



Economic development 101: Infrastructure encourages smart economic growth

May 05, 2008 - Spotlights

Like blood vessels and muscles for people, roads, bridges, airports and utilities are the support system for our business community. Historically, economic growth has occurred along corridors where sufficient infrastructure is either in place or well into the planning stage.

Unfortunately, many of our residents think that investing in infrastructure will reduce the quality of life in Orange County. For example, some might suggest that upgraded roads, sewers, and utilities will lead to an uncontrolled influx of people, resulting in congestion, overcrowding of schools, and other problems. The fact is that nothing could be farther from the truth... if we adopt a regional approach to infrastructure planning

In fact, by proactively building infrastructure along a planned growth corridor, a municipality can direct balanced growth appropriately and not be reactive to growth, which is often the cause of sprawl. In order to achieve a balanced quality of life in any community, infrastructure must first be put in place that will support it.

We must advocate for smart growth around our roads, water and sewer lines, and electric and gas utilities. Economic development trends throughout the entire region suggest that growth is coming to our area whether we like it or not. Instead of futilely fighting this, we should embrace it as a means to promote positive changes in Orange County: more jobs, better schools, and a better quality of life in general. The key to making this work is cooperation among our communities.

In Orange County, we have an exceptional state, federal and local highway infrastructure, two utility companies and water and sewer systems which are owned by the county and individual municipalities. The county sewage treatment plant located in Harriman serves eight communities and is now a sound example of cooperation and cost efficiency. Ed Diana, county executive, wholeheartedly supports the need for cooperation between parties, which is one reason inter-municipal agreements like the one in Harriman work.

Here is a prime example of how effective such cooperation can be. The Town of Newburgh did not want to invest in building a new sewage treatment plant, so the City of Newburgh expanded its existing plant to accommodate a greater capacity. The town paid for the expansions to the city plant, satisfying its needs without the enormous expense of time, environmental studies, consultants and financial outlay. This is a good example of inter-municipal cooperation and everyone benefited. The environment benefits from such cooperation, too; one efficient system is better than a number of smaller plants spread throughout the region.

Orange County's three cities are, for the most part, built out. If the cities enter into intermunicipal agreements with the neighboring towns on infrastructure like water and sewer lines, it's a win-win for everyone. It provides revenue for each city and opportunity for the surrounding towns. As an example, Middletown and the Town of Wallkill could be working on developing infrastructure on

County Route 78.

This kind of planning takes vision and cooperation. Every year over the last 50 years, we have seen a one-two percent growth rate in population. That's not going to change. So let's make sure that we plan for it appropriately. Let's work together to invest in infrastructure that will encourage smart economic growth. Let's keep our residents here, building rewarding lives in Orange County.

The Alliance for Balanced Growth is an organization that strives to be a positive voice for quality commercial development, and the creation of sustainable communities here in Orange County.

Jerry Bergman is a senior project manager in the Goshen office of Clough Harbour & Associates and a member of the Alliance for Balanced Growth.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540