

February 11, 2015

Who decides? When it comes to planning, is it the people, the politicians, or the bureaucrats?

Karl Peterjohn, 3rd district county commissioner

The Wichita Eagle editorial page is unhappy with the county commission's decision to terminate the county's participation in the federal government's "sustainability planning grant." When this controversial grant was first voted upon by the county in 2010, it was rejected 3-2. This also led the county to withdraw from the Regional Economic Area Partnership (REAP).

In 2011, a new county commission reversed this decision and decided to participate in this joint federal grant from three often controversial national agencies: HUD/EPA/DOT. The Housing and Urban Development has played a key role in federal housing mandates and failed federal urban programs going back to the odious urban renewal era. The federal housing failures led to the 2008 financial crisis.

The Environmental Protection Agency is focused on creating new and complicated federal mandates. These are having a small impact on improving environmental problems but are becoming a new power center for the leftist, statist agenda out of Washington, D.C.

President Eisenhower said, "In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless but planning is indispensable." Ike also said, "A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both."

The key question for a free people who cherish their liberty is the question, who decides? Why is government planning, which up until the New Deal, was largely left to the private sector and local government becoming a federal problem?

I believe that the state government is better than the federal government in trying to project what public needs might appear in the future. I believe that the local government, county or city, is better than the state government. I believe that a great deal of the current "planning," should be left to the people and not the government.

Today, there are over-lapping, and duplicative planning efforts underway. The new 20 year Comprehensive Plan that was presented to Sedgwick County earlier this month is one case. The city of Wichita is also involved in this effort. The members of this planning effort were appointed by the city and county managers and included a couple of elected officials as well as over 20 other private citizens.

A 25 year transportation plan is being work on by the Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WAMPO) for a region that includes all of Sedgwick County as well as Andover, Rose Hill, and Mulvane that covers western Butler and northern Sumner counties.

A third plan was this "sustainability" planning grant that would be followed with an, "implementation," grant. The fact that Sedgwick County has withdrawn from this plan does not guarantee that other cities and counties in this region could not continue to proceed in this process. The sustainability grant has

continued despite the opposition to it from both Butler and Sumner county commissions. I believe the sustainability implementation grant, if it proceeds, would probably supersede the other two plans.

REAP has been closely tied to this controversial "sustainability" grant. I want to repeat my reasons for voting against participating in this grant and REAP. I have voted against participating in this grant every time it has appeared on the county agendas in 2010, 2011, and again this year. I also opposed the doubling of the county's dues for REAP membership. REAP's legislative agenda has been cited as a reason for supporting this organization. I believe that each local government should have their own agenda. I oppose seeing REAP's taxpayer funds from being used for statehouse lobbying.

I firmly believe that local government's role is to provide a firm rule of law where there is a level playing field in it with clear rules for everyone to build their future for themselves and their families. This is the very limited role of government for a free people in a liberty loving society.