

2/10/2010

Metropolitan Planning Commission East County Sector Plan Update, Knoxville/Knox County, TN

Dear Commissioners:

As a citizen and taxpayer of Knoxville/Knox County, I strongly encourage you to reject the East County Sector Plan Update, which focuses on the approval of a Business Park (BP) at the I-40 Midway interchange (Exit 402), in the Feb 11 2010 meeting. As the meeting is being held during business hours, I will not be able to discuss this with you in person. I would like to request that in the future, such meetings be held to accommodate the schedules of those of us who work during business hours.

The following is a bulleted list describing my rationale for this recommendation.

- Undeveloped land, not developed land, is the rarity in Knox County. Midway is the only interstate exit in Knox Co which is undeveloped. It follows from the law of supply and demand that rarity should be valued and preserved. As a taxpayer, I expect both MPC and TDC to consider the environmental consequence of their actions, and it is clear that this BP would negatively impact our environment because of this simple fact.
- Because the proposed park is at the far eastern edge of the county, it promotes sprawl, air pollution, and gas consumption. Workers at the BP will be either forced into long commutes or will buy newly developed residential properties in the area (that do not yet exist). This will dramatically change the rural character of the area, and the self-determination of the locals who wish to keep it that way and promote it *as is*. I note that MPC has recommended no commercial development at this site (gas stations, McD's), which is intended to blunt this criticism. This merely implies that workers will have to commute to surrounding exits for their lunches, and doesn't address the issues of enhanced residential development or sprawl in general.
- I am a geologist by training, having 3 degrees (BS, MS, and PhD) in geology with specialization in subsurface hydrogeology (ie, water flow and contaminant migration). The underlying limestone rocks contain numerous natural fractures and bedding planes, some of which are enlarged due to the influence of infiltrating rainwater. This is referred to as "karst" topography. Typically, the proportion of enlarged cavities is very small and on the order of a few percent of the subsurface media. Because water flow is slow through most of the media, and because of the relatively large size of solution channels, however, these channels conduct water flow (and contaminant movement) very quickly, and contaminant migration from surface to groundwater can be nearly instantaneous in the large channels in karst aquifers. This leads rapidly to contamination of groundwater aquifers once a release has occurred.
 - Thus, I am extremely concerned with the idea that a septic sewage system will be used for waste water and solid waste disposal at the site. Having a relatively "thick" soil profile, as mentioned in various MPC documents, is quite meaningless, because water, contaminants, pharmaceuticals, medical radionuclides, and pathogens (e.g., *E. coli*) will move very quickly through any soil profile present. A mere 48" of soil, for example, has a very short residence

time for contamination given the scale of the proposed system (serving around 2000 people). And unfortunately there is very little doubt that there are solution cavities in the aquifer beneath the soil profile at the site. Consequently there is little doubt that nearby wells, and even not-so-nearby wells, could be contaminated, particularly during large storms where large volumes of water are flushed into the subsurface. There are literally hundreds of scientific papers published over the last 40 years supporting these basic and well-known facts. I know because I have read a good many of them. I will be glad to discuss this further with you at your convenience (and mine), so please don't hesitate to ask if I can be of any assistance to you.

- If the MPC were interested in refuting these significant environmental claims, they could provide a geophysical survey of the area which would elucidate the thickness of the soil profile and the presence (or absence) of any subsurface cavities in the underlying rocks. The fact that MPC has not allayed these concerns suggests that either they do not want to know what really underlies the site, or they are ignorant of the actual consequences of contamination from large-scale septic systems in karst topography. It is notable that there are no such septic systems in the entire state of TN, despite the fact that a good deal of the area around Nashville, for instance, is also cited in karst topography.
- Companies considering (re)locating to this site will not hesitate to consider these facts. No business wants to locate somewhere that is unsustainable, particularly in the current economic climate.
- There is available space in various BP in the county. Thus there is not a clear need for a new one. I note the Development Corporation (TDC) has distributed a "Fact Sheet, Feb 2010" where they acknowledge this fact but obfuscate it by claiming that the Eastbridge BP is 12 miles from the interstate. They do not acknowledge the fact that the road to the Eastbridge BP has been vastly improved and is a 4-lane divided highway. There are no access problems with the Eastbridge Park, or with Forks of the River industrial park. Further, why does a BP need direct interstate access? It's not like traffic going down the interstate will see a factory or warehouse and decide they need to stop and check it out.
- This effort is costing a lot of money and will cost a lot more in the future. This is especially true if Knox Co is suddenly "on the hook" for damages due to groundwater contamination. What if we have to build water supply lines, as was done for the contamination of groundwater in the *Burnett Creek area in South Knoxville? Have we already forgotten the missteps there? As a taxpayer in these hard times, I expect my tax dollars to be used frugally. Right now is NOT the time to add a BP. Companies are NOT hiring new workers and are NOT expanding their enterprises. Rather, our economy is in contraction, and probably will be for the foreseeable future. This contraction is freeing up locations for redevelopment all over the county. Why isn't TDC working to fill those in first?
- TDC bought the property before the zoning was in place to support it. The local citizens do not want this BP in their neighborhood. They demanded that TDC follow the zoning and planning recommendations that were in place within Knox Co and had to go to court to ensure that happened. So, here we are. Rather than admit that TDC is forcing an

unwanted and unneeded BP onto the community, MPC has recommended a change to the Sector Plan to allow the BP. I cannot think of any more underhanded, dishonest, and disingenuous effort. I am ashamed that MPC is supporting this effort. MPC has been responsible for so many good efforts at sustainability. This isn't one of them. Please vote against this change in sector plan.

Sincerely,



Melanie A. Mayes, PhD

*A quick refresher on Burnett Creek contamination, as it is particularly relevant here. Redevelopment of the Coster Shop site liberated large quantities of creosote, lead, and asbestos contaminated materials. A coalition between the City of Knoxville, KCDC, Barge, Waggoner, Sumner & Cannon, Inc. (BWS&C), S&ME, and Burnett Demolition and Salvage was formed, and the result was unregulated disposal of tons of contaminated materials to several residential sites. One of these was a sinkhole in south Knoxville on private property in karst topography. A number of area wells became contaminated shortly thereafter, and a huge investigation and a number of lawsuits ensued. A dye trace in the sinkhole was used to verify if the sinkhole was the source of contamination. Burnett Creek, which is located approximately strike-parallel approximately 1 mile away, was red with dye within 72 hours from the start of dye trace. This indicates how quickly karst systems can convey contamination. Burnett Creek was located very near the Lafollette farm, which had contaminated well water but did not have detectable dye in their well. Dyes were not, however, detected above detection limit in any water supply wells. Contamination of wells typically occurs sporadically during storm events and it is difficult to reproduce exact conditions leading to well contamination. Notably, the original contamination events occurred during the wet season, while the dye trace was in the dry season. Wet season tends to spread contamination rapidly, and different pathways in the subsurface exist during dry season.

One can argue about the extent of culpability of the 5 parties in this coalition, and the lawsuits have long been settled. But the costs and time involved were significant: \$250K for TDEC sampling and tests, \$1 million for water line + 1 year to install it, \$12 mil lawsuit by landowners Reagan, Black, Wheat, \$256 mil class-action lawsuit by 72 citizens affected in Burnett Creek area, and \$800K in cleanup costs. These figures are not fully up to date since various lawsuits have been resolved and I do not know the end cost. Regardless, if the Thorn Grove community's wells become contaminated, Knox Co taxpayers will be on the hook to fight the lawsuits and to pay the settlements.

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Date: 2/10/2010 10:54:16 PM
Subject: MPC Agenda Item #14 - East County Sector Plan

Knox County Metropolitan Planning Commissioners
2010 February 10

Dear MPC Commissioners,

I'm writing in favor of everything in the East County Sector Plan except for the Midway Business Park proposal.

First - a big cheer for a lot of great concepts that are in the plan. The French Broad Conservation Corridor is very forward thinking and something that we've needed for a while. I like the tweaking that was done to the zoning along Asheville Highway. The proposed zoning districts - farm conservation - are great. And it makes sense to do some enlargement of the Forks of the River Industrial Park.

With all that, the only thing I don't like about the plan is this idea of a business park at the Midway Road intersection...

- Has anybody driven out there? It's not near anything!
- What technology company wants to locate 20 minutes from downtown, 30-45 minutes from most of the workforce on the west side of town, and 10-15 minutes from someplace to go to lunch?
- It's sprawl. One of TPO and MPC's missions has been to figure out how to control sprawl. This is sprawl to an extreme - it's several miles away from any other development. We're starting down the same path we went down on the west side - sprawling out along I-40. It's not a very pretty site. I wouldn't be proud of this.
- The long commutes required do not help our air quality and energy conservation efforts. I talked to TPO; they don't have any plans to run a bus, light rail or other line out to this business park.

I also don't understand the argument about a need to enhance development in all areas of the county. Not all areas of the county are equal. If the residents of the East County don't want a business park - they have a right to say that. It's been offered and rejected. If the equal development principle is to be applied, then where's the farmland in downtown Knoxville for me to use in agricultural pursuits? We better get busy knocking down some buildings and clearing some space for that. Perhaps it's time to revisit the

General Plan and that statement in particular.

OK - my apologies for the slap-handed comment above - farm land wouldn't be a good use for the downtown. But I just don't see a business park that's a 20-45 minute drive away from everywhere else as a good fit for some progressive planning. It seems really 1990's. If you want to attract new, higher paying businesses then lets work on development around downtown - some infill development, some stuff around Magnolia Ave, Broadway... that seems to make a lot more sense. As a young technology worker, I'd much rather be working downtown than out in east Knox County. (Although, as a farm owner, I also envy what the residents of East Knox County have and are fighting to preserve).

Again, I extend my thanks to the work of the MPC staff in putting the recommendation together. I know that Jeff and Mike have put a lot of work into trying to balance the request of area residents and area business people.

I just hope you'll side with the residents, who will have to live with the impact of your choice for a long time.

Sincerely,

--Kevin

Kevin P. Murphy
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From: Diette Crockett <dcrockett78@gmail.com>
To: <Mark.donaldson@knoxmpc.org>
Date: 2/11/2010 8:56:31 AM
Subject: MPC vote on Midway Business Park

As a resident of the East Knox Community that has made numerous recommendations to NOT build a business park at Midway due to the many negative things it brings to the community, please vote NO for the Midway Business Park.

Thank you,

Diette Crockett