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FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

Planning & Zoning

Local Item: 1954-58 Planning and Zoning

The Fort Collins L. W. V. has had a local agenda item in the field of planning and zoning since 1954. The need for study and action in the field was appreciated as a result of the Know Your Town study which we made during our first year as a League - 1951, and subsequent study of the 1913 City Charter.

In 1953-54 the League assisted in informing the people of the need for a new city charter, which would establish the city manager form of government by charter rather than by ordinance, as had been the case since 1938, and would enlarge the city council to better represent the growing population. A charter convention was approved by the voters, and the League held a series of public meetings to which charter convention delegates, in particular, were invited; where experts discussed the need for long range community planning and other matters needing study before the charter convention.

When the 1954 charter was written, we were gratified that a city planning board was established for the first time. Not long afterward, under Colorado law, a Fort Collins Regional Planning Board was created to plan for the areas outside the city limits where cooperation between city and county officials is so necessary.

In 1955-56 the League began a detailed study of community planning, using the Chamber of Commerce of the United States booklet, "City Planning and Urban Development" (20¢ in quantity) as a reference. Each member had a copy of this publication. Members of the local planning boards, and the professional planning consultant, were invited to discuss their work at a briefing session for discussion leaders, and the professional planner met with each of our four units at least once. At an evening meeting of the general membership, to which husbands were also invited, chairmen of the city, regional, and county planning commissions, members of the city council, and the county commissioners were invited to discuss their problems and progress relative to planning.

A series of tours, open to the public, was jointly sponsored by the League, the local Board of Realtors, and the planning boards, to acquaint people with the need for planning by taking them to see trouble spots that have developed over the years as a result of no planning. City and county officials were particularly invited to go along on these tours.

The following year much the same approach was used, but the study was particularly directed to zoning, as a logical outgrowth of the planning work the year before. We used the Chamber of Commerce of the U. S. "Zoning and Civic Development" leaflet as a guide for unit discussions and again had the cooperation of local planning boards, professional planners, and legislators in our efforts.

This past year our efforts have been concerned with bringing ourselves up to date on recent developments, and with sharing what we have learned with the general public. This is being chiefly accomplished by the publication of a one page flyer "Would You Like to Protect the Value of Your Property - Here's How Planning and Zoning Can Help You", which is being distributed to every property owner within the limits of the city of Fort Collins, and all those in the county outside other municipalities. The League is paying for the printing costs, and the Fort Collins Regional and the Larimer County Planning Commissions are paying for addressing (from the tax assessment rolls) and for postage. (Some extra copies are available.)

We have had good press and radio coverage during the period we have been working on these studies.

Our next year's item continues to be in the planning field, with special emphasis on recreation problems.

We feel great progress has been made in planning the future of our community. The greatest problems, as in most parts of the country, lie in the need for greater patience, understanding and cooperation in the fringe areas where city and county must work together.

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A STORY OF TOWN PLANNING

Planning & Zoning

Yours is a Small Town - It Needs Planning - What can Your League do About it

It is difficult to advise a Local League how to proceed in getting and implementing a Town Plan unless it is known at what point that town now is in this process. Some towns have planning boards which are that in name only or who have as their sole duty the laying out of new roads. Perhaps your town has a planning board, but it is ignored by the politicians who appointed the board or by the citizens who elected the politicians who appointed the board.

If you want to help your town plan its future, the first thing you must do is a review of your "Know Your Town" in order that you may be familiar with Town Law as it relates to the duties and responsibilities of your government agencies through which planning is to be achieved. Planning always steps on some toes. It is imperative, therefore, that the politicians of your town or municipality be made aware that there is sufficient demand and support for a planning program to make it politically wise for them to proceed in the face of opposition which will surely develop.

Our town, which is North Castle in northern Westchester County, New York, had been lucky in many ways. Within the boundaries of the Town lay much wooded property and several bodies of water belonging to the water supply system of the City of New York. North Castle's three unincorporated villages were sufficiently distant from a railroad station to prevent them from being highly attractive to the first wave of commuters who packed up and moved to the country. We have virtually no water or sewage systems for prospective home builders. The population was made up of large estate owners, families of lower and lower middle income, and some commuters - a heterogeneous community which had its sociological advantages, but which was not one likely to demand from its town government modern improvements like a Town Plan under ordinary circumstances.

All of these factors inevitably slowed down the growth of the town, which was a good thing, but made it quite unprepared for the event which finally precipitated a demand for forward-looking control of the development and growth.

This event was the news that one of the large estates in the center of the town was to be bought by a large real estate company specializing in business properties. This company wanted the town to change the zoning on this property from two-acre residential to business. This the Town Board was about to do when a few citizens woke up to the fact that by giving this new zoning to a real estate developer without restrictions as to land use, type of eventual business to be located on the property, responsibility for construction of roads, sewage disposal, source of water, etc., the town was, in fact, giving away a very valuable asset which it had no assurance of reclaiming through taxes or other advantages to the community at large.

This small group of men and women organized into a citizens' committee and began its long and arduous campaign through publicity and petitions to arouse the town's residents to this eventual give-away. The group persisted although it was under almost constant attack from politicians, stand-patters, status quoers and the like. Today it has won that battle and is fighting others, but it is a respected and growing force in the community.

During this crucial time, where was the League of Women Voters of North Castle? Well, we were sweating it out on our recognition standards as a provisional League and then as a new, untried group with full League status but only tentative support from the community. The membership of these two organizations was partially interlocking; some League board members and their husbands were members of the Citizens' Council.

Through the impact of two petitions each displaying the names of as many as one-fourth of the town's citizens and a constant barrage of town-wide mailings and newspaper publicity, the town board was persuaded to turn down the request for change of zoning and in its next town budget \$13,000 was specified to be spent by the planning board over a period of two years to hire a planning consultant.

All this time the League was growing stronger and more sure of itself. This was fortunate because from this point on in North Castle's struggle for planning no other organization could have undertaken to do what now needed doing. To illustrate this, let's digress once more.

North Castle had a planning board and its chairman was also chairman of the Planning Commission of Westchester County - a man who knew the importance of planning and a man with enough personal prestige and wealth to obviate criticism of his motives during these sticky controversies. However, while the Citizens' Council was, in the long run, doing the whole town a big favor by its efforts, tempers ran so high that criticism directed principally at the town board rubbed off on the planning board and that board became not a little hurt and defensive. These men, after all, serve without pay and do not have political ambitions, for the most part, and they didn't like being made to look derelict in their duty. Most of this misunderstanding has been subsequently ironed out, but in the meantime the planning board and the Citizens' Council were at swords' point much of the time.

And here is where the League's role began to emerge.

It soon became apparent to the League Board that the Planning Board might very well end up as a patsy with money to spend on a planner, but with no one in authority interested enough in the findings of a planner to give them substance by transforming them into ordinances and laws. We therefore, decided our job was to cooperate with and assist the Planning Board in every way we could.

One of the fine things accomplished by the pressure of the Citizens' Council was a Citizens' Advisory Council to the Planning Board - a group made up of representatives from all the town's civic groups - which met and consulted with the Planning Board to advise the Board and to acquaint members of these various organizations with just what it was the Planning Board and the official planner were trying to do. The League, of course, had a woman on this Council.

At one of the early meetings of the Advisory Council, we asked the town planner, what we could do to help him that his office could not do better. He replied that a Town Survey would be the very best thing we could do.

Our Local Current Agenda Chairman and her committee went forthwith to the president of a big advertising agency who is a resident here and asked for his help and he put at her disposal his company's director of research. Before long the survey was prepared, mimeographed, and 30 League members and 15 conscientious men in the community were signed up to act as interviewers. Our ad agency benefactor then sent out two young women from his research department to train our 45 volunteers in the art of interviewing and out they went to the villages and back roads.

All of this effort was accompanied by as much publicity as we could squeeze out, not primarily for the kudos it got the League, but because it kept the people around here thinking and eating and sleeping PLANNING.

Once the interviewing was completed, we approached the Citizens' Council and asked them to aid us financially in getting the results of this survey professionally tabulated. This they agreed to do and the resulting information received maximum publicity through newspapers and mailings.

During the many months that the Plan was in preparation, opposition to sections of it and even to the whole philosophy of planning itself developed from this and that quarter. In each instance, the Town Board remained non-committal for the most part and the Planning Board was under fire almost constantly. In addition to appearing at public hearings in support of specific ordinances and in general support of the Planning Board, the League developed a few techniques for constructive thinking vis-a-vis town planning. One was the enclosed story on taxes based on information we got from a planning-minded citizen in a neighboring town. Another was the enclosed STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES. This statement has provided the authorization for many subsequent League statements at public hearings.

During one particularly hectic period when it began to look as though not only the \$13,000 but the whole concept of planning for North Castle would go down the drain, the League Board appointed a committee

of three women to draw up this Statement of Principles. It was mailed to every member of the League of Women Voters of North Castle with an enclosed postcard which she was asked to sign and mail in if she supported this Action Call her League Board was launching. After we had received almost unanimous support, the Statement of Principles was taken in person by a board member in each case to other organizations in the town requesting that they use this or a similar statement to poll their members. Many of the larger organizations complied and were present at the next Town Board meeting to make this support known.

At our annual meeting last spring we had a speaker from the County Planning Commission. Our guests were our town Supervisor, chairman of the Planning Board, a representative of the minority political party, the chairman of the planning's chief opposition group and the heads of all organizations in town represented on the Citizens' Advisory Council to the Planning Board. Each of these organizational heads was the personal guest of a League Board member and we wine and dined them at the best club in town.

Finally this Town Plan was finished and printed and although it may look modest in its demure blue and white cardboard cover, it represents sweat and tears and awfully close to bloodshed.

Is the battle over now? Not by a long shot! Many ordinances have been passed by the Town Board; our zoning has been generally raised; we have an Architectural Board of Review; the property mentioned in the beginning of this essay has been sold to International Business Machine Corporation with many explicit restrictions for its use; we have higher standards for town roads; developers are now required to give land or its equivalent in cash for open space in any residential development. There are many things which have been done, but there are more which must be done. Above all, the intent of the finished Plan must be maintained down through the future.

Our most recent job was to assist the Planning Board in circulating the finished Plan. Many said "No one will look at it when it's finally finished" or "750 copies of that thing? what do you think you're going to do with them?" Well, we sent out postcards to every family in the whole Town asking them to put the card in an envelope and mail it back to our Local Current Agenda Chairman if they wanted a copy of the Plan. The Citizens Council mailed one to each of its members. The Plans have been available at the Town Hall. And right this week, our local Current Agenda committee is wondering where in the world they are going to scrape up enough copies to supply the demand.

It's been a long job and we know it's not over. But North Castle will in future be a planned community. And we think the Town Board, the Planning Board and the whole Town are taking off their hats to us. And what more can a League want?

* * * * *

FOR MORE INFORMATION WRITE:

Mrs. Edwin Lindstrom
[REDACTED]

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

1. We approve of sound town planning within the framework of our existing government; we support the Planning Board in its efforts to achieve this through the proposed Master Plan.*
2. We recognize and approve the progress made by the Town Board during the past three years in upzoning acreage. In general, we do not favor down-zoning in the community.
3. We believe it is essential that the specifications of the zoning ordinances be clearly drawn to implement the Town Plan.
4. We approve of maintaining the rural atmosphere of the Town of North Castle.**
5. We approve well-planned business and non-residential development. We feel such development is essential as a means of balancing the growth of the community.***
6. We believe in a need for open areas for recreation for adults as well as children and that these areas should be planned for while land is still available.
7. We are aware that the process of achieving sound Town Planning will involve changes in some existing laws.****
8. We recognize that it is inherent in the planning and zoning function that a few property owners may be restricted from complete flexibility in exploiting their property values. We think that the rights and desires of individual property owners should be considered, their objections and protests heard, and every effort made to reconcile their individual rights and desires with the requirements of a meaningful overall plan. On the other hand, we feel that it is absolutely imperative that the most practical, workable and desirable plan for the benefit of the entire community and all property owners therein be adopted and put into law, even over the objections of a relatively few property owners. The longer the plan is delayed, we feel, from being enacted into law, the more difficult it may become to make the desired changes.

*In the Town of North Castle, the Town Board has the responsibility for appointing the five members of the Planning Board whose function is to advise the Town Board on the developments of the community.

**Results of the Town Survey showed that 87% of the people in the Town wish to preserve the rural atmosphere of the community when they are asked the question "What would you most like to preserve in the Town of North Castle?"

***In the Town Survey on the question "Do you think there should be non-residential development encouraged in North Castle, provided such development would be separated from residential areas and had no objectionable features?" 63% interviewed answered they wanted office buildings or research laboratories; 17% wanted none.

****Existing businesses would be allowed to continue regardless of the new specifications as non-conforming uses.

HOW TO REDUCE TAXES THROUGH SOUND PLANNING

1. Retard the present rate of growth of the town.
2. Increase the area requirements of the zoning ordinance.
3. Increase minimum floor area requirements of zoning ordinance.
4. Support and strengthen the Planning Board.
5. Strengthen the sub-division requirements.
6. Strengthen road specifications.
7. Enforce strictly the road specifications.
8. Have well-planned developments.
9. Have developers pay all of cost of new developments.
10. Have business property owners provide off-street parking.
11. Provide sound and adequate town engineering.
12. Make public improvements within an overall plan.
13. Adopt an official plan showing proposed streets and highways.
14. Make public improvements only in accordance with a capital budget.
15. Don't subsidize new building through lower assessments.

HERE'S HOW PLANNING AND ZONING CAN HELP YOU

What Planning Is

PLANNING—whether city, regional, or county— is the building of a long range guide for the future orderly development of the area.

Why It Is Necessary

Communities within Larimer County are growing rapidly. Without long range plans, many inefficient and unattractive developments can be expected! Such errors may reduce property values and will be difficult and expensive, if not impossible, to correct.

How It Is Done

1. INFORMATION IS GATHERED about existing conditions which affect future growth.
2. A LONG RANGE PLAN IS PREPARED to show the most desirable pattern for future growth. This plan includes the location and sizes of streets and highways, public utilities, parks, schools, and other community facilities. All citizens thus have a responsibility as well as an opportunity to let the planning boards know how they would like to see their areas planned.
3. LEGISLATION MAY BE PASSED to effectuate the plan:
 - ZONING—protects property values by controlling use, density of development, off-street parking, etc.
 - BUILDING CODES—provide for improved safety, by specifying proper types of building construction.
 - SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS—establish the pattern of development for new residential areas by setting standards for the design of streets, blocks, and utilities.
 - HOUSING CODES—designate minimum requirements for healthful living.

Who Does It

PLANNING BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS are appointed by city councils and by county commissioners. Their job is to make recommendations to these legislators on all planning matters. They meet once or twice a month, and their members serve without pay. The Larimer County Planning Commission studies all areas of the County which are outside the municipalities. City Boards in Fort Collins, Loveland, and Estes Park consider planning matters inside their incorporated limits. Regional Commissions are concerned with planning the larger territories which compose the trade areas around these major cities.

PROFESSIONAL PLANNERS may be hired by the County and the cities to gather basic information, and to prepare reports which are submitted to the appropriate boards, who make their own recommendations, and refer them to the legislators for action.

CITY COUNCILS AND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS have the only authority to make the various codes and regulations into law.

All of these people must work together, particularly in the fringe areas beyond municipal boundaries, if we are to succeed.

Who Pays For It

We all do. A small part of our tax dollar is now being invested in planning the future of our communities.

Adequate planning offers us such dividends as:

- Improved land values,
 - Streets and highways adequate to handle future traffic,
 - Enough schools and parks, in the right places,
 - Water, storm, and sanitary sewers, designed for future developments, and
 - Satisfaction that our community is a good place to live.
- Inadequate planning costs us losses in business and property values.

What We Can Do About It

1. Find out more about the advantages of planning or "looking ahead" now.
2. Tell our neighbors the advantages of long range planning.
3. Let the planning boards know how we would like to see our areas develop.
4. Tell city officials and the county commissioners that we think good planning is good business.

This information on planning and zoning has been prepared as a public service by the Fort Collins League of Women Voters, a non-partisan organization interested in better citizen understanding of government.

If you would like to learn more about planning in Larimer County, or if you would like to have someone discuss the subject further at a meeting of a special organization, call the Fort Collins League of Women Voters, HUnter 2-5468.



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Fort Collins, Colorado
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WOULD
YOU
LIKE TO PROTECT THE VALUE OF YOUR PROPERTY ?