

MENTATORS

portunity:
Federalism



NEAL PEIRCE

the post-9/11 efforts in Manhattan but such citistate regions as Salt Lake City, Austin and Chicago. Part of the secret is engaging whole communities with such techniques as electronic town meetings. Second are geographic information systems — GIS — that illuminate, as never before, what big or proposed infrastructure systems mean for communities. And third, for local levels, so-called “visualization techniques” that let citizens and businesses see how actual development choices will change their towns and neighborhoods.

If we’re going to spend untold billions on Gulf Coast revival, said Grow and Yaro, why not tap some of the country’s best minds and new tools for democratic decision-making?

Congress’ lead spokesperson for the new approaches is Oregon’s Rep. Earl Blumenauer, who has focused on disaster relief issues for years and visited Indonesia after the tsunami. Though “we’re burning through tens of millions of dollars an hour” on Katrina relief, says Blumenauer, the disaster presents “the closest we’ll ever get to a blank canvass” for truly thoughtful and intelligent planning.

A really open process, tapping the best of both private sector and government talent to forge inventive new approaches, should pass muster with both conservatives and progressives, says

Keeping a community’s vision

Gainesville is way ahead in the community vision game but conflicting technical codes could yet be the downfall.



BILL SPIKOWSKI

Town planning is made up of two distinct functions.

The most visible function is visionary or long-range planning about the future of our communities. The other is the technical function of individual zoning approvals and building permits.

The public is most engaged by the visionary side of town planning: “Where is our community headed and what can we do to improve it?”

Communities that are serious about planning their future take the time to create clear physical visions for entire neighborhoods and districts.

This kind of visionary planning is often controversial, and even exhausting, but the job is not completed when the plan is finally adopted. The ideals defined in a community’s plan must then be carried out, in large part by adjusting the way that government functions.

It’s a sad but not unusual day when a developer who

embraces a community’s vision for itself discovers that the vision cannot be carried out because of conflicting technical rules in that same community’s land development

regulations.

Gainesville has been a leader in breaking the cycle of community plans that never get implemented. The city has adopted special land development regulations to implement community plans for College Park and University Heights and also has adopted special “Traditional City” downtown regulations.

These types of regulation are known as “form-based codes” because they regulate new buildings in order to achieve a specific urban form. Great attention is placed on ensuring that each new building helps create a comfortable “public realm” that includes the streets, front yards and the fronts of buildings.

Other communities around the country are also experimenting with form-based codes and learning how they can be

Town planning

Spikowski will be speaking about form-based codes from 2-4 p.m. Wednesday at the Chamber of Commerce Design Center at 300 E. University Ave.

successfully merged into complex land development regulations.

There are many challenges ahead for the citizens and planners of Gainesville. These form-based codes need to be better integrated into the city’s regulations. Their provisions need to be clear and not conflict with any other regulations.

Buildings that have been constructed since these codes were written need to be compared to the original community plans to see if the codes are doing their jobs.

Once the regulatory framework has been refined, the city will be in a strong position to replicate these examples. Larger portions of Gainesville can then be regulated by codes that carry out great planning rather than stand in its way.

Bill Spikowski is a professional planner based in Fort Myers.