

THE HISTORY OF THE PLANNING PROCESS
IN AN INDIANA COMMUNITY

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to record and analyze the process of planning in a community which is rapidly developing into an urban area but whose residents retain strong agrarian sentiments. It is a study of planning in a predominantly anti-planning, anti-government environment.

I have a very practical reason for researching these questions; I was recently hired by this community to assist in the formulation of its Comprehensive Plan. This Plan is desired by certain elements, but vigorously opposed by many both within government and without.

I need to know what will work in this community. Comprehensive Plans for the area have been written before and have never been adopted.

My secondary purpose is to generate a document for the use of planners and local government officials, so they can learn what has already been tried, what mistakes and what accomplishments have resulted, and so they too can get a grasp on local sentiment.

My primary sources of information have been the Official Minutes of the Monroe County Planning Commission, 1949 to 1988. From these I have been able to get both the facts and a feeling for how the community has reacted to the internal pressures of growth and the external pressures of State and Federal Government requirements.

In addition, I interviewed the current Monroe County Plan Coordinator, the former president of the now-defunct group Citizens for Better Planning, and several outspoken anti-planning residents of the community.

COMMUNITY OF INTEREST:

The community which I examined is Monroe County, Indiana. This County is in the south-central portion of the state, approximately forty miles south of the capital city, Indianapolis.

The section of this report which deals with the early history of the community describes the entire County. The analysis portion includes only those areas which are now in the County Government's planning jurisdiction (which does not include the town of Ellettsville, the City of Bloomington, which is the County Seat, or Bloomington's urban fringe.)

HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY:

The southwestern portion of the County was obtained from the Miami Indians as part of Harrison's Purchase, through the Treaty of Fort Wayne, in 1809. It was surveyed in 1812. The northeastern portion was acquired from the Miamis by the Treaty of St. Mary's, in the fall of 1818, and surveyed in 1819. [Schellie 1963] (The dividing line between the two treaty areas is easily located on the current United States Geological Survey topographical maps; it is labeled "Old Indian Treaty Boundary".)

In 1816, the first settlement in the County was established and two years later, this settlement was formally laid out. The county of Monroe was also formed in this year. [Schellie 1963]

Quarrying, milling and processing limestone were to become the major industries in the area. In 1827, the first quarry of record was opened in northwestern Monroe County, near Stinesville. By the 1850's, after the railroads had arrived in Bloomington and it became possible to ship stone to the large cities of the midwest and the eastern seaboard, the local limestone industry quickly evolved into a national one. [Rooney 1970] Large numbers of men worked in the quarries and the mills, while carving out small farms and homesteads on the ridgetops and bottomlands of the rough, hilly terrain. [Sanders 1985]

There's two things you learn when you go to work in a quarry. You're going to get tired as a dog and filthy as a hog. When you lay down at night you know where every bone and muscle is in your body. It's like farming -outside in any weather, wrestling with dirt. Half the guys here started on farms. Instead of raising corn we're raising stone.

-Carl Anderson, quarry foreman-
[Sanders 1985]

By the turn of the century, hundreds of buildings - mansions, churches, offices and schools- were built across America from Indiana limestone. However, during the 1920's, the golden age of the stone industry climaxed. This was the peak of a period when buildings with intricate details and carvings were in style. [Rooney 1970]

Since that time, concrete, steel, and glass have been the more popular building materials; buildings have the look of reaching for the sky, and the heavy look of a solid limestone building is considered antiquated. [McDonald 1988] Most of the quarries are idle, waiting for a change in taste.

Meanwhile, large numbers of people have moved into the area. In 1950, Monroe County's population was about 50,000. [Indiana State Board of Health 1961] In 1988, the population has been estimated at over 101,000. [U.S. Census Bureau, 1987] Bloomington is a commercial and retail center for surrounding counties. The main campus of Indiana University is located here, as is Lake Monroe, the largest impoundment of water in the State. [Region 10 Planning Commission 1978] There are several State Forests and the Hoosier National Forest within a few minutes drive. In national surveys, Bloomington has recently been rated as the seventh most popular retirement community in the United States, one of the ten most stress-free communities, one of the ten top bicycling communities. In the New York Times magazine "Education Life", Bloomington was rated as one of the "Big 10 of College Towns" because of its "rich mixture of atmospherics and academia". [The Herald Telephone Nov. 11, 1988] In short, Monroe County is a very popular place.

The following chronology begins with the year 1947. In the 130 years between the acquisition of the land from the Miamis and that time, a succession of roads, bridges and schools had been built. Towns, cities, and a major university had been laid out. Obviously, planning was a necessary and early step in this work. It is not this type of planning with which this report is concerned. In 1947, when the State passed legislation allowing communities to set up Plan Commissions, a different type of planning process emerged. In theory at least, community decision-making became less of a back-room business deal process and more of a public input process based on community needs. The history of this public planning process is the focus of this report.

1947 In 1947, the State of Indiana enacted the Advisory Planning Law, which granted local communities the authority to plan and pass development controls and to establish a Plan Commission to guide development within their jurisdictional limits. [State Planning Services Agency 1979]

1949 In 1949, the Monroe County Plan Commission and the Monroe County Board of Zoning Appeals were organized. At the Plan Commission's first meeting, which was held on February 17, 1949, the President of the Commission, John T. Stapleton, who was also the County Surveyor, was asked to "set up a Master Plan for the Plan Commission". [MCPC 1949 to 1974] This Plan was accepted at a Special Meeting one month later, but "only...as a basis for further study". [MCPC 1949 TO 1974] In April of that year, the Plan Commission approved a map, known as the "Recommended map of the Farmers". [MCPC 1949 to 1974] I have not been able to locate this map or anyone who remembers it. From the fact of its existence I surmise that as large landholders in the County, farmers were an active voice in the formulation, or lack thereof, of land use controls. During the same meeting, the Plan Commissioners agreed "to place no restrictions on land usage". [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

The following month, during the May meeting, an ordinance "for the constructive development of all unincorporated areas of Monroe County, Indiana" was adopted. Part of this Ordinance was a "Master Plan map, which shows the recommended land use for the areas existing in the unincorporated areas in this county." [emphasis in original, MCPC 1949 to 1974] This Ordinance primarily addressed the issue of road, bridge, and right of way protection, but also required that "all subdivision platting of any acreage . . . shall be submitted to the County Plan Commission for approval." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In October, the Plan Commission decided not to require building permits, although they had the authority to do so under State Law. (Chapter 228, Indiana Acts 1949) [MCPC 1949 to 1974] In that first year, the Plan Commission made the decisions not to restrict land usage and not to require building permits. In this year a pattern emerged, a pattern of reluctance to engage in planning, of reluctance to accept the responsibilities granted by the State.

1950

Although the Plan Commission had decided not to review building plans, in July of 1950 the State Highway Commission asked the members to review the plans for a service station along State Highway 37 North. The Commission approved the station, noting that its' approval was merely "a formality" for the State Highway Commission. [MCPC 1949 to 1974] This was the first in a series of requests from citizens and from Federal, State and Local Agencies, for the Plan Commission to broaden their responsibilities.

1952

In January of 1952, the City of Bloomington Plan Commission sent a letter to the County Plan Commission stating that "the City wished to go on record as being interested in the County Plan Commission zoning the area around the new lake (Bean Blossom Lake, now known as Lake Lemon)." "After discussion and on motion duly made, seconded, and adopted, the above mentioned letter was tabled and placed on file." [MCPC 1949 to 1974] This is another example of considered and deliberate inaction.

1953

In July of 1953, the Plan Commission authorized a letter to the local newspaper in response to an article which appears to have implied cooperation between the City and County Plan Commissions. It explains that it was written . . .

"to correct an impression that was given your readers in an article . . . It has always been, and still is, the purpose of the County Plan Commission to prevent any limitation through governmental authority that is contrary to the desires and needs of the county residents . . . your 'factual' report quoted members of the City Commission assuring cooperation between the commissions in gaining land-use restrictions in the 'fringe' areas. These statements have misled your readers . . . We, the residents of Monroe County, are proud of our heritage, appreciate the system of free enterprize [sic], and intend to protect the rights of the individual." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

During the same meeting, a member of a civic group asked the Plan Commission to consider zoning a one half mile area around Bean Blossom Lake to protect the area from any "disorderly business, including the sale of intoxicating drinks". At this second request for protection of the lake area, a member was appointed to make a survey of similar situations in other areas. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In October, the Plan Commission was visited by a representative of the State Board of Health, "to discuss sewage, water and other health measures necessary to the safety of home owners and residents in the area of Bean Blossom Lake, and to all users of water from the City of Bloomington water supply." The Board of Commissioners and County Health Officer sat in on the meeting, "as was felt a matter of duty". The State Board of Health expressed reservations about the adequacy of septic systems in the lake area, due to unfavorable soil conditions, and asked if they could furnish the Commission with a form Ordinance for the lake area and/or Monroe County.

The general opinion of the Plan Commissioners was that "enforcement of such an ordinance would be difficult". It seems that, despite pressures from the State Board of Health, the City of Bloomington (for whom this lake was the primary source of drinking water), and a civic group concerned about public safety, the Plan Commission was still waiting -- waiting "to follow the multitude of the population-- at a very safe distance". [S. Fernandes 1988]

"In all, the members of the Commission made no committment as to any definite stand they might take on the above matter." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1954

In January of the following year, a representative of the State of Indiana Highway Commission met with the Plan Commission and encouraged "proper planning and zoning", with talk of a by-pass if the County complied with their request.

In October, the plans and specifications for the University Hotel were laid before the Commission "in order to comply with the law" [MCPC 1949 to 1974] After several such requests for building plan review, the Commission reluctantly started to review large construction projects as a matter of routine.

1956

In May of 1956, the Monroe County Commissioners (who were also the County Board of Health) requested the Plan Commission to inspect and make a report and recommendation "as to the propriety and appropriateness of the operating of the fill of a dump located in a twelve acre area near the intersection of 12th and Monroe streets at the northwest edge of Bloomington. Said request also asked that said area be zoned." The Plan Commission noted that both the fill and the operation of the dump were satisfactory, and recommended that it continue to be used as a fill. [MCPC 1949 to 1974] We now know that much of the fill in the scattered dump sites in the county was not "satisfactory", it was toxic. The Westinghouse Corporation allowed scraphandlers to dispose of polychlorinated biphenol (PCB) contaminated waste as they saw fit.

1958

In October of 1958, a member of the Plan Commission, William Wayne, decided to study the operations of the Plan Commission of Bartholomew County. He "thought it was a good system" and proposed to compile materials for a map showing various business, residential, farm and stone belt areas for the future consideration of the Commission. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]
This is the first time in the public record when a Plan Commissioner took the initiative to do some planning.

1959

During their first meeting of 1959, the Plan Commission studied the draft of a bill, proposed by the State Department of Commerce, for tax relief of farm residents in urbanizing communities. It proposed to tax rural non-farm residents on a different scale than the farmers. It required that a subdivision control ordinance be in effect in a county before the proposals contained in the bill would take effect. A member of the Commission, Ralph Ridge, was asked to study the bill. The Plan Commission's immediate reaction was that "excessive haste in outlining more complete plans for county development is not desirable." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

A week later, a Special Meeting was held, at which time the County Farm Bureau President, Robert Curry, who attended with a delegation, stated that the overall aspects of the bill seemed "highly socialistic in that it would tend to put the entire future of rural agriculture into the hands of too few men." It was also stated that the use of such a bill as this to force planning commissions to be organized would likely result in the organization of figurehead plan commissions that exist for the sole purpose of permitting a tax deferral law to operate, or in poor planning, which would be worse than no planning. The Plan Commission went on record as opposing the bill. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In July, the Commission Secretary pointed out that according to Section 46 of Chapter 174 of the Indiana Acts of 1947, Plan Commissions must hold public hearings for the approval of proposed plats. At that time, subdivision plats were circulated by the subdivider to five or more Commission members for examination at their leisure. [MCPC 1949 to 1974] The Secretary was asked to direct the question to the County Attorney, who was not present. The County Attorney's opinion was that since the Monroe County Plan Commission "is not a full-fledged planning organization according to the requirements set forth in Chapter 174 of the Acts of 1947, and until it meets the other requirements for such a planning commission, its method of disposing of subdivision plots [sic] need not meet those requirements either." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In October, there was more discussion about whether or not the Plan Commission was a legal body. It was stated that the Commission needed a subdivision control ordinance on the books to be a legally-constituted group. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

At this meeting, there was another outburst of citizen appeals to the Commission for action against a different dump. Apparently, the odors of the garbage had precipitated requests that the Commission determine if it had any authority "to require that such places be properly maintained at all times." The Secretary was directed to inquire of several "professional land planning companies", without any commitment, as to what they would charge for such a study.

This was the first time that an outside professional was consulted regarding the Commission's authority and powers. Once again, it appears that the pressure to comply with state law, combined with the desire to respond to the concerns of local citizens, affected the Plan Commissioners gradually, so that eventually they felt they had little choice but to do something.

In November, a letter was written to Kenneth L. Schellie and Associates, a planning consulting firm in Indianapolis, requesting a bid.

1960

During the first meeting of January, 1960, the Plan Commissioners discussed an invitation from the City Plan Commission for the two groups to meet for an informal discussion of their mutual responsibilities. A motion was made and carried, with 6 in favor, one opposed, and one abstention. [MCPC 1949 to 1974] It is notable that even an informal discussion between the City and County was considered suspect enough to vote against.

At this meeting, several citizen requests for road enlargements and provision of sidewalks were heard. Also, a visitor, Ed Skiroin, made a case for fairly uniform regulations in the City and the County for subdividers "so that they will have only one set of standards to meet."

The Plan Commissioners also discussed a bid which had been received from the consulting firm of Metropolitan Planners, Inc.. They proposed a cost of "about \$1000 per township plus \$1000 overall for the county as a whole". [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In April of that year, the Plan Commissioners had a discussion as to whether a public meeting should be held "in order to find out the opinions of as many persons as possible . . . on the need for the Plan Commission to undertake preparation of a comprehensive master plan for Monroe County." Several persons present offered their views on the matter as follows: a member of the League of Women Voters asked that a date be set. The Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce stated that a public hearing was needed, and that the "attitudes of many residents have changed during the past 12 years, and that the growth rate is still going up. If the county government refuses to undertake a planning operation, some higher level of government may step in and take over." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

This theme, that if the County does not take action, a higher level of government will take action for them, is a dominant one in County government. Unfortunately, programs which are initiated as a result of this kind of pressure often lack anyone who is committed to them.

A citizen, Mr. Harold Doerr, pointed out that "homeowners investments must be protected by providing adequate plans for future roadways, utilities, etc. and that land uses of greatly differing natures must not be allowed to develop side by side." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

A member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce expressed the willingness of the JC's to help with any legwork needed to accomplish planning in the area.

After a vote, a public meeting date of May 13, 1960 was set. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In July of that year the Plan Commissioners met with Mr. Schellie, the consultant, to discuss the proposed planning process. Questions were asked of Mr. Schellie on road design specifications, zoning and industrial area needs, costs, and the "effect of land zoning on farmers, who are large land holders." [MCPC 1949 to 1974] The concern for farmers was, and is, ever present. The fact remains that without land use controls, there will be little land left to farm in this community, which never has had much good farmland.

In October, the County Council, which is the fiduciary body of County Government, following the recommendation of the Chamber of Commerce, approved funding for the planning consultants. The Council also asked the Plan Commission Secretary to suggest priorities as to which townships should be studied first. The Secretary prepared the following list.

- 1st : Bloomington and Perry Townships, because of rapid and extensive urbanization.
- 2nd : Clear Creek, Polk and Salt Creek Townships, because of their proximity to the proposed Monroe Reservoir area.
- 3rd : Benton, Richland, and Van Buren Townships.
- 4th : Washington, Bean Blossom and Indian Creek Townships.

Note that the Chamber of Commerce recommended to the Council that they hire a consultant to prepare a Master Plan.

1961

In the meeting of January, 1961, a representative of the Chamber of Commerce stated that he was told by the State Highway Department that their planners "liked to work with planning consultants who were based as close as possible to Indianapolis . . . because of the convenience of communication." The Monroe County Plan Commission apparently based their decision on this piece of advice and hired Schellie Associates, who had their offices in Indianapolis, to prepare a Comprehensive Master Plan.

It is a widespread belief in the County that this plan was never accepted because it was not produced locally. As explained by a local landowner who campaigned against Mr. Schellie's plan, and let his opinions be known to the County Commissioners, "No out-of-towner is going to zone my land". [P. Goodman, 1988]

In April of that year, a member of the Chamber of Commerce reported to the Plan Commission on a meeting which they had with the Army Corps of Engineers about the road system around the Monroe Reservoir. He was questioned about the Chamber's interest in the Plan Commission and replied that the Chamber of Commerce "is interested in any and all aspects of the betterment of the community as a whole, and that it works to improve the possibility that more industries will consider moving to Bloomington". [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In May, a special meeting was held to deal with a number of junkyard complaints, and an ordinance was proposed which would limit the locations of junkyards.

Schellie made a presentation on his procedures and progress on the plan in October of that year. He explained the proposed zoning categories and stated that "Farming is exempt from zoning. The purpose of zoning is to prevent urban sprawl, thus the zoning will normally affect a farm only when it ceases to be a farm and is developed into another use." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In November, the proposed land use maps were presented to the Plan Commission for study. At this time, a representative of the City Plan Commission requested that subdivision requirements be coordinated between the City and the County and stated "that the City Plan Commission would be pleased to have a committee set up to work out details with the County Plan Commission." No action was taken by the County Plan Commission on this request. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1962

In January of 1962, there was extensive discussion of the lack of ground water and the lack of soils that will drain around Lake Monroe. It was suggested that "perhaps we should require community utilities (sewer and water)... around the Lake." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

At the request of several of their members, the Plan Commission decided to start reviewing subdivision plats at their public meetings, and also required that the plats be presented to the County Surveyor to be checked ten days prior to the meeting. [MCPC 1949 to 1974] This was thirteen years after the law requiring this procedure went into effect.

At this meeting, Mr. Schellie was questioned about enforcement techniques and suggested "joint operation of a full time office by both city and county plan commissions." [MCPC 1949 to 1974] The prospect of city/county cooperation is not popular in the county. People in the county seem to have the opinion that they are in the county to avoid over-regulation and they will not let city-type rules spread out to them.

The following month, Schellie informed the Commission that the State Highway Department had established a Division of Urban Highway Planning, but that they seemed "to be willing to go along with county plans, where they exist." He then presented his Thoroughfare Plan. [MCPC 1949 to 1974] Again we have the threat of interference from the State Government if the local government does not act.

In June, the Plan Commissioners decided to request additional appropriations for a Building Commissioner. They also decided to ask the County Assessor to take on the issuance of permits. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

During the September meeting, Schellie presented revisions to the proposed zoning ordinance. The League of Women Voters presented the Plan Commission with a formal resolution which requested that the "Tentative Report, including the proposed Zoning Ordinance and Maps, be transmitted to the Board of County Commissioners...for its consideration." The Plan Commission approved and signed this Resolution. The League of Women Voters has played a very active role in encouraging the Commission to act.

In October, the Plan Commission was presented with a statement from the President of the Bloomington Real Estate Board, stating "that the Board was unanimous in favoring a zoning ordinance and a subdivision ordinance for Monroe County because the only way to develop a community logically and keep values of property steady is to designate certain use patterns." [MCPC 1949 to 1974] This is the beginning of a steady stream of input from realtors into Plan Commission proceedings.

1964

In September of 1964, the Chairman of the Plan Commission presented an alternative plan, entitled "Lake and County Restrictions Plan". There was much discussion of this plan, but no official action taken. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

The following month, a member of the Commission, William Wayne, presented a different alternative plan entitled Zoning Ordinance for Monroe County, Indiana. "A very enthusiastic and lengthy discussion followed . . . Everyone had a very fine attitude. Bill Wayne did a fine job and consented to prepare an index." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In November, by a vote of three to two, the Plan Commission rejected the zoning of the entire County, but voted in favor of zoning the Monroe Reservoir area. They submitted Wayne's Ordinance (also referred to as a Comprehensive Development Report) to the County Commissioners with the request that it be passed "at the earliest date". [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In December the County Attorney, Sylvan Tackitt, informed the Plan Commission that they could appoint a Coordinator and secretary for the new zoning ordinance. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1965

In March of 1965, the Subdivision Ordinance which Schellie developed was approved by the Plan Commission and forwarded to the County Commissioners. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

During that year, the Plan Commission started to meet monthly, hired their own attorney, Tom McDonald, and adopted "Proposed Rules for the Petitioning of the Monroe County Plan Commission". [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1966

In July of 1966, a representative of the Farmers Home Administration approached the Plan Commission about his agency's willingness to provide a federal grant for the purpose of "comprehensive area-wide water and sewer planning" for the County. The Plan Commission took the proposal under study. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1967

In January of 1967, during a Special Meeting of the Plan Commission, the Commissioners were advised by their attorney "that we could be taken to Court, concerning the legality of the Subdivision Ordinance, because of the manner in which it was passed originally." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In June the City Attorney, Jim Cotner, presented the Commission with a petition for zoning jurisdiction over Bloomington's two-mile fringe. He stated that this fringe would not be stationary, but as the City boundary moved out, the two-mile boundary would move also. He also stated that when the County Ordinance is adopted for the entire County (at this point zoning was only for the Lake Monroe area) this two-mile area would go back under the County's jurisdiction. The Plan Commission approved the petition and forwarded it to the County Commissioners for their action. [MCPC 1949 to 1974] The two-mile fringe area has since become a sore point in city/county relations. The county feels that the city "took it" and the county "wants it back".

In July, the Plan Commission accepted the Federal Grant of \$14,000.00 for a Sewer and Water study. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In December, a public hearing was held on the new County Ordinance, which would extend land use controls over the entire County. No record was kept of these proceedings. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

Also in December, the attorney for the Monroe County Airport, Robert Mann, presented an Airport Ordinance and maps to the Plan Commission and asked that these be incorporated in the new Monroe County Zoning Ordinance "for the safety of residents and pilots. The Plan Commission agreed. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

The Plan Commission also voted to recommend approval of the entire county Zoning Ordinance to the County Commissioners. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1968 However, in March of 1968, the County Commissioners stated that they rejected the Zoning Ordinance for the entire County. [Emphasis added, MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1969 In October of 1969, the Plan Commissioners adopted the "Comprehensive Plan for Water and Sewer Facilities" which had been prepared by Sieco, Inc. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1970 In May of 1970, the Plan Commission decided to invite the County Commissioners to their July meeting to "make some decision concerning County-wide zoning and planning." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

During the July meeting, the Commissioners agreed to study any "workable" plan which the Plan Commission would submit within ninety days. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1971 In January of 1971, the County Health Officer, Dr. Borland, read a letter from the State Board of Health which applied to "any subdivision that contains water that flows toward a State Lake". It was notice of the requirement that preliminary plans for the water supply and sewage disposal system for those subdivisions should be submitted to the State Board of Health and the Stream Pollution Control Board for review and consideration. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

Also during this meeting, copies of a proposed new Zoning Ordinance were given to the Commissioners for study. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1972 In April of 1972, the Plan Commission voted to appoint a committee "to work with the City to make an up-to-date comprehensive study of thorough-fare roads, etc." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In September, a member of the Commission, Ray Graham, gave a progress report on what he termed the "City-County Planning Commission". [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

In November, in response to several high-density residential housing petitions around Lake Monroe, the League of Women Voters presented the Commission with a letter stating that "it is premature to consider further development around the Lake until a land use plan is operative...there is an immediate need for an in-depth study of land-use which is compatible with water quality." [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1973

In October of 1973, the Plan Commission was challenged by the Indiana Public Interest Research (InPIRG) for not adhering to State Regulations for surety bonding. The Plan Commission requested technical assistance from InPIRG, which was provided. [MCPC 1949 to 1974]

1974

In January of 1974, there was an organized remonstance from the Sassafras Audobon Society in response to a petition for a very large development around Lake Monroe. This group strongly advocated the need for better protection around the Lake. [MCPC 1949 to 1974] Citizen's Groups had become very active in the Plan Commission meetings, and provided vital technical assistance to the Commission.

The following month, the new Zoning Ordinance was recommended to the County Commissioners and, in April, it was approved. [MCZO 1949 to 1974]

1976

In February of 1976 the Mayor of Bloomington, Frank McCloskey, recommended that the City and County Planning staffs be combined. [MCPC 1976]

1977

In March of 1977, a group known as "Citizens for Better Planning" attended the Plan Commission meeting to express their disagreement with "the controversial changes proposed for the Zoning Ordinance".

Apparently, the discussion was heated, for the Plan Commission requested that "two uniformed law enforcement officers be present to keep order" in future meetings. The Planning Coordinator, Robert Snoddy, resigned. [MCPC 1977]

In July of 1977, the Region 10 Planning Commission, which was composed of Monroe and Owen Counties, published the First Phase of a Comprehensive Plan. The Region 10 Plan Commission had no statutory authority or police power over the actions taken by the governmental entities in the area; it did, however, promote regionalism as providing "the best possible defense against the dangers of excessive state and federal control over a community's affairs." Region 10 made suggestions and provided technical assistance to the pre-existing Planning Bodies within its jurisdiction. [Region 10 Planning Commission 1977]

During the November meeting, a Public Hearing was held on the proposed changes to the Zoning Ordinance. One woman's simple questions seemed to sum up the mood of the group . . .

- (1) How many realtors are on the Commission?
- (2) How many developers?
- (3) Who is going to pay her taxes?

1980

A local newspaper article about the March, 1980 Plan Commission meeting on Zoning Ordinance amendments stated:

"It soon became apparent, however, that as far as the citizens at the meeting were concerned, any county planning ordinance - amended or not- was an affront and an infringement on their rights as property owners."

[The Herald Telephone, no date indicated, See MCZO 1980]

In April, during the Plan Commission meeting, a member of the Commission, John Trott, explained "how the nine [Plan Commission] positions are filled and how to do away with the Monroe County Plan Commission." [Emphasis added, MCPC 1980] Note that this information comes from a member of the Commission, and unwilling member. (Mr. Trott was on the Commission by virtue of his office as County Extension Agent.) This was not the last time that abolishing the Plan Commission was considered as a possible solution to planning problems.

1981

In May of 1981, two planners from the City presented a report on the Transportation and Land Use Study which the City and County had been working on for over two years. The City Planning Director, Tim Mueller, explained that the purpose of having the data available was because the Federal Government had designated Urbanized Areas for the first time. Before a Unit of Government would be eligible for Federal Highway funding, a plan must be certified by the Government. The Governmental Unit, be it City or County, needed to produce a rational future projection of needs in order to meet Federal standards of eligibility. [MCPC 1981]

1982

In December of 1982, the County Commissioners were informed that they were required to adopt a Flood Plain Ordinance by March of 1983, if they wished to maintain the County's eligibility to obtain Flood Insurance. If they failed to do so, the National Flood Insurance Program would discontinue servicing the residents of Monroe County on their Mortgages. [MCPC 1982] This was a controversial ordinance. Some persons felt that it "forced the County to subsidize the insurance companies, who prior to this Ordinance, had to investigate the floodplain areas themselves and pay for any mistakes made." [E. Farkas 1988]

1983

In February of 1983, the Plan Commission considered rezoning the County's landfill area from Agriculture to Industrial, in order to restrict the construction of residences in the landfill's potential expansion area. This was vehemently opposed by the neighborhood, whose members went directly to the County Commissioners. While the Plan Commission was studying the issue, a County Commissioner stated that she "had heard enough opposition already to indicate that the commissioners would veto such a proposed rezone." [MCPC 1983]

The County Commissioners were apparently more susceptible to the pressures of public opinion than the Plan Commissioners, as evidenced by this action and by the Commissioners earlier decision not to pass the Zoning Ordinance.

In May of that year, a member of the Plan Commission, Jeff Carr, brought up "the need to work to work on a Master Plan and conduct public meetings to encourage community input into the Planning Process". He met with some resistance from Commission members who in the past had endured great hostility from the general public at public hearings. [MCPC 1983]

In October, after organized lobbying by the local offices of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) and the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), "agricultural buildings and normal agronomic practices" were exempted from the Zoning Ordinance. [Sunday Herald Times, Oct. 23, 1983]

1984

At the first meeting of 1984, there was heated opposition to the reappointment of the Plan Coordinator; it was angrily argued that "anyone who wields as much power as [the Coordinator] should be publicly elected." [Herald Telephone, Jan 18, 1984]

1986

The Monroe County Zoning Ordinance was declared invalid by a local Court, because of "a flaw in the original legal advertising process". [MCPC 1986]

In April, Public Meetings were held regarding the reenactment of the Zoning Ordinance. Because of the difficulty in making amendments to the Ordinance, the Plan Commission recommended to the County Commissioners that the Zoning Ordinance, with maps, be reenacted in its entirety. [MCPC 1986]

In June, the Plan Commission hired its first professional planner, Susan Fernandes. [MCPC 1986] Ms. Fernandes was hired to prepare a Comprehensive Plan for Monroe County.

CONCLUSION:

As the foregoing review has shown, the history of the planning process in Monroe County has been characterized by reluctance on the part of the Plan Commissioners and the Board of County Commissioners to accept the responsibility to engage in planning. This attitude of reluctance is understandable, to a degree, given the attitudes of many members of the general public. There are many in this community who believe that times will not change; they cling to the vestiges of a lifestyle of rural self-sufficiency and are willing to fight for what they perceive as their property rights.

Because of this vocal, readily-mobilized segment of the population, who believe that planning is a tool of socialism, public planning is either accomplished at an extremely slow, incremental pace or else it fails.

Another problem is intrinsic to the nature of the Plan Commission. When this group has taken a decided action, either after a "push" from a citizen group or a "pull" from a higher level of government, if they are criticized for that action they have historically backed down. I attribute this to the fact that they are a volunteer citizen board. They are not planners and lack confidence in their decisions, in addition to lacking the time and energy to spend at lengthy meetings.

Perhaps the biggest problem can be attributed to the overall structure of the higher levels of County Government. The three County Commissioners are part time and keep no office hours. They spend very little time with their Boards, Commissions, and staffs, yet are subject to pressures from thousands of constituents. Additionally, since there is no one person in charge, there is no one to take personal responsibility for seeing that things are accomplished .

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INTERVIEWS:

- Susan Fernandes, Plan Coordinator, Monroe County Planning Department.
Paul Goodman, private citizen.
- Ed Farkas, Surveyor, Monroe County; former President of Citizens for Better Planning.

