

Skip Claypool – Comments on recommendations. Date: 12.7.2020

The following were done very quickly and have not been reviewed for grammar or punctuation.

Comments on the recommendation’s summary requested by Linda Crombie. First, let me say (again), this is not an appropriate set of recommendations and the process violates every best practice approach I have seen in my career. There are MANY recommendations missing and not presented, because, I believe, that this is cookie cutter consulting. I have completed many such reports. In general, a good methodology the consulting company should gathers input and document a set of finds. Then they review the findings with their client (Us). Then there is a discussion of those finds along with corresponding recommendation options. This approach appears to be one in which our consulting company is pushing a narrative/agenda. One that is born form a Urban Planning training and/or the constructs that the consultant is familiar with. I have seen these same recommendations in similar studies in NOACA, NEO2030/2050. This is common in the consulting world, never mind the field, they operate in. It is common whether it is financial consulting, computer consulting, etc. It is human nature that people offer those ideas and concepts they know and learn in the practice of their focus. It is cookie cutter language and NOT based on the findings of what is happening in Geauga County. I will point more specifically in the current setup of recommendations to make my point.

If you are wondering what I am asking. We must stop this process and do a gut check. What should ask the question where are we going, what would Geauga Count Citizens think of these recommendations? I can tell you what I am hearing. We just completed a survey in Chesterland. I heard loud and clear what folks in Chesterland value, and it does NOT align with the recommendations offered by Envision.

One of the big elephants in the room is what are those things that we do not want to happen in the county. What things would we encourage in the county?

Our consultant has failed us. We have no findings in a number of areas that support these recommendations. Where are the findings on the impacts of NEO2030 and NOACA on our county? Where are the findings on our existing zoning model and how it might align with these findings? Where are the findings on Western Reserve Conservancy and/or the amount of property and how it is used in Geauga County? How many developments with less than 5 acre lots? How many sewer systems. I could go on. I was looking for a set of findings that would support recommendations. We are basing all of these recommendations on a very small subset of residents with a narrow focus and on the Planner’s Urban planning world view.

My Comments:

This is more a statement then a recommendation. I think that the majority of those in Geauga County agree with this statement. We are rural and should maintain that character. That should be remembered in all other recommendations.

Preservation of Rural Character	Gauga County is a predominantly rural community that presents a unique opportunity to reside in a tranquil country setting near Northeast Ohio’s major urban employment centers. Any future development should complement the County’s rural character in size, scale, and appearance.
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Again, this statement is accurate, however, there is some question about Governments role in business. Should government take an active or passive role? Should we use tax dollars to encourage business or simply provide a friendly environment. What is the Counties role versus the local government's role? A township or city is sovereign and can make the decisions to support business. What is the Counties role and how would this translate to actions from the county?

Commercial Corridors	<p>size, scale, and appearance.</p> <p>The County's major highways are the primary location of commercial and industrially zoned properties. The County should assist local governments in maintaining vibrant commercial and industrial corridors (such as US 322 in Chester Township and SR 87 in Newbury Township) through technical support and possible financial assistance (e.g. Revolving Loan Fund for commercial revitalization).</p>
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This recommendation is typical of a Urban planner "big government" concept. It is NOT the counties business to mess with a city or township and how they conduct the business for their citizens. This concept aligns with TLC a NOACA device in which tax dollars are siphoned off to do "beautification projects". What is the impact. Tax dollars that are taken for a purpose (roads, county administration, etc) is provided to promote the ideas of the larger government organization. Then that government organization must raise taxes to make up for the loss. This is a deceitful process and fringes on "government control" aspect. This idea walks us into a big government thought process that has no good outcome. Look at what this thinking has done to Cleveland. It is a disaster zone. They have more poverty, higher taxes, over bearing government practices, and more corruption.

Town Centers	<p>Several of the County's rural Townships have established Town Centers (e.g. Russell, Thompson) that could be enhanced through landscaping, wayfinding, and commercial revitalization efforts. The County should assist Townships seeking to enhance their town centers with technical support and possible financial assistance (e.g. Revolving Loan Fund for commercial revitalization).</p>
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This includes a nugget of truth to sell very destructive concepts. I am a baby boomer and yes I wish to remain in my home and community and will do so until I can't afford it or can no longer maintain my home. Then I will choose to do something different, without asking others to fund my lifestyle or provide me a solution. No one has asked the following questions. Before entertaining and recommendations in this area we should be able to answer the following questions. How many senior living accommodations are there their and where are they? How many are needed and projected. What are those projections based on? There are a number of existing senior living complexes in Geauga County. Who lives there? Folks from Geauga County or from elsewhere. In other word's we could build all kinds of facilities to meet what the perceived need but may find them occupied by folks from Cleveland. We may find that HUD and/or other government organizations may intervene to serve specific populations. There are a lot of senior living accommodations in Geauga County we have simply NOT done an inventory. We must do that before contemplating any recommendations. Again, I ask the question. Is it governments place to solve this problem? I say NO! In a free enterprise world this problem should be accomplished by private industry after working within the zoning and constructs created in a community. The county should NOT be pushing its big government thoughts. This is a big city, Urban planning idea that does NOT fit Geauga County.

Senior Housing	Nationwide housing trends indicate Baby Boomers wish to remain in their community as they age into their senior years. The Model Zoning Code should provide best practices to accommodate senior-friendly housing such as "step-down" lower maintenance homes and lot sizes, as well as dedicated senior housing facilities.
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This is a concept that is already part of the Geauga County zoning model. Geauga County has a number of development areas. Each uses a conservation mindset in their processes. Again, I might ask did our consultant think to look at what we have? This should be in the findings document before offering a recommendation. This demonstrates a clear ignorance of what is already happening in Geauga County.

Conservation Development	Residential subdivision activity has slowed dramatically in Geauga County over the past decade as overall real estate market trends favor smaller, lower maintenance lot sizes. Conservation Development is density-neutral development tool that accommodates smaller lot sizes while preserving a portion of a subdivision. The Model Zoning Code should include a best practice for a Conservation Development Planned Unit Development (PUD) as a conditional use that could potentially be applied for on a case-by-case basis in appropriate residential districts.
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Again, this is a no brainer and a concept that is already occurring. This is a worthless recommendation. Rather than make a recommendation for something occurring it would seem logical to me that our consultant should have simply recognized a practice that is existing based on their findings. Since adequate findings were not done, then this may be a reason for this recommendation.

Mixed-Use Development	While the County is predominantly rural, limited strategic opportunities exist for denser, mixed-use development. In locations where adequate infrastructure capacity exists or is readily available (e.g. Chardon and Bainbridge) these efforts should be encouraged.
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Another big city, Urban (not rural) planner thought. High density housing will occur based demand and local zoning. It should be done very cautiously. Each community should consider zoning etc with a long-range view of how these communities evolve. They county should NOT be encouraging high density housing. I am remembering how these communities evolved in Cleveland and what they have become today. It is NOT a concept the county should be encouraging. In fact, I would suggest the county should caution communities against high density housing. This type of development will change the infrastructure requirements and along with that the tax structure. None of this has been discussed as a part of this recommendation. Again, there are NO findings that demonstrate the nature of housing that exists in Geauga County. There are many high-density areas. How many, where, etc. This data that should be in findings.

Market Rate Workforce Housing	The County has a limited amount of smaller residential lots (less than 1 acre) and apartment units. Efforts should be made to encourage such denser development types in urbanized areas in close proximity to employment centers and commercial services such as in the City of Chardon and the Village of Middlefield.
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When we began this process there was an understanding that we would conduct research on the Western Reserve Conservation group and other groups that have tied up property across Geauga County and the impacts that has on our citizens. There are tax implications, both in the loss of tax revenue for untaxable property to taxes required to maintain park and other property. This recommendation should be based on facts that we have paid for. There is huge impact on how our land is used and we need to understand this much better. There are best practices in land use the county can support. We can support agriculture and the like. But we need data to address this area.

Public Acquisition of Land	Over 12% of the County's land area is comprised of tax-exempt properties. The County should carefully consider the fiscal impacts of removing a property from the tax base on a case-by-case basis before pursuing the acquisition of additional land for conservation or other purposes.
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My comments on this recommendation can be seen in the prior recommendation. We need more data and findings to address the huge impacts that Conservation easements have on our county. And we need to discuss and explore options for conserving farm land that does NOT involve conservation easements.

Private Conservation of Land	There are over 100 privately owned parcels under conservation easement in Geauga County. While private individuals have the right to enter into conservation easements, the County should educate the public on the fiscal impacts of preserving a property in perpetuity on a case-by-case basis before encouraging or facilitating additional conservation easements by third parties.
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I am very disappointed in this recommendation. We are doing all of this and so we did not need to pay an outside concern that takes our watch to tell us what time it is. NOACA is NOT a friend to Geauga County. They are a large urban planning organization that tries to foist their big city concepts (equity, TLC, etc) on Geauga County. They take the tax dollars from Geauga County residents to waste on big Urban programs that do not work. They promote bike trails over roads, mass transit, etc. Any consultant that claims to understand and appreciate a rural community should understand the harm that a large MPO does and we should be able to document that and develop strategies to overcome these problems. Clearly Envision is aligned with NOACA thinking. That causes me big concerns.

Transportation	The County should work with government funding agencies (e.g. NOACA, ODOT, and OPWC to leverage outside federal and state funding assistance for the preservation of roadway pavement, bridges, and culverts, as well as strategic safety and operational enhancements. The County should continue to work with the Amish community and funding agency partners to improve heavily traveled Amish routes as identified in ODOT's 2016 Geauga County Amish Safety Study.
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This recommendation is meaningless. It offers no value to our planning commission.

Water & Sewer	The County should work to ensure future water and sewer expansion projects are in concert with higher intensity development areas identified in local land use plans and zoning to maximize return on investment.
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Broadband connectivity is a challenge and a private industry problem to solve. When someone chooses to live in Troy or Parkman or Chesterland, they know the nature of the area they choose to live in. Clearly, the county, townships, and cities can create a friendly environment, but this is a private industry problem to solve. If private industry knows they will not get tax dollars and there is local demand they will solve this problem. There is new technology (5G) that is being implemented as we speak. This will change the landscape and needs to be understood and factored into any conversation and/or recommendations.

Broadband	Broadband connectivity speeds in Geauga County lag behind much of the Cleveland metropolitan area, particularly in the Southeastern portion of the County. The County should explore potential partnership models for enticing private fiber optic company investment in underserved areas of the County.
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Clearly the residents of Geauga County have spoken. They do not want more transit. We are independent folks that like our cars. Last mile transit is a trojan horse and part to the mindset of a large Urban planner. If a company needs employees without cars (?) they will solve that issue.

Transit	Consideration should be given to coordinating with existing regional transit agencies in Northeast Ohio to provide a "last-mile" connection from larger Regional Transit Authority transit hubs to commercial/industrial employment centers in Geauga County (e.g. Warren to Middlefield).
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There is a parallel program to assess how best to retain employers in Geauga County. From a Geauga County Planning commissioner perspective, we should consider findings of how many folks commute, where they commute to. How many folks reside and work in Geauga County. After review and discussion of this information few can develop recommendations around strategies to support what best aligns with Geauga County. E.g.; There is nothing wrong with folks living in Geauga Commuting to Cleveland or other surround counties. That can be part of our county plan and culture. Therein we can focus on retaining farmland and not trying to promote other kinds of big box businesses.

Business Retention & Expansion	The County should formalize an ongoing Business Retention & Expansion program that conducts regular visits to local businesses to better understand their current and future needs. The County should work to identify and engage regional corporate leaders residing in Geauga County and connect with them to see what it would take to encourage them to locate operations here.
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I am still questioning why we are paying a consultant who tells us we are doing what we should. Not a value add.

Industrial Parks	The County should continue to leverage their existing Community Reinvestment Areas (CRAs) to incentivize private investment in new, rehabilitated, and expanded commercial/light industrial properties that result in long-term increases in property values, job growth, sales activity, and tax revenue.
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Another useless recommendation that adds little value. Perhaps an expansion of developing industry around the hospital and how that might be leveraged to provide high tech jobs in that area. I am underwhelmed.

Strategic Development Areas	County leadership should further explore partnerships with Geauga University Hospitals at the expanding County office campus to energize the current footprint into a "health care hub" which will be further enhanced by the future relocation of County offices to this location.
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This one area that may deserve a further look. We have not done enough in the county to look at JEDDS, but they come with a dark side so we need to be careful. JEDDs often include an unelected beauracacy that is easy to loose control of.

Intergovernmental Cooperation	Economic development opportunities exist along major corridors in unincorporated areas beyond municipal boundaries. In such cases potential for a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) between municipalities and bordering Townships should be explored such as the agreement between Bainbridge Township and the City of Aurora and the agreement being finalized between the Village of Burton and Burton Township.
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More information is needed to enable an intelligent discussion of this recommendation.

Innovative Financing	The County should explore innovative financing mechanisms for strategic infrastructure investments such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) which leverages future increases in property values to finance catalytic infrastructure projects. The County's certified federal Opportunity Zone in Middlefield Township should be promoted to encourage the private investment of capital gains into qualified real estate projects and businesses.
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Not really a component of a county plan. While the statement is true. It has little bearing on the planning commission. Our consultant is stretching.

Marketing & Promotion	The County should update and modernize its website as part of a branding effort. A consolidated resource for available properties and supporting infrastructure should be made available to site selectors in the form of an interactive map.
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This is another big city urban perspective. It encourages development of large industry to help pay for schools. This contradicts the recommendation to keep Geauga Rural. Points to a lack of understanding of rural communities.

Public Schools	The County and local governments should collaborate with local school districts to ensure that future development results in positive fiscal impacts to the schools which are funded through property tax revenue and, in the case of Berkshire Township, income tax revenue. In particular, commercial/industrial properties are highly desirable from a school district standpoint as they increase the property/income tax base without increasing the student population.
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The county has not authority or responsibility to do this recommendation. This is NOT part of governments job. There are other organizations that are responsible for this kind of focus. It is another big government do everything for everyone type of mentality.

Higher Education	The County should build upon established partnerships with Kent State University Geauga Campus such as the nursing internship program which serves as a workforce pipeline for many healthcare organizations throughout the region and encourages future generations to work and live in the County.
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The county has no involvement and no authority regarding parks. There is a separate park board established under the Ohio Revised Code. For the county to stick its nose into the Parks business would cross political boundaries and not be conducive to good government. Another example of Big Government mentality.

Parks & Recreation	Geauga County has a tremendous number of public parks, nature preserves, and wildlife areas. Efforts should be made to expand recreational opportunities and public access to these properties, with an emphasis on enhancing trail access.
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