

A Zoning Odyssey: The Quest for Initial Zoning in Pitt County

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For most planners, zoning is a given. They arrive on the scene to administer a set of accepted regulations. In Pitt County, North Carolina, there are no such regulations. This article will describe a trail-blazing effort to develop and adopt Pitt County's first zoning ordinance. While it was a frustrating undertaking, and the Board of County Commissioners eventually chose not to adopt zoning, this five-year effort was not without value. Planning staff produced a unique county-wide zoning ordinance proposal, which will serve as a foundation for future zoning discussion, and along the way staff learned several important planning lessons. Hopefully, our experience will serve to guide other planners who face the challenge of similar ground-breaking initiatives.

The Setting

As a regional center of higher education, medicine, and industry, Pitt County is often viewed as the most progressive county in eastern North Carolina. It is one of the state's most populated and fastest-growing counties without zoning. Historically, the county has been an important agricultural center in North Carolina's coastal plain, famous as the world's number-one producer of flue-cured tobacco. Over the past few decades, however, a more diverse economy has developed with the continued growth

and emergence of East Carolina University, Pitt County Memorial Hospital, the ECU School of Medicine, as well as service, manufacturing, and pharmaceutical industries.

This county of 116,000 people comprises ten incorporated communities ranging from 100 to 50,000 in population. The largest city, Greenville, is located in the center of the county on the banks of the Tar River, the most prominent physical feature. Almost all municipalities have adopted zoning regulations, and eight exercise their planning and zoning powers one mile beyond their corporate limits. Over 500 square miles of the county remain unzoned, however, with nearly 50,000 people residing in the unincorporated area.

Single-family developments and manufactured home parks are the prevailing nonagricultural land uses, although scattered throughout Pitt County's planning area are many nonresidential land uses, such as auto repair shops, junkyards, and sand and gravel operations. Since the provision of sewer service is limited to municipal areas, development in the county is dependent upon septic systems. Due to poor soils and a high water table, the average residential lot is one acre in size, with areas of better soils and improved drainage suitable for one-half-acre lots. Since its formation in 1972, the Planning Board has adopted a number of "stand-alone" ordinances to regulate land subdivision, manufactured home parks, multi-family dwelling developments, billboards, and shooting ranges. In 1990, the Board of County Commissioners adopted the county's first land use plan.

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) set out basic planning goals, including preservation of large tracts of prime agricultural land, protection from incompatible land uses, and conservation of natural resources. In keeping with the prevailing development pattern, the plan steered growth toward municipalities

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Pitt County Zoning Ordinance Timetable

January 1990	County Board of Commissioners adopts the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.
January 1991	Planning Board begins discussion of zoning.
Fall 1991	Public meetings on preliminary zoning ordinance.
March 1992	Planning Board presents draft of zoning ordinance to the Board of County Commissioners; Open House for the public.
May 1993	First public hearing on the ordinance.
August 1993	Formation of POTPZO (Persons Opposed to the Proposed Zoning Ordinance).
October 1993	Arrival of new county manager; new zoning options.
Jan.-Apr. 1994	Planning staff update the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.
Summer-Winter 1994	Staff draft a new, "hybrid" zoning ordinance.
January 1995	County manager approves draft of the hybrid ordinance; Board of County Commissioners approve start of public review.
16 October 1995	Board of County Commissioners rejects finalized zoning ordinance.

and along major highways. Agricultural and low-density uses were recommended for outlying rural areas. To implement the plan's long-range objectives, the Planning Board recommended the development of a county-wide zoning ordinance.

Optimistic Beginnings (January 1991-Summer 1993)

Armed with the CLUP, the Planning Board officially began discussion of zoning in January 1991, and adopted a two-year time line for ordinance preparation. Over the course of the next six months, standard sections of the ordinance were drafted and presented to the board at monthly meetings. A land use inventory was begun, and by midsummer, the first draft of the code contained nine districts: three rural, four residential, one commercial, and one industrial. By late Spring 1992, Planning staff had completed background mapping of existing land uses, flood hazard areas, prime agricultural soils, and soil suitability. This information, along with the CLUP, was used to map proposed zoning districts. Throughout the summer, remaining sections of the draft text were generated for review.

Based heavily on existing regulations, the draft

ordinance defined the following zoning districts and their lot-size requirements: Rural and Residential districts included Resource Conservation (5 acres), Rural Residential (2 acres), Low Density Residential (1 acre), Suburban Residential (25,000 square feet), Manufactured Home Park (25,000 square feet), and Multifamily Residential (25,000 square feet); nonresidential districts included Commercial, Business, and Institutional (25,000 square feet) and Industrial (1 acre). The ordinance also contained watershed protection and airport height overlay districts, and provisions relating to signs, parking, appeals, amendments, conditional uses, and nonconforming situations.

Public Involvement

Even before the ordinance was finished, the Planning Board scheduled a series of five public meetings for the fall of 1991 to share preliminary results. They also published the first of a series of newsletters about the zoning effort. The Planning Board publicized upcoming meetings through all the standard techniques—advertisements in all local newspapers, press releases, direct mailings to identified interest groups, flyers posted at crossroads

stores throughout the county—but, unfortunately, when the first meetings took place in November, citizen response was minimal, and two meetings were actually canceled for lack of interest. In all, about 25 people attended. Although staff expressed frustration with the lack of interest to the county manager and the Board of County Commissioners, they supported the effort to move ahead.

With the draft completed in early 1993, the Planning Board chair and staff met with the Board of County Commissioners to present the draft ordinance and a proposed public involvement schedule. Staff provided a second public newsletter and a summary fact sheet, with the intention that the Board of County Commissioners would either approve the program or redirect Planning staff if they were uncomfortable with any of the recommendations. With little comment, the Board endorsed the ordinance and citizen involvement program.

On a Saturday at the end of March, the Planning Board hosted an all-day open house to present the zoning ordinance and maps. Approximately 75 citizens attended. Only a few participants expressed major concerns, typically of a general, anti-regulation tone. From the list of participants, a special mailing list of interested citizens emerged. It was a positive meeting, and preparations were made for a Planning Board public hearing at the end of May. In the meantime, Planning staff made special presentations to several interest groups. For example, staff invited developers, surveyors, and engineers to an informal discussion with the League of Women Voters. The latter group requested stronger environmental zoning requirements, while the development community called for a weaker ordinance, with a single, half-acre zoning district applied county-wide.

The Target Starts to Move

On May 24, 1993, the Planning Board held the first public hearing on Pitt County's draft zoning ordinance. Over 100 people attended, and about 20 addressed the Board. Criticism focused primarily on the large-lot requirements of the Resource Conservation district. Other comments related to accusations of inaccurate zoning maps, the lack of farmers on the Planning Board, more regulations and the loss of private property rights, and the desire for a referendum on zoning. In response, staff recommended deleting the Resource Conservation district, and replacing it with the Rural Residential district. In effect, all proposed districts were slid out-

ward, significantly weakening the proposal in terms of carrying out comprehensive plan policies. The Planning Board scheduled a second public hearing to collect further comments and illustrate that changes had been made. In what would turn out to be a significant event later in our zoning process, the county manager announced his retirement during this period.

A few days prior to the second hearing, the Board of County Commissioners indicated that a move toward one-acre zoning county-wide would be more acceptable to them. Too late to alter the Planning Board proposal, the hearing was held in late July, with most of the same 100 people attending. At this hearing, the two-acre district in the rural areas was now attacked, with citizens overwhelmingly favoring "one-acre zoning" instead. A number of speakers, however, noted that zoning was needed.

The following month, an opposition group, POTPZO (Persons Opposed to the Proposed Zoning Ordinance), officially launched an effort to stop county zoning. The group's primary argument was that the county needed water and sewer service, libraries, and other infrastructure and services *before* zoning. Their advertisements included biased and misleading information. For instance, they stated that land would have to be rezoned before it could be sold, and that every landowner at the last public hearing had spoken out against zoning.

The Planning Board's First Recommendation

After further review, the Planning Board made some changes and voted six-to-three to certify an ordinance to the commissioners. This version retained only one-acre and half acre residential zoning throughout the county; it was less restrictive than the public had been requesting. Of note, one member voted in opposition because he felt it was too weak and did not seek to carry out adopted plan policies, especially protection of rural character and agricultural conservation. Therefore, in an accompanying motion, the board also recommended that the County Commissioners consider revisiting the land use plan to evaluate its validity.

In September, staff went to the commissioners regarding the schedule for reviewing and adopting the recommended ordinance. Of primary concern was the fate of state-mandated provisions to regulate development in the Tar River watershed. The commissioners said they would not be ready to discuss zoning until a new county manager was selected, and directed staff to extract the watershed overlay

requirements to generate yet another separate ordinance. The Water Supply Watershed Protection Ordinance was adopted just in time to meet the state deadline of January 1, 1994.

A Major Change In Direction (Fall 1993-Spring 1994)

Several Options

In October 1993, a new county manager arrived, replete with a Master's Degree in urban planning and planning experience in several other counties. Without reviewing the situation with Planning staff, he scheduled informal discussions with the commissioners. And although he had previously told us that he would not impose his planning ideas, but instead would lend support to the effort already underway, the manager advised the Board of County Commissioners to move toward an entirely different zoning approach. He suggested a performance-based ordinance similar to that adopted in the county he had just left. This ordinance was selected in lieu of traditional zoning, and was based upon models from Kentucky and Virginia.

The primary feature of this ordinance approach was a single "open use" district, where a few uses were allowed by right, but all others were subject to a rating system and a neighborhood compatibility meeting. If sufficient points were achieved and consensus among adjoining landowners was gained, the proposed use (subject to any agreed-upon requirements) could be established. Significantly, Planning staff had rejected such an ordinance at the beginning of the project on account of the complexity and subjectivity of the point rating systems and the heavy reliance on buffering and landscaping requirements.

The details of this ordinance approach were not identified. Of course, since the commissioners were facing opposition, *anything different* sounded good to them, and most members appeared ready to accept the new proposal. Planning staff, on the other hand, were convinced that adding a few more uses and eliminating the minimum lot size requirement in the rural district or dropping back

to partial county zoning could win public support.

Thus, the manager instructed staff to prepare several proposals for consideration by the Board of County Commissioners. Staff developed the following four options:

1. Partial zoning for only the most rapidly growing areas (North Carolina law allows counties to zone parts of a county provided the initial area encompasses at least 640 acres and 10 separate owners);
2. Revisions to the county-wide recommendation to reduce the minimum lot size to one-half acre;
3. A hybrid ordinance using conventional zoning for developing areas around cities and towns, and an "open-use" zone for the rural remainder; and
4. The "open-use" zone for the entire county.

By the time a joint workshop of the two boards was held in mid-November, the manager had reduced the options to only the two county-wide alternatives. At the meeting, he strongly steered the commissioners toward the "open-use" choice with glib promises like "just about any use will be allowed." Not surprisingly, they embraced the hybrid option as the new direction to pursue. Additionally, the Board of County Commissioners requested that the land use plan be updated before a new zoning ordinance of the selected variety was prepared. The next day's newspaper headline summed up the situation well: "County Back to Square One on Zoning."

At the beginning of December, Planning staff and the manager met to discuss this new directive. The manager instructed staff to work out an aggressive, six-month timetable. It was agreed that two members of the Board of County Commissioners would be appointed as liaisons to the Planning Board to monitor the process and provide input from the legislative level. By year's end, the Planning Board had approved a new work program which would allow for updating the plan and concurrently developing a more "flexible"

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zoning ordinance over the course of the next six months. It was agreed that doing both tasks simultaneously would better illustrate the relationship between planning and zoning.

At the start of 1994, Planning staff worked on the plan update, reviewing all of the adopted goals, objectives, and strategies. Four main elements emerged: County-wide Growth and Development, Land Use Compatibility, Natural Resources and Features, and Community Character. Staff prepared numerous resource maps relating to soil suitability, existing uses, thoroughfares, utilities, flood hazard areas, and demographics. They updated goal statements for each topic and grouped existing objectives under the most appropriate categories. Finally, staff presented a future land use plan map. Overall, this quick effort to revisit the CLUP did not generate any new results; it reconfirmed the overall planning direction contained in the version adopted in 1990.

By April, we were ready to present updated goals and objectives and a future land use plan map to the public right on schedule with our strict timetable. However, one Planning Board member—who happened to be facing opposition in the upcoming May election—pushed to delay the Planning Board’s meeting so he could attend. Even though staff advised that the April Open House was for the Planning Board and should not be deferred, the elected officials voted to have us postpone the public meeting, ignoring our “aggressive” schedule.

Back to Zoning

Nevertheless, we turned our attention back to zoning. As a first step, representatives from two other counties were invited to describe their zoning ordinances. Not coincidentally, the manager had worked in both jurisdictions. One was the county with the performance system where he previously worked. Over the course of the next two months, staff studied the alternatives in detail, trying to blend the traditional and performance approaches into a workable package.

Around this time, the county manager began to admit to staff that he had probably done the zoning effort a “disservice” by overselling the open-use concept. He was now afraid that the Board of County Commissioners had set their sights only on this aspect. By May, he also began to question the wisdom of half-acre zoning in areas of the county with extremely poor soils. He requested special soils maps and information to use in one-on-one discussions with commissioners to try to sway their opinion. We were

not surprised when, after talking to the most liberal member of the board, he gave up on the idea and admitted that we’d better forget larger lot sizes, even in those areas with known constraints.

Confrontation

The Open House for the land use update was finally held for 135 participants during an afternoon and evening in late May. Near the end of what turned out to be a positive event, a few zoning opponents angrily confronted me, with several Planning Board members coming to my defense. Among other things, we were criticized for “not listening to what they wanted” and “not doing as the Board of County Commissioners had directed.” They even blamed us for the size of the prominent newspaper article that had previewed the meeting.

Following the Open House, a letter to the editor from one of the cofounders of POTPZO suggested improper reporting by the newspaper and criticized me for “having an agenda.” He went on to say that his group had not acted improperly at the Open House as was reported, but was simply “asking questions” at the meeting. A week later, the two POTPZO founders appeared before the Board of County Commissioners and called for me to be fired, claiming I had said that they do not pay my salary and that I did not work for the public. Further, they argued that we were not doing what the commissioners had directed.

An outpouring of positive support for the zoning effort—and me—followed this incident. For the first time commissioners expressed support for the Planning staff, while letters to the editor were critical of the opponents’ position and tactics. This incident ended when the County Manager stated in the newspaper that staff was doing what the Board of County Commissioners had requested, and that my job was not in jeopardy.

In Search Of An Acceptable Approach (Summer-Winter 1994)

After hearing the same negative comments repeatedly, staff still favored the partial zoning approach for several reasons. Since citizens in outlying areas said that they did not want or need zoning, what better way to show we were listening and respond to their demands than to leave them unzoned? We also felt that it would be beneficial if we gained zoning administration experience in localities that were more supportive of the idea of

land use regulations before tackling areas with known opposition. Nonetheless, the manager continued to press for his version of county-wide zoning.

Determining the best way to proceed occupied our time for most of the summer of 1994. We spent several months shuttling draft language between the planning department and the manager's office, trying to craft the "right" zoning approach for the rural portions of the county. We produced two versions which did not satisfy the manager since they did not include compatibility meetings and a rating system as used in the type of performance ordinance he favored. Finally, staff took the open use process and started to modify it to make a better fit with our situation. We also set about trying to develop a scoring system. When we informed the manager of our direction, he said that we were on a 500-mile detour that we probably shouldn't have taken. Rather than back away gracefully, we were forced to find a way to make his idea work since the commissioners were committed to it.

At last, staff produced a third recommendation for zoning the rural areas of Pitt County, which included a great deal of the open use technique, except for the point rating system. Three categories of land use were identified in the renamed Rural Open Use (ROU) district: (1) permitted by right, (2) provisional, and (3) conditional. The more intense conditional uses would go directly to the Board of County Commissioners for action at a public hearing. Provisional uses, on the other hand, would undergo an informal compatibility review with the Planning Board, with uses achieving consensus at the meeting subject to Planning Board approval. If consensus were not reached, the proposed use would follow the conditional use track for final disposition. Although he expressed some concerns, the manager agreed that this approach could be presented to the Planning Board for review and discussion.

While the Planning Board's reaction at the September 1994 meeting was rather subdued, the two commissioner liaisons favored the results. One was especially pleased, saying in the newspaper that "They're really on the right track now. They got the rural areas where there aren't any restrictions." Obviously, this was not the kind of rousing accolade we wanted! The next day, however, the manager suggested that we should prepare a "real" rural district with a one-acre minimum lot size requirement for inclusion in the text of the ordinance since the open use district "was not really our first choice." This district, he noted, was not to be mapped, but would

be available upon request if landowners didn't feel that the ROU district would afford sufficient protection. We were astounded. After all of our effort to justify and rationalize the open use direction, he was now suggesting that the way we were headed might not be the best alternative.

For the remainder of 1994, an intense, but low-key, profile was assumed. Activity concentrated on rewriting and presenting various major sections of what became known as the "hybrid" ordinance to the Planning Board. To fully meet the commissioners' directive from a year earlier, the Rural Open Use district was combined with the remaining six traditional zoning districts. Staff developed a new map which represented this proposal, including about 60% of the unincorporated area in the ROU district.

Blending these two approaches into a hybrid ordinance took time, but it allowed the Planning Board members to become more familiar with the details of the code. This was purposefully done in the hope that they would develop stronger ownership of the regulations and be better able to explain and defend the draft when finally presented to the elected officials and citizens. Although no real schedule of completion was being followed (we had previously been instructed to avoid any unveiling prior to the November elections), staff hoped to conclude the drafting process early in 1995 and begin to plan for public presentations.

Presenting the Hybrid Ordinance (Winter-Summer 1995)

In early 1995, staff prepared a revised draft ordinance for presentation to the commissioners. The manager reviewed the draft in January and approved the document. As part of our strategy, the ordinance was to be presented to the Board for general concurrence *before* releasing it for public scrutiny. After its February meeting, the Planning Board extended an invitation for a joint meeting with the elected officials for the following month.

During this time, certain events started to make staff a little nervous about the potential success of the endeavor. One commissioner asked for a map to show how partial county zoning might be enacted for part of his district. The County Manager also mentioned that we should look at a "back-up" strategy for implementing zoning in limited geographic areas. He suggested that townships or fire districts might be considered. A few days later the Board of County Commissioners delayed the invitation to the joint

meeting that had been extended by the Planning Board until mid-April, noting a number of previous meetings had already been scheduled in March and that one board member was still recuperating from surgery. Worse still, the commissioner who was interested in the fall-back position of partial zoning suggested that this extra time would allow the Planning Board to prepare a report on the possibility of zoning only certain areas of the county.

Staff proceeded to finalize the draft language, and prepared a fact sheet, a "script" for the anticipated joint workshop, and final zoning maps. An assessment of the possibility of partial zoning was also prepared for discussion with the Planning Board at the next meeting. The day before the meeting, the manager mentioned that some commissioners were "really ready" for partial zoning. We had come back around to the staff's original recommendation eighteen months later! Interestingly, the Planning Board decided to stand fast with a county-wide approach since this was the charge that had been given by the commissioners over a year earlier.

We finally presented the redrafted ordinance in mid-April of 1995. The Planning Board requested authority to proceed with public review. The Board of County Commissioners overwhelmingly supported the new hybrid proposal. The two Boards agreed to schedule another joint meeting to examine the ordinance in more detail. The only blemish on the evening was that the chairman of the commissioners invited a few known zoning opponents to express their opinions. After the meeting, a couple of commissioners expressed their pleasure with the ordinance, and a newspaper editorial applauded the ordinance direction, concluding by suggesting that the opponents' position was simply not an acceptable one.

At the next joint meeting three weeks later, several commissioners came prepared with questions. Many comments expressed an attitude of opposition to government regulations, although, again, most

board members noted that zoning was needed in the county. One member said he had some major reservations and needed more time to review the draft. Among other things, he questioned procedural issues and approval responsibilities, and wanted to delegate legislative authority to the staff or the Planning Board.

In addition, the Board of County Commissioners chairman asked about the partial zoning option. Planning Board members responded that they did not think partial zoning was the best approach. Finally, after two hours of questioning, the boards discussed meeting again in a week or two. One commissioner suddenly suggested the meeting be held in two months since the budget season was upon them. No one objected, so we were delayed for another 60 days. The Planning Board was discouraged that they could not begin planning for public presentations.

After the two month delay, the two boards met again in yet another discussion session. Planning Board members had developed some strategies to ensure that the program would move ahead. One idea was to vote and certify the ordinance at the meeting, which would eliminate more public meetings and would put the ordinance squarely in the commissioners' laps. After an hour of nonsubstantive questions, the Planning Board reminded the commissioners that all that was being requested was permission to take the proposed ordinance out to the general public for review and comment. Although one commissioner continued to express reservations (he represented the southern portion of the county where most of the zoning opponents lived), even saying that "we shouldn't rush into this," the Board finally agreed to allow the Planning Board to conduct public meetings.

At its regular July meeting, the Planning Board reviewed the commissioners' comments one-by-one and agreed to incorporate some of them into the draft ordinance. They also decided on a series of three public informational meetings near the end of August, aiming to be able to vote on the ordinance in

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September. They agreed to omit another public hearing, noting that they would only receive the same "worn out" comments from those opposed to any regulations. Additionally, the Planning Board would make special presentations to interested groups upon invitation.

Staff got to work organizing the public meetings and preparing a four-page newspaper insert that could describe the draft ordinance. As we got closer to sending the insert to the newspaper for layout and printing, the County Manager began to express concerns about using it. He questioned the cost (about \$2000 to reach 20,000 households) and said that it might look like we were "promoting" zoning too much. Against staff opinion, he nixed the idea. As an alternative, we took the information and prepared another newsletter.

Just days before the first meeting, the opposition group (which had now changed its name to People Against Zoning (PAZ)) sent out a mailing to all property owners of 10 or more acres of land. It contained a "fact" sheet full of misinformation, exaggerations, diversionary statements, and a fill-in-the-blanks form that could be sent to County Commissioners. The county manager now started to talk about doing an informational campaign on cable TV to present accurate zoning information! Obviously, there was no time to mount an effective campaign.

Considering the opposition's efforts, we anticipated the worst at the three informational meetings, but they went very smoothly. A total of 100 people attended. Some arrived with their jaws set and their minds solidly closed, but throughout these meetings we still held out hope that zoning would be supported. As usual, debate focused on the philosophical. Very few comments on the actual provisions in the ordinance or the proposed zoning maps were received. We began to wonder if we had a chance to succeed with zoning this time.

During this stage, however, several commissioners started to publicly express their position on zoning. The common theme was that they personally supported zoning and thought it was needed, but many of their constituents were writing and calling in opposition. We assumed that their political aspirations would outweigh anything else, and would dictate that they would vote against zoning in accordance with "citizens' wishes" rather than follow their own instincts.

A Final Decision (Fall 1995)

More than two years after transmitting its first zoning recommendation, the Planning Board unanimously certified the revised, county-wide zoning ordinance to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration. Prior to the official action, they reviewed and agreed to incorporate a number of minor text changes that were suggested by citizens and special interests during the public information meetings. An accompanying motion recommended that the Board of County Commissioners adopt the changes to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Thus, Pitt County's first zoning ordinance was back in the hands of the elected officials.

Finally, a presentation was scheduled for the Monday, October 16, 1995 meeting of the Board of County Commissioners. The previous week, the county manager advised staff that a major presentation would not be needed and to save it for the Board's public hearing. Over the weekend before the meeting, the *Daily Reflector* ran a series of articles, with one story on Saturday and several on Sunday. Most of the first section of the paper was devoted to the topic. This excellent set of stories laid out the complexity of the issue in an informative, unbiased manner.

With optimism, we appeared before the commissioners to formally present the certified ordinance and update to the land use plan, and asked the Board to schedule a hearing. In a matter of minutes, the commissioners pulled the plug on the first attempt at county-wide zoning in Pitt County. First, the commissioner who had delayed efforts on previous occasions spoke, saying, among other things, that people should be allowed to vote on the issue and that regulations may start out at an acceptable level but soon get out of hand. He concluded by saying that zoning just did not have the support of the general public.

Then, after accepting the report and applauding staff and Planning Board work in producing a "user-friendly" ordinance, another commissioner made the motion not to proceed with a public hearing. He did note, however, that the motion was not intended to preclude the possibility of a future referendum on the issue or areas of the county volunteering for partial zoning. With no further discussion, the commissioners voted six to one not to go forward.

Conclusions and Analysis

After nearly five years of work, we finally had an answer. Given our roller coaster ride of delays and setbacks, we were not at all surprised by the outcome. This Board of County Commissioners had never truly embraced the idea of zoning. Historically the Board had avoided comprehensive land-use regulations for the county favoring instead ad hoc measures. This same attitude prevailed even during our five-year effort. At one point there arose a move to regulate shooting ranges in the county and at another a town requested permission to extend its extraterritorial jurisdiction. The Board could have used either issue to spotlight the value of county-wide zoning, but instead, in both cases, the Board specifically chose to avoid a zoning route. The continual changes of direction were perhaps another symptom of the overall lack of commitment to zoning on the part of the Board of County Commissioners. However, the situation was further confused by the arrival of the new county manager who had a predetermined course of action. We were especially frustrated that two years of conflict and controversy might have been avoided if he had not insisted on having his mark on the outcome.

Nevertheless, we enjoyed a certain amount of success. The whole process raised awareness of planning and zoning in the county. The Planning staff produced an innovative, workable zoning ordinance geared to a county with a mix of rural and suburban development. Finally, there was some comfort in simply knowing that the staff and Planning Board had persevered on this major undertaking. Furthermore, we learned some very important lessons about planning and politics. Here are some observations that might prove useful in other initial efforts:

1. **Establish early consensus on your planning direction.** Devise a way to discuss broad ordinance ideas and issues before writing a complete code. If at all possible, obtain a *real* commitment from elected officials from the beginning. Unfortunately, people tend to hold back true feelings until a lot of effort has been expended in producing a final plan. At that point, many will decide they would like to back up and talk philosophy.
2. **Define responsibility.** On too many occasions, our Board of County Commissioners usurped Planning Board authority. The Planning Board

ought to be able to conduct its work and make its recommendations without having to obtain permission from the elected body at every step of the way. The responsibility and authority of each board should be spelled out and understood before problems develop.

3. **Communicate.** Establish and maintain continuous dialogue between staff, citizens, and elected officials. If you use liaisons—and we would encourage them—make sure they are required to report activities back to their counterparts. Ensure that copies of written comments sent to elected officials from the general public are shared with staff and appointed officials so everyone can be given the benefit of this information.
4. **Engage the public.** Do everything possible to involve, inform, and educate the public. Consider the use of a citizen's committee to get "buy in" from those who might oppose your effort. Use nontraditional means to get the word out. But realize that no matter what you say or do, some people will never agree.
5. **Exploit the Media.** Use the mass media to reach those citizens not actively involved in planning issues. You can be sure that your opposition will.
6. **Respond to criticism.** Find a professional, effective way to publicly respond to criticism, misleading information, or personal attacks. We often wondered if not actively defending ourselves caused other people to think that critics were correct in their accusations.
7. **Capitalize on opportunities.** Be smart and strategic in your approaches to the project. We lost too many chances to convince people of the need for zoning. Of course, if the elected officials had truly been committed to zoning, we might have been able to use one of those situations to our advantage. Furthermore, if a project demonstrates little chance of success at a given point in time, find others to work on while you wait for a precipitating event.
8. **Don't take things personally.** Finally, develop a thick skin, a sense of humor, and a hobby or sport that burns a lot of energy. There's more to life than planning and zoning. 