantages for industries and businesses. Many parts are wisely encouraged to remain in productive agriculture. Still other areas are needed for parks and outdoor recreation.

We pointed out that a county with little growth or little decline—factors that cause changes—in its communities may be able to solve its problems without planning and zoning (although counties suffering large population losses possibly should plan how to accommodate or reverse these losses).

However, in many counties population and industrial growth are occurring fast. Without warning, poorly kept trailer parks, noisy late-hour taverns, unsightly junkyards, foul-smelling dumps, water-polluting

industries, and other unwelcome intruders have moved into quiet residential areas of small towns or next to beautiful farms. People have invested life savings in their homes and farms, only to have their enjoyment and property values severely damaged by these disturbances.

Moreover, such growth occurring in haphazard fashion has brought burdensome demands on public facilities and services. Because this development has taken place without adequate preparation and guidance, it has been wasteful. It has made taxes for new public facilities and services much higher than would have been necessary with effective county planning.

We can compare zoning to automobile driving regulations, in terms of limiting our freedom. We all know that limiting the freedom to drive through town at any speed we wish increases the freedom of our loved ones and friends to drive or walk safely along and across the streets. Restricting an individual from doing exactly what he wants to do with a piece of land can ensure the best use of land for the most people and the community.

We helped farmers understand that zoning usually permits continuation and expansion of farm operations without interruption. Farmers can plant any crops, raise any livestock, construct new buildings, and make other needed improvements in the operations, subject only to fire, health, and similar codes that are completely separate from zoning.

We helped townspeople realize that zoning doesn't make people move existing businesses and homes, if not located in the proper zone today. Zoning only affects property when a change in land-use occurs.

We indicated how counties with planning and zoning are *favored* by responsible industries seeking new plant sites. These companies want to be located in an industrial zone where they'll have assured access to the transportation, utilities, and other services they need. They want to be located in a designated industrial area away from residential and other neighbors who could be troubled by the effects of an industry's nearness. The management and employees of these companies want to live in a community that's giving thought to its future and is protecting its residential and other areas.

We discussed federal aid for sewer, water, and other facilities and how local governments undertake comprehensive planning as a condition of eligibility for an increasing number of federal financial aid programs, to assure the best possible local use of such aid.

Most recently, we've discussed modifications in land-use controls. These include accelerated use of easements, tax credits, purchase and leaseback, and other forms of compensable land-use control made necessary when returns to land development become so high that zoning—a noncompensable regulation—imposes too severe an economic hardship on landowners.

We reached the women of our communities on planning and zoning. Part of the thinking here was that although the men of our counties had numerous opportunities to learn about this issue through usual political and business activities, few of their wives—important voters—received similar opportunities.

We encouraged citizens to form citizens' planning associations, study the plans for the county, participate in the planning process by giving the planning and zoning commission informed opinions on problems and solutions, urge friends and colleagues to attend planning and zoning commission meetings, and ask newspapers to give full coverage to community planning.

We *stressed* that planning by itself does next to nothing in achieving community improvement. Active citizen support and progressive government must take the plans and back them with effort, money, law, and everything necessary to transfer the plans into reality—a new facility built or a new service provided. Unless a community is willing to act on its plans, it's just wasting taxpayers' money on planning.

We made it clear that putting the plans into effect is the hard part. Few people will take issue with a plan or even remember its preparation if it's not being put into effect. However, when putting it into effect means zoning, housing, plumbing, electrical, fire, health, and possibly other codes that touch each family's home, people then question whether planning helps more than it hurts.

## Evaluation

Testing the worth of these accomplishments over 15 years, evaluation shows they've led to continuing requests for Extension's help.

For example, the New Castle County agricultural agent was subsequently appointed to the county planning and zoning board, where he continues to serve. Extension's coordinator of community and resource development (CRD) has been elected to the board of directors and serves on the planning and zoning committee of the countywide civic group most actively involved in the county's planning and zoning program. The CRD coordinator and Kent County agricultural agent were asked to assist that county's new planning and zoning agency in determining its initial staffing, budget, office space, and other requirements.

The Sussex County agricultural agent has been consulted by his county's planning/zoning staff on numerous problems. The CRD coordinator serves as an advisor to the State Planning Office on its project to revise the statewide development plan.

Additionally, two former graduate students from the university's Department of Agricultural and Food Economics have held permanent positions with the State Planning Office, and a third has served on a four-month temporary basis with the New Castle County Planning Department.

On the unfavorable side of evaluation, our experiences suggest

caution against Extension's expecting too much from land-use planning as a major tool in rural development. Land-use planning unfortunately has done little for meaningfully improving the lives of people in *hard-core poverty*—despite claims to the contrary.

Land-use planning that attracts and accommodates new industry helps low-income rural areas, or so it's claimed. Unless that new industry employs local unskilled workers and constructively *trains* them during their employment, have such people been helped? Maybe area income will rise so a few more people can be hired to pump gasoline, be salesgirls in the dime store, or work as domestics. Have these people really been helped?

It's also claimed that land-use planning for community facilities helps poor people. However, the

new sewer or water system involves a hookup charge in the hundreds of dollars plus periodic user fees; hard-core poverty families can't tie into the system. In many places zoning has prevented low-income people from obtaining better housing. Other community facilities that meet specific needs of the urban poor—public transportation, "vest pocket" neighborhood parks, etc.—seldom are feasible in rural areas.

Planning and zoning mainly enhance the living environment for middle- and upper-income classes of people. This isn't to say that planning and zoning aren't good. Instead, it recognizes that planning and zoning haven't helped—and sometimes have hindered—efforts to end rural poverty. Creative thought must improve planning and zoning to benefit *all* citizens.