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A Response to Dane County

TOWNS WILL MEET CITIZEN NEEDS JUST FINE, THANK YOU

To: Dane County Towns
From: Dane County Towns Association Executive Board
Date: March 18, 2016

Having lost its attempt to stop towns from winning approval of zoning withdrawal legislation, Dane County is now urging towns to reject withdrawal before towns have even seen the details of what will happen. The County's dire warnings are premature at best. In the 21 months before towns will actually withdraw, the DCTA will complete work already underway to create a first-class zoning ordinance and administrative system. We think the County's concern is not really about the quality of decision-making, but rather, to use scare tactics to try to persuade towns not to withdraw, maintaining the County's control over town zoning. Let's look at the facts.

Hundreds of Towns Already Handle Zoning in Wisconsin

Dane County towns certainly can handle zoning. How do we know this? One Dane County town, Westport, already has done so for more than a decade. Hundreds of towns around Wisconsin, including all the towns in Rock County, Brown County, Washington County and Sheboygan County, have done so for decades. Dane County towns are no less capable. In fact, there are considerable resources available to handle the zoning task. The DCTA already is working with professional services consultants to create a zoning program which will be ready for prime time by the time town zoning will take effect, on January 1, 2018.

Why The Propaganda Campaign?

Dane County obviously spent considerable money and effort to put together a polished, lengthy pamphlet telling towns how important it is for towns to continue to have access to the county's resources. The County contends that its staff, records, databases and experience are essential to good zoning decision-making. We don't doubt that these resources are useful. Indeed, we have repeatedly told the County that the DCTA would urge towns to continue to use the County for zoning administration after withdrawal, if the County would agree.

But the County has made it clear: if a town decides to withdraw, the County will cut that town off. This is at best insulting – these resources were financed by the taxpayers, after all. If these resources are so vital to good zoning, what's stopping the County from offering to make those resources available to towns which withdraw?

Only one thing will change after a town withdraws: the town will make the final land use decisions. That's what the County opposes and is trying to prevent. The County hopes that towns

will react quickly, out of fear of change. They hope that towns will decline to declare their zoning independence out of fear.

It is each town's choice what to do. The DCTA worked very hard to give towns that choice. More work is ahead for towns which withdraw. There will be challenges. We do not now have every detail buttoned up, so there is uncertainty. But nothing important is ever gained without those sacrifices. We happen to believe that freedom is worth the price.

In the space below, we answer the rhetorical questions posed in the County's pamphlet. We also refer you to some of the memos we wrote on the legislation, which address these issues in detail. Please attend the DCTA special meeting on March 30, 2016 at the Town of Westport. We will be providing you with an overview of how the town zoning system will be developed and will work. Don't be rushed.

RESPONSES

Please remember the County's memo is asking towns to decide to stay with the County now even though the choice is actually months away and implementation is 21 months away. Towns should keep their options open.

How will towns pay for the cost of planning, zoning, and land division administration?

The taxes and fees which have been going to the County will come to the towns instead. The County has been spending \$900,000 a year. We're confident we can do a better job for that much, and we may be able to spend less.

Will town property tax payers see an increase in taxes?

No, because levy limits won't allow an increase in taxes. Towns will transfer levy from the County to the town, but total taxes will not increase.

Will applicants for zoning permits pay higher fees?

We will be replacing two layers of regulation with one. The fees now being charged are more than sufficient to pay for zoning review.

Can a private sector consultant provide direct customer service on a daily basis, or are services going to be compromised?

The consultant we are working with has a far larger staff than the County zoning department does. Towns will be able to consolidate building inspection with zoning administration. And if service isn't good, towns will have an option they currently don't – find another service provider.

What impact will opting out have on relationships with neighboring towns, cities, and villages?

Towns will be able to negotiate and work with neighboring cities and villages on a more level playing field. The cities and villages won't like that, but they will no longer be able to use the County to hold back the towns. That can't help but give towns better outcomes. You have only to compare the experience of the Town of Bristol with that of the Town of Verona. Bristol, because it had more control over its development than Verona, has been able to hold off its

growing neighbors. Under the County's control, Dane County has lost five of its towns. We can't do worse than that.

What impact will towns opting out have on the county's ability to provide planning and zoning services to towns that remain with county zoning?

That depends on the County. The County has indicated that the County won't provide services to towns which choose to withdraw from zoning. Towns will certainly work with their neighbors, but the towns will manage their own futures. If the County wants to continue the coordination and cooperation, the County needs to accept that Dane County towns now have the choice which other towns in Wisconsin have had for decades.