



Urban vs. Rural Planning

By Marion Anderson

Urban Planning has been around for a long time. King Philip II of Spain formulated plans for towns in the American colonies in 1573. Similar plans went into the design of towns in the English colonies. It wasn't until the early twentieth century that regional planning grew out of the limitations in urban planning. It is only in the last few decades that planners began to realize that a whole new set of principles were needed for rural settings, and a few universities are beginning to offer rural planning curricula.

As a result, many people think of planning using the model for urban planning and apply its principles even where they are not appropriate.

Conceptually, urban planning assumes that growth is inevitable and essentially good. Its prime fiscal focus is on enlarging the tax base. When balance is considered, it is usually discussed in terms of balancing the mix of various kinds of residential and commercial development.

Planning concepts in rural areas, however, note that growth can be either good or bad – or even irrelevant. The important consideration is what happens to the local community as a result of growth. The prime fiscal focus is whether or not the costs of development can be recovered from the new taxes generated, thereby acknowledging the need for new services and infrastructure in a rural setting. Balance considerations cover a broader spectrum in rural planning and include how development of any kind impacts current uses, the natural environment, and local culture.

An example of how these two sets of principles give different results in our county would be the meadow around the high school and middle school. Urban planning principles would indicate that this land is highly “developable” and commercial development would provide growth as well as increase the tax base. Rural planning principles would consider this area a prime example of land that should not be developed because it lacks supporting infrastructure and urban services to support intense development. The county fiscal impact would be negative when all the actual costs are considered. In addition, commercial development would detract from the natural setting that supports tourism which generates many jobs in the county.

This example points out the problems that can arise when urban principles are misapplied in a rural environment. Much of Clear Creek County, particularly outside the four municipalities, is rural not urban. Applying both urban and rural principles where each is appropriate leads to the logical conclusion that commercial development in Clear Creek County should focus on the four towns where infrastructure and services are already available.

Marion Anderson is a Clear Creek County resident, and a member of SOLVE, an organization promoting sustainable land-use practices. www.solveccc.org

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	Urban	Rural
		
Nature of Growth	Inevitable	Manageable
Value of Growth	Good	Good or Bad-- or just irrelevant
Economic Focus	Tax Base	Net Revenue : Cost
Balance	Among various Residential & Commercial types	Among Natural Areas, Agriculture, & All Development