

Unincorporated areas feeling development pressure

BY JON SAVELLE

For residents of unincorporated parts of King County, an Oct. 25 forum with County Executive Ron Sims provided a kind of relief: He was there to listen, and the residents found that they had a lot of concerns in common.

Like traffic. From Vashon Island to May Valley, the lament was the same. Road congestion is bad and getting worse, with no fix in sight.

Rural areas are feeling the squeeze in many ways. Though they are outside the urban growth boundary established under the state's Growth Management Act, places like May Valley and Four Creeks are still next door to cities.

Residents said they are subject to infrastructure projects that support urban areas, and their roads handle far more vehicles than they were designed for. Yet planning for things like parks, schools, housing and transportation is lacking.

Sims was sympathetic but cautious.

"King County will face incredible pressures over the next several years," he said.

With property tax revenues leveling off and turmoil in the national housing market, the county has forecast a budget reduction in 2009 of \$25 million.

"We are going to have dramatically challenging times," Sims said.

Many of the speakers expressed appreciation to Sims for his leadership, for hearing their concerns and for promoting a culture of service among county employees. Even formerly bitter critics, like Four Creeks Area Council President Rick Spence, had words of praise for the way the county has responded to local concerns.

"I'm really happy, almost to the point of ecstatic, at the changes," Spence said.

Yet, he added that he fears the juggernaut of growth.

"If Four Creeks and May Valley fail as a buffer to development, all of you are in trouble," he told the crowd in Seattle's Fauntleroy neighborhood.

Dick Bonewits, chair of the Greater Maple Valley Area Council, pointed out some of the things residents of all rural areas have in common. Among them: a desire to live where and how they like, a desire for privacy and solitude, and freedom in the use of their land.

In his area, Bonewits said, 90 percent of the residents own their own homes, which is 25 percent higher than the county average.

"More than 70 percent do not want to be annexed to any city," he said. To Sims, he added, "We are generally happy with the services you provide. But there are some we'd like to have less of."

While that got a laugh, Bonewits was serious about the

things he would like to see the county do better. In particular, he said he wants to see a new emphasis on planning and the management of county projects.

"We want a top-level deputy executive, with rural experience, to focus on rural areas," Bonewits said. "To provide bottom-up integrated planning and management."

Changes are coming. Tom Carpenter, a former Boeing engineer who is active in the Four Creeks and Greater Maple Valley area councils, noted a "cosmic event" approach that presents both opportunity and challenge. Two major documents, the county's charter and its comprehensive plan, are, by chance, up for revision and renewal at the same time.

What's more, Carpenter noted that the Growth Management Act is also reaching a milestone.

"We're at the point in the GMA where we can predict where we're going," he said. "This is the last opportunity to make substantive changes to the documents before the end of the 20-year GMA cycle."

The changes need to address the problem of development outpacing transportation, and the problem of rural areas peopled by urban commuters. What's needed is a shared vision, Carpenter said, and the planning to implement it.

"The unincorporated fringe areas are the canaries in the mine," he said.

Citizens invited to planning workshop

Come Nov. 8, Pickering Barn will throb to the sounds of 120 people brainstorming the future of the city's central commercial zone.

Or so it is hoped. City officials are aiming for a repeat of the turnout they got for the first workshop on the issue, held July 30, when business owners, landlords, civic activists and regular folks jammed the barn to share ideas.

The second workshop is set from 6:30-9:30 p.m. at the barn, 1730 10th Ave. N.W. Attendees will conduct a mapping exercise regarding how much growth the

new Central Issaquah Subarea Plan, which would guide development — and redevelopment — in the city's commercial heart for decades to come.

The subarea's territory extends north and south of Interstate 90. On the north, it reaches to Lake Sammamish State Park, and on the south it goes as far as

Northwest Holly Street. The western edge is Newport Way, while on the east, a zigzag boundary separates commercial and residential zones.

Further workshops and council committee meetings will be scheduled to refine ideas, with the goal of producing a final Central Issaquah Plan by the end of 2008.



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