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## Good intentions pave road to zoning hell



**Larry Collins**

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Be Our Guest

With good intentions to preserve local character -- plus cheerleading from the Times-News, zoners and not-in-my-backyarders -- Henderson County is about to make a huge mistake. The zoners will adopt a Land Development Code that will have these perverse effects:

- Anywhere-USA standards will convert our unique county into just another burb.
- Long-discredited techniques will replicate the zoned nightmares many have escaped.
- Farms will be filled with McMansions on one-acre lots.

- Our workforce housing crisis will worsen.
- More than 300 pages of prescriptive rules will stifle innovation and creativity in land planning.

(Visit [www.prairiecrossing.com](http://www.prairiecrossing.com) to see one wonderful place that would be illegal here.)

- One-size-fits-all rules used throughout the county will ignore those place-making factors already in existence.
- Worst of all, citizens will be pitted in endless fights over property rights.

How can I know these things will happen? Simple -- they've happened in every single place where similar rules have been adopted. The zoners produce their studies and "comprehensive plans" that supposedly predict outcomes. All I need to produce is my camera. Why do I use the term "zoners" instead of "planners?" Because planners are supposed to plan things. What have our zoners planned? What's the vision for Edneyville? Etowah? East Flat Rock? Anywhere in Henderson County? If we don't know where we're going, any map (LDC) will do. But wait, the zoners say, we have the Comprehensive Plan -- that's our map. Well, besides experience showing most comprehensive plans aren't worth squat, ours is just another generic document produced by the traveling road show of zoning zealots who've left their trail of destruction across the country. We could have saved money by bringing out a big rubber stamp. So much for the rant. What to do? We could start with an actual plan based upon an actual vision. Such a plan, produced by an actual town planner, would produce different scenarios for widely different areas of the county. Thus, any LDC would need to take these differences into account. None of this one-size-fits-all nonsense. But wait! We need to stop all this rampant development! First, the LDC won't stop or slow down development. Second, there's a better way that won't take long. And yes, it involves a moratorium. Before my developer/builder clients go ballistic, I'm not suggesting another round of mind-numbing listening sessions supervised by politicians and zoners. Ours would be "doing sessions." A real town planner (someone like a Randall Arendt, author of *Rural By Design*), would conduct a one-week, all-day-every-day intensive workshop where you have an opportunity to drop by at your convenience, listen to experts, look at drawings in progress, and provide input. The planner might sketch your ideas. If he disagrees with them, he might illustrate their unintended consequences. Instead of sitting at a "meeting" where you get three minutes to spill your guts in an uncomfortable public setting, you talk with an actual town planner. What a concept! Yes, within one week we can have a plan depicting what things would look like -- instead of a generic comprehensive plan that produces a generic community. Then, instead of someone arguing that signs aren't big enough, we'll have a picture that shows how modest-sized signs will work as well here as in countless other places. Instead of relegating workforce housing to mobile homes and condominiums, we'll visualize compact villages of homes of various sizes and prices. And instead of endless one-acre-lot subdivisions that spoil our rural countryside and our environment, we'll have pictures showing a mixture of intense village development within rolling open countryside. All this in one week, you say? Yes. But allow two months to organize; a month to create final documents, and two months for approvals. To create urgency, we'd limit the moratorium to six months. It would expire whether or not we're finished. Guess what? We'd finish on time. So, six months to catch our breath and decide what we want to be when we grow up. Meanwhile, vested subdivisions

continue to be developed and houses continue to be built. After the first three months of the moratorium, developers will know how to proceed with planning for future communities. Even if the county were inundated with plans the day after the moratorium expired, the plans would begin to implement our vision. I'm not alone in my views. Nearly every nationally-renowned planner rails against conventional zoning -- for reasons that are readily apparent. ***Larry Collins is a planner who has helped plan numerous communities including Straus Park in Brevard and Highland Lake in Flat Rock.***

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