

## **United Growth for Kent County, Inc. Minutes of Coalition Meeting October 16, 2007**

Present: Paul Haan (Chair), Dave Bee, Tom Marine, Nelson Twp. (attended due to interest in farmland preservation), Mary Jane Robinson, Kevin Wisselink, Marsha Wilcox, Cynthia Price, Herb Ranta, Carol Townsend, Bonnie Blackledge, Paula Blumm of Lowell Township, and Elizabeth Gorski of Village of Sparta.

PRESENTATION: It was announced that Kendra Will would not be able to make the scheduled presentation on farmland preservation because her child had an emergency illness.

MINUTES: We read through the minutes. Herb moved, seconded by Marsha, that we approve them, and the motion carried. Cynthia will ask Kendra to send them out to the whole group.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION: Though Kendra had provided copies of her slides, the consensus was that we should wait and reschedule her presentation for November. However, Marsha filled in some information with which she was familiar. She gave a brief history of the Purchase of Development Rights program: United Growth and several United Growth members worked on its development and worked to have it passed by the County, which it was, but there was no money allocated for the purchases. The County is willing to hold the easements, but there is also no staffing to follow up on it. However, there is one staff person who works on finding money, coordinating the Ag Preservation Board, expediting the purchases, etc., and that is Kendra – in addition to her United Growth responsibilities. The program is a partnership with state, Federal and local governments, and foundations such as the Wege Foundation.

Because it was timely, the invitation to an Oct. 29 celebration of the first farms on the Ridge to be preserved prepared by Kendra was passed around. Kent County commissioner Gary Rolls, Congressman Peter Hoekstra, and others will speak.

The recent Land Preservation Committee project is intended to raise awareness about and facilitate such permanent preservation. United Growth for Kent County prepared a white paper a few years ago asking the Kent County Board of Commissioners to put some funding toward PDR, and refuting point by point a task force's reasons why it should not. However, that process bogged down in the advocacy issue since UGKC was still a Michigan State University Extension project at the time. It was decided that a comprehensive education process should take place first, one goal of which would be to increase the commissioners' comfort level that voters support PDR, and that UGKC project has been funded in part by Frey Foundation. We reviewed briefly who might be supportive of PDR funding on the board of commissioners. Carol mentioned that in last week's Urban Prosperity Indicators report, Rich Jelner had a statistic that 86% of Michiganders favor farmland preservation.

Kendra will give the more in-depth presentation next time.

CLEAN KENT COUNTY CAMPAIGN: For those who could not be there, we reported that the small group who met after the Land Use Networking Luncheon had decided to wait until there was a specific request and consider it at that time. A few present had gotten a specific request: Shawn Wessell of WMEAC had asked people to respond to a favorable editorial in the *Grand Rapids Press*, and the e-mail was enclosed in our packets. However, as a whole United Growth did not feel it was close enough to our mission, especially since advocating for the septic system program as it was presented to us would amount to asking Kent County to spend money. There had been a survey of

streams and rivers and the impacts of agricultural and septic system runoff but it had not been correlated to the negative consequences for such things as sportsfishing. Paul suggested that if anyone had thoughts about how to get sportsfishermen involved, they should send them to WMEAC.

We agreed the situation does affect land use and growth patterns, and we talked at length about some of the ways developers are addressing the problem. One example is that a lot of big developments have been required to, or have decided to, incorporate their own treatment facilities. This would seem to be in keeping with Kent County policy. We took no action at this time.

**LAND USE AND CLIMATE CHANGE PRESS CONFERENCE:** At the September meeting, Brad Garmon of Michigan Environmental Council had asked for United Growth participation in a press conference about the connection between automobile dependency and climate change and the need to plan better to reduce auto dependence. Paul Haan took him up on it and issued a Call to Action, which was also included in the packet. We discussed a few avenues to pursue to make that happen, including fees based on number of miles traveled, toll-type roads, changing the funding of mass transit away from gas tax dollars (which is a poor incentive, that is, if people drive less, fewer funds go into mass transit coffers).

**PARKS FOUNDATION:** The City Parks Foundation had been discussed previously, and Paul is still attending. The County gave \$10,000 to get the foundation going. They hope to get \$60,-\$65,000 from the philanthropic community that the \$10,000 will help them leverage.

**GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE:** Bonnie Blackledge is now chair of this committee, and she said she was not sure whether we had ultimately decided on whether United Growth should become a supporting member. There was some confusion about that, based on not being sure exactly what supporting versus full membership meant, so we discussed that it did not mean attending meetings but just keeping informed and indicating we were in agreement with its goals. Cynthia moved, seconded by Kevin, that we become a supporting member, which carried.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:** Paul reported that we had discussed funding to continue salaries, etc., but it was hard for us to talk about because MSU still holds the money and it's difficult to get a handle on it. Carol said that she and Kendra needed to come up with 40% of their salaries locally and wondered if UGKC was able to come up with programs that would include enough time for them. We put off considering this until we could get better reporting on how much money is involved. Some people said that it would be a good idea to have a "signature" fund-raising event.

**LAND PRESERVATION COMMITTEE:** Marsha reported that work is ongoing, and more funding has been received to match Frey's money from the Lowell Community Foundation.

**REVNITALIZING NEIGHBORHOODS COMMITTEE:** This committee is a work in progress. There is a lot of interest in determining what the indicators of positive economic impacts on neighborhoods might be. There is still also activity on the Grand Rapids revised zoning ordinance, and Suzanne Shulz would be the guest at the committee meeting taking place shortly. A communitywide education process is one of the goals of the committee, and this needs to be discussed with Suzanne when the ordinance is passed. There is a lot to it. Herb said he is now on the City of Grand Rapids Planning Commission.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dave Bee announced that the Michigan Association of Planning meeting is this week.

We adjourned at 9:35 for committee meetings.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cynthia Price