

Defeating Smart Growth in Montana  
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Montanans like to think of themselves as "fiercely independent". I heard it again just this past Monday at an Independence Day party here in Plains, Montana. Why then do we have to aggressively repel repeated attempts to destroy our independence and our property rights by local government officials? You would think these attempts wouldn't stand a chance here in "don't-tell-us-what-to-do" rural Montana.

The reason is there is a deceptive, underhanded program underway from the United Nations down through the Federal government and state governments to force their Agenda 21 down our throats. One of the elements of that agenda is "Smart Growth", designed and implemented by the American Planning Association and their Smart Growth Coalitions in each of the 50 states of the union, and funded by the federal government (HUD).

Montana has its Smart Growth Coalition, headed up by Tim Davis. He likes to brag alongside the Sonoran Institute of the great advances in legislative actions in Montana which supposedly strengthen their Smart Growth initiatives. In reality, the citizens of this state and local governments still can easily resist the destructive programs of planning and zoning, if they want to, have a little backbone, and can resist the lure of "free" grant money.

Let me tell you how we put Smart Growth on ice in Sanders County and in Plains, Montana.

In 2000 a County Planning Board was set up by the County Commissioners. By 2002 the Board had drafted a Growth Policy but it had not yet been adopted. By then also, due to the diligent efforts of several local residents' study of the planning laws of Montana, alarm bells went off and it became clear that the real purpose of the Planning Board was to implement zoning in the County. No one wanted that, not even the liberal contingent, or so they said.

This small group of citizens undertook the process of writing and certifying a "ballot issue" for the 2002 general election. This ballot issue would repeal the resolution that created the Planning Board and would therefore dissolve the Planning Board and kill the Growth Policy. Montana law says a Planning Board is required in order to adopt a Growth Policy. It was an arduous and expensive task but successful, in that the measure passed and the Sanders County Planning Board and its Growth Policy bit the dust.

Round 1 for liberty!

Little known or understood by the citizens of Plains was the effort of the Town Council and the Plains Planning Board during that same time period to adopt a Growth Policy and then a Zoning Ordinance. In fact the Growth Policy was adopted in 2002. During the public hearing portion of the process it was repeatedly stated that the Growth Policy had no teeth; that it was just a document to give others a concept of how we would like to see the community develop. There would be no "regulatory impact". It was adopted with almost no resistance.

Everything was peaceful until the panic call to Montanans for Property Rights (MPR), a local group with a mission befitting its name, from a Plains resident. "Did you know the Plains Town Council has written a zoning ordinance and they intend to get it passed very quickly, and that it

will destroy the value of our land? Can you help stop this?!" The MPR Board got a copy of the draft ordinance, divided it up into sections and assigned those to different members to dissect and comment on. These comments were incorporated into a 7 page letter which was sent to every household in the Plains area. The letter also explained the dangers of Smart Growth and the fallacies of zoning.

What we also discovered was that the University of Montana School of Law had a program set up by one of its professors to help Montana communities implement Smart Growth, and that Plains had contracted with them to write the Plains Growth Policy, and now the Zoning Ordinance for the sum of \$10,000. Plains had received a grant for the \$10,000 to pay U of M. (When directly asked about their involvement with Smart Growth they denied even knowing what Smart Growth was. This was a lie, which we were able to prove with plenty of evidence. For example, the U of M consultant, John Horwich met regularly with Tim Davis, head of the Montana Smart Growth Coalition.)

At the same time as the letter was being drafted, a petition was written and circulated in and around Plains. The petition asked for the withdrawal of the zoning ordinance. Within a matter of a few days approximately one-third of the population of Plains had signed the petition. The battle became a little heated, as evidenced by the fact that 100 of the petition signatures were stolen. Even so, 450 signatures were presented to the Mayor and Town Council, with press cameras rolling. The Mayor said "I don't give a hoot about your petitions - they don't mean a thing to me." MPR said "We'll see about that!"

Due to public pressure and rumblings in the streets, the Planning Board revised the Draft ordinance and did not release the new revision until the day before the required public hearing. At the hearing, immediately MPR called for the meeting to be cancelled on the grounds that inadequate notice had been given of the changes. The Mayor felt forced to cancel the hearing and reschedule it for one month later. A week before the rescheduled hearing, a notice was found in the paper, canceling the hearing indefinitely.

The MPR members watched carefully over the ensuing months to see if anything would come up in the press, and attended all Town Council meetings to make sure nothing would slip under the radar. About 4 months passed until the Chair of the Planning Board read into the record that the zoning ordinance was withdrawn and the services of the U of M consultant team was no longer needed. So far (2011) the zoning ordinance is still dead.

Round 2 for liberty!

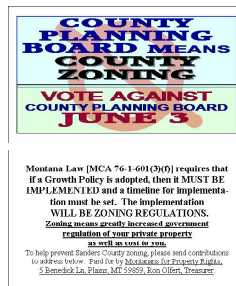
Not learning too much from 2002, the County Commissioners in 2007 decided to try once again to set up a County Planning Board. This time they were taking no chances. They were completely confident it would pass. They created a mail-in ballot measure and scheduled it 6 months in advance, to give themselves plenty of time to campaign and promote their agenda. They held hearings in all communities in the County, collected comments from the meetings, and enlisted the help of the liberal progressive faction to help in their campaign.

The "liberal help" set up a website devoted to informing the public of the virtues of planning, and refused to acknowledge the connection between planning board, growth policy and zoning.

In the meantime MPR initiated a campaign of its own. Large signs showed the connections between the proposed Planning Board and zoning, according to Montana law. They also showed that zoning would cost citizens money, lots of money, besides destroying their property rights.

A debate was scheduled between the proponents and opponents of the Planning Board, to be held just a few days before the ballots were set to be mailed. MPR took the opponent side, of course, and it became obvious who won the debate when at the next Commissioner meeting the mail-in ballot was cancelled. Had it been sent out at that time they knew they would lose, and felt their chances would be better if they prolonged the campaign until the following June primary election, 8 months away.

Those eight months were intense, with both sides campaigning for and against the ballot measure. MPR was very careful to speak the truth - and used materials such as fliers, posters, business cards, refrigerator magnets, booths at fairs and festivals, and an old farm truck with a very large sign which was moved and parked all over the county; the other side continually spewed out lies and misinformation. We educated ourselves in the law, then we educated the public. Truth prevailed. The ballot measure went down in flames.



Round 3 for liberty!

We're not the only Montanans successful in fighting Smart Growth. Ravalli County set a precedent by repealing a Growth Policy that had been adopted and put in place and thereby killing a Zoning Ordinance that had been written and was about to be railroaded into law.

We stay vigilant because we know the big-government forces will be back sooner or later with more attempts to corral us and control us.

If you fight with truth you win.

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