

Coordination and Neighboring Counties

Are any of Woodford's neighbors talking about regional coordination? More importantly, are they doing anything about it?

Woodford County, over the last 10 years, has assumed a leadership position in community planning. No other community in the Local Region has pushed itself to move farther ahead with visionary, necessary planning. This fact cannot be overstated: Woodford County is **the** region's planning leader. The *Preserving Town and Country* program is a good alternative template available to other communities in the region upon which to model their planning efforts. However, like our neighbors the Woodford template lacks a fully developed perspective on regional coordination. In order to develop this perspective and address the topic of regional coordination we will review and evaluate the plans of neighboring communities.

Comprehensive Plans...An Inventory

All the counties that border Woodford have planning commissions and comprehensive plans. These plans have all been created on a similar template and as such they share similar language. For example, all the plans place primary emphasis on the importance of preserving the unique character of the individual community.

The language employed to frame goal and objective statements is also very similar from county to county. An initial review of these goal and objective statements reveals consensus on several items of regional importance:

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Environment: All comprehensive plans stress the importance of protecting the environment, including specific areas such as the South Elkhorn Creek and the Kentucky River.

Agriculture: Most plans have strong goals and/or objectives regarding the importance of growing the community's agricultural economy and preserving the best farmlands.

Only Lexington, however, puts forth a strongly worded goal concerning the importance of the Thoroughbred industry to the community. This is a serious oversight in Scott, Jessamine, and Bourbon Counties in that they comprise 3 of the top 6 Thoroughbred producing counties in the nation.

(Madison County, which contains the lowest levels of prime farmland in the metro region, also makes little mention of the importance of promoting or preserving agriculture lands).

Recreation: Each county has adopted goals that state the importance of recreation facilities. Many discuss the importance of providing larger facilities, which often times is outside the financial capacity of an individual community.

No plan has a goal relating to regional coordination of recreation planning or creation of facilities. This often causes serious conflicts, such as the recent proposal for the large marina on the Kentucky River that was proposed independently of any regional consensus.

Tourism: Most plans acknowledge the importance of tourism to the individual community, yet most are vague as to what tourism strategy they are promoting. (Scott County appears to be a significant exception, although it could be that tourism will be promoted generally by the community's efforts in implementing the comprehensive plan). There is no region-wide effort to "brand" our touristic identity in ways similar to what has occurred in Napa Valley, the Berkshires, the Cotswolds, or even Tuscany.

Cultural/Historic Resources: Each plan in the region has a section on the preservation and promotion of cultural and historic resources. Yet, as should be apparent by now from review of other sections, there is no uniformity from community to community about which structures and lands should be preserved and how and to what purpose.

Redevelopment: The importance of this category is that success in directing growth to urban areas will prevent further outward development at the fringes of towns as well as into the rural areas. Most plans have adopted goals to encourage this type of development.

Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2

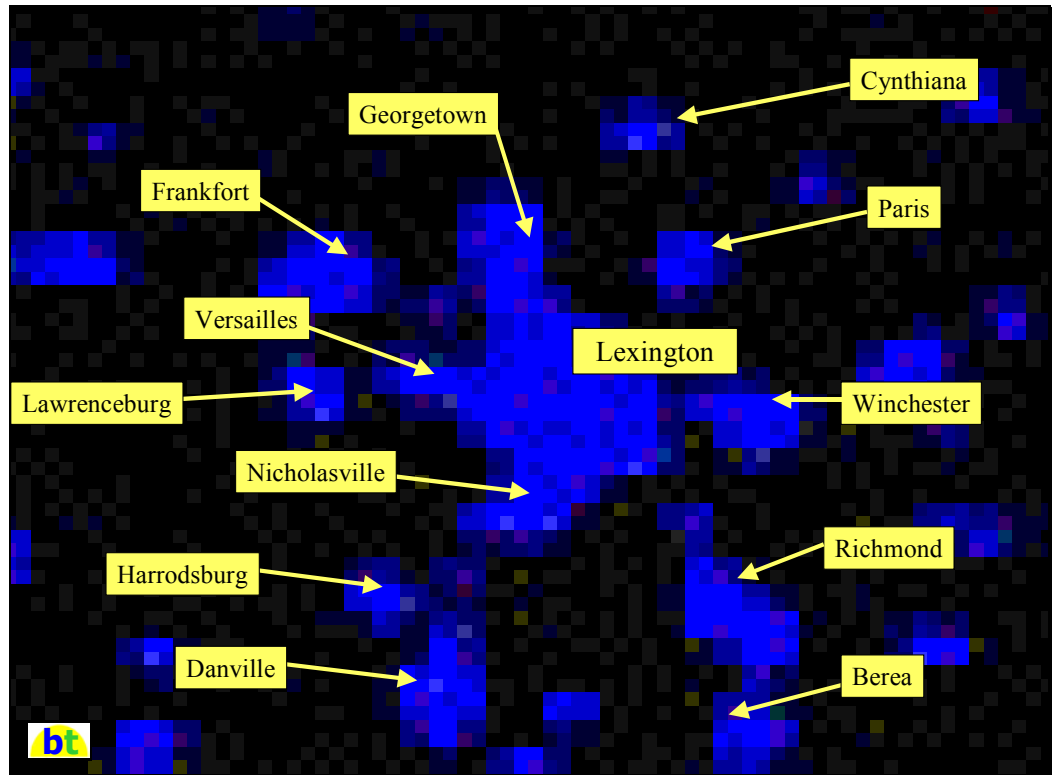
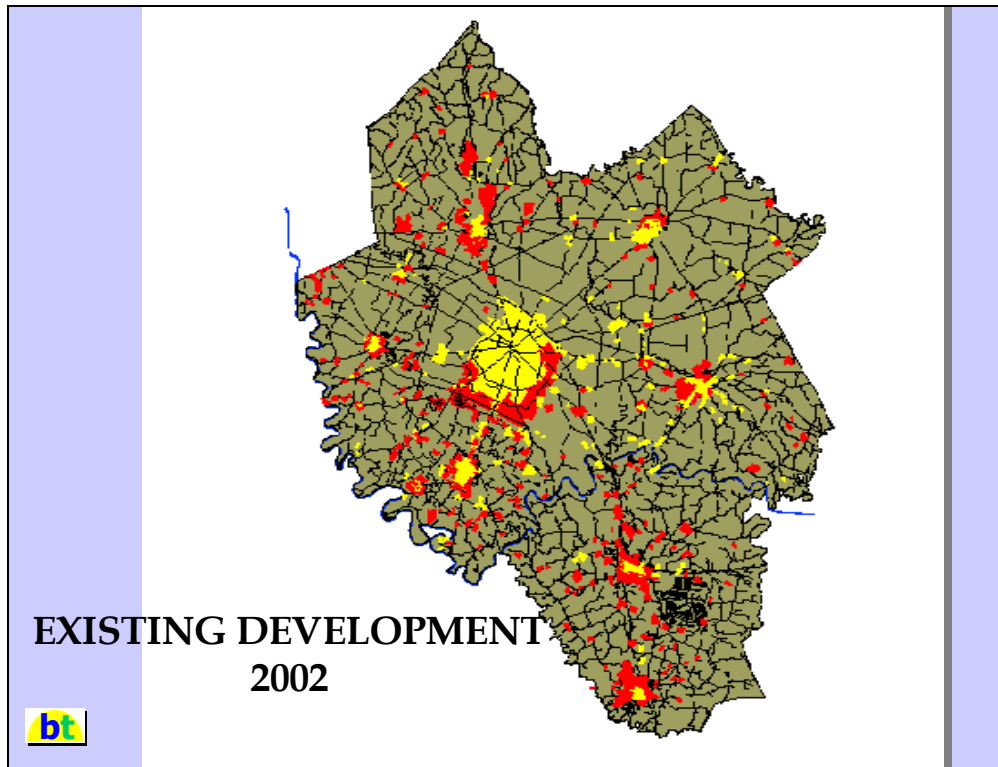


Figure 2.3



Harrodsburg presents a significant exception. The capacity and disrepair of sewer lines within the core of the city severely limit the ability of the community to direct or encourage urban growth to the established core. The result of this is that as population increases in Mercer County, more and more people will find housing outside of the established core¹, most likely in rural areas of the county. This could further the process of transforming the character of Mercer County from predominately rural to predominately suburban.

Urban Land Use: Central Kentucky is greatly distinguished in planning circles in that most of the cities - in the Metro area at least - have urban growth boundaries – outside of which no substantial urban development may be permitted. Lexington’s was the first urban growth boundary in the nation. The Metro communities with other urban growth boundaries include:

¹ Legacy Plan: A Vision for the Future of Mercer County, University of Kentucky Department of Landscape Architecture, 2002

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Georgetown, Midway, Paris, Winchester, Wilmore, Nicholasville, Versailles

Metro and regional cities without growth boundaries include:

Cynthiana, Lancaster, Lawrenceburg, Harrodsburg, Frankfort, Richmond, Berea

While the Kentucky River provides a buffer to encroaching urban growth from the west, the lack of a strong urban boundary in Frankfort should be of great concern to Woodford Countians.

Rural Land Use: Perhaps the largest disparity in planning philosophy throughout the region is in rural land regulation. Each county has a different regulatory system in place. For example, Franklin County allows 1.5 acre tracts if they can be served with water and sewer. Scott County allows 5-acre tracts anywhere in the County. Mercer County is considering reducing the minimum lot size from five acres to two and one-half acres.

Housing Affordability: Many communities across the country have made dedicated efforts to subtly reject “undesirable” citizens through their housing and zoning policies. This has an undesirable social effect because areas of poverty are often concentrated. This also has an adverse economic impact on an overall region in that a large segment of workers become harder to come by in a given area because they have been forced out, or never included, and cannot easily reach jobs due to a lack of transportation.

Each community in the region has goals that encourage the creation of adequate levels of affordable housing. Further research is necessary to determine if any community is “dumping” lower income residents.

While there appear to be no visible efforts at housing discrimination, community desirability and planning policies have made certain communities unaffordable for much of the working population. Median home values vary dramatically across the region. For example, in 2000, the median home value in Woodford County was \$117,100², which was the highest in the region. Across the Kentucky River in Anderson County, the median value was \$83,800³.

Infrastructure: The strongest regional tie that exists in the Bluegrass is the water system. Currently all the communities in the counties that surround Woodford and all but two in the Lexington Metro gain their water from the Kentucky River. Since

² 2000 U.S. Census

³ Ibid

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1990, the region has grown by nearly 75,000 people without one new ounce of water being added to the system⁴.

Only Lexington's comprehensive plan tackles the important issue of ensuring adequate regional water supply squarely. No other community's plan states more than that water supply should be ensured and quality protected.

Economic Development: Each community's plan puts forth a self-reliant posture regarding economic growth. No plan mentions the importance of pooling resources, sharing ideas, or building a regional economic growth coalition. (Only Lexington's plan mentions the importance of attracting capital to the larger region)

Many plans place great emphasis on commercial – shopping center - growth as economic development. In its current forms, this may mean more large, single-use commercial areas on the region's arterial roads and in locations outside of Fayette County.

Transportation Planning: Most plans stress the need for multi-modal transportation planning. But the plans are community-centered, and none envisions a regional transportation system of any sort.

Regional Planning: As obviously similar on the surface as these plans are, a reader perhaps could come to the conclusion that regional planning is a favored concept. This is not the case. **Only one plan (Lexington's) does more than mention regional planning or coordination in passing and most do not mention it at all.**

Lexington's planning goal states: *"Promote regional planning and coordination throughout the Bluegrass."*

⁴ Bluegrass Area Development District, Bluegrass Water Consortium

Figure 2.4

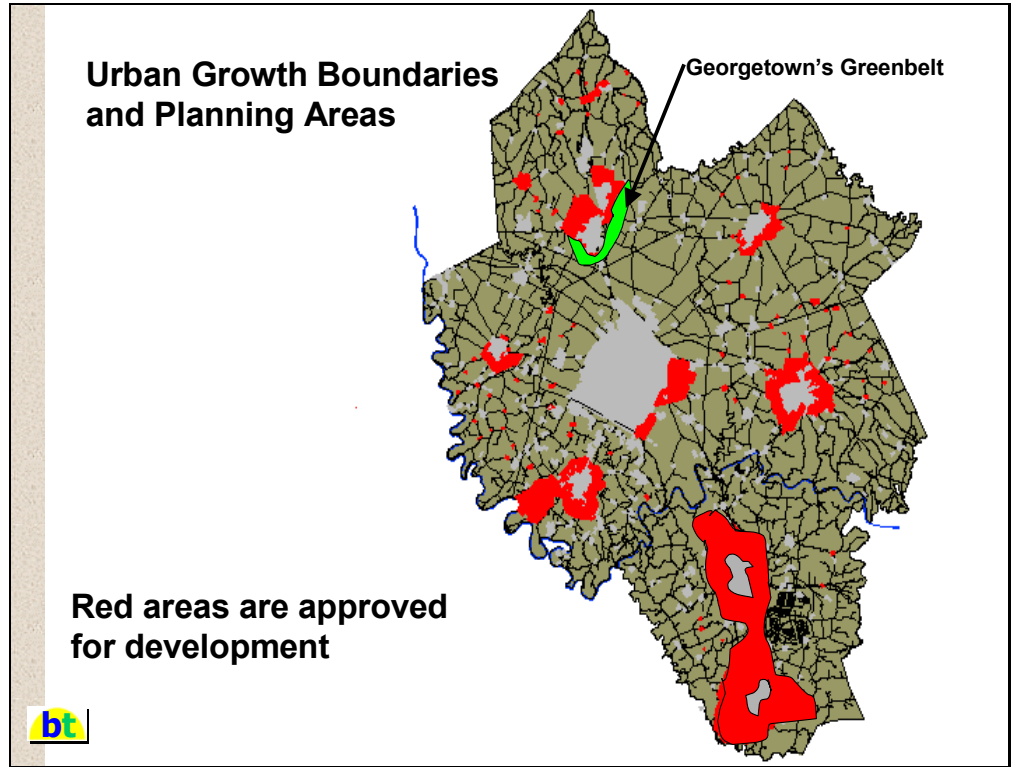


Figure 2.5

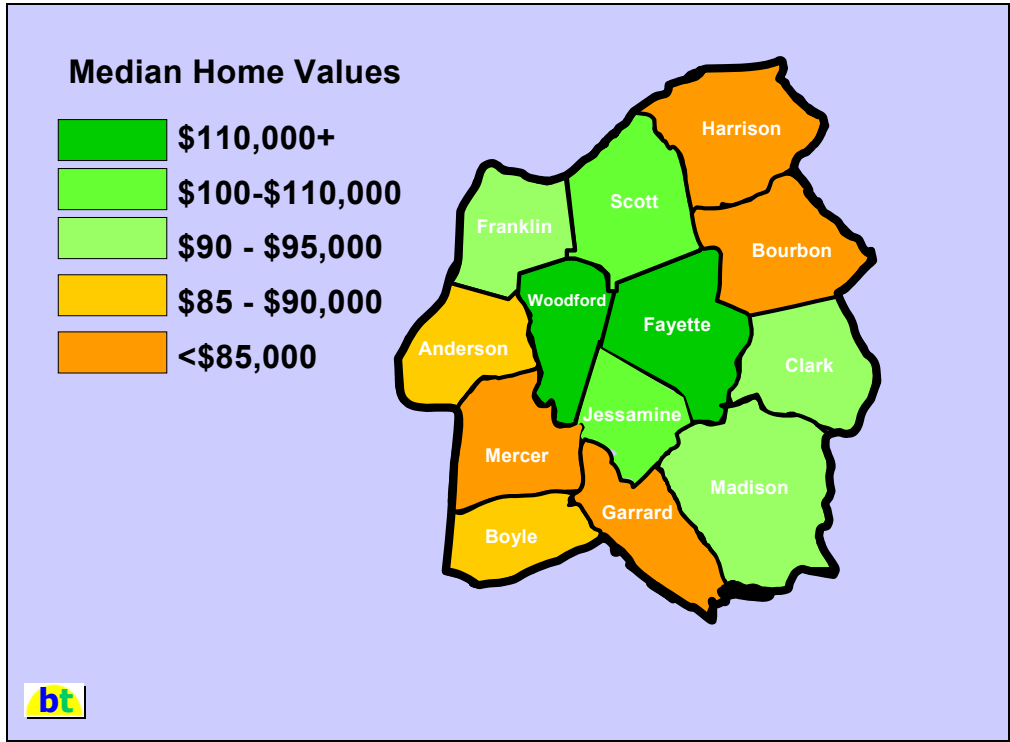


Figure 2.6

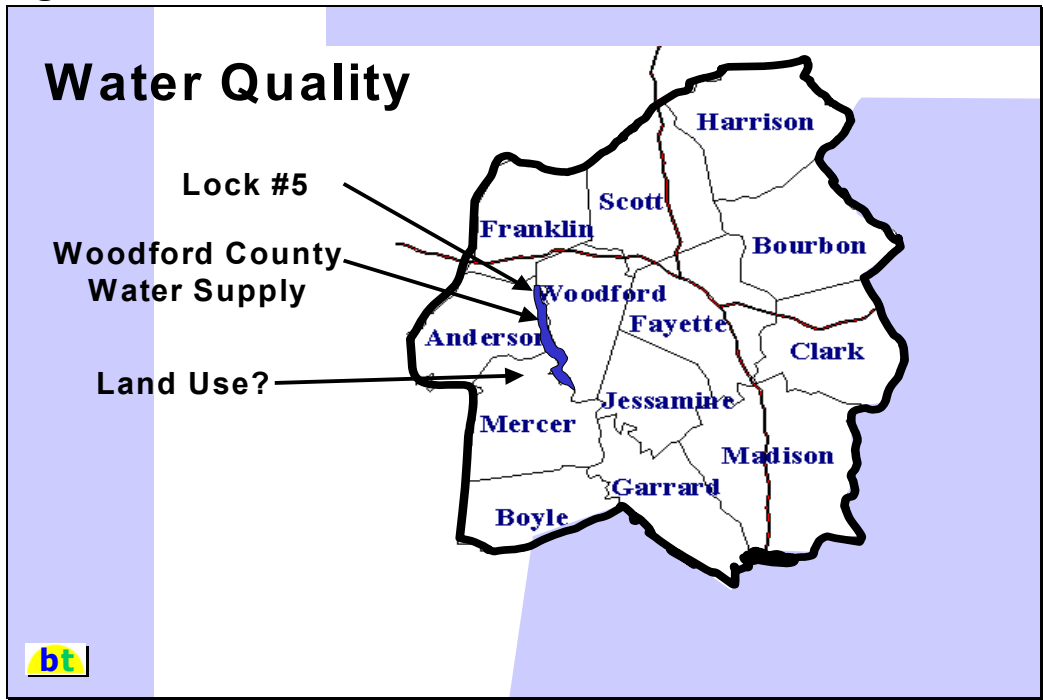
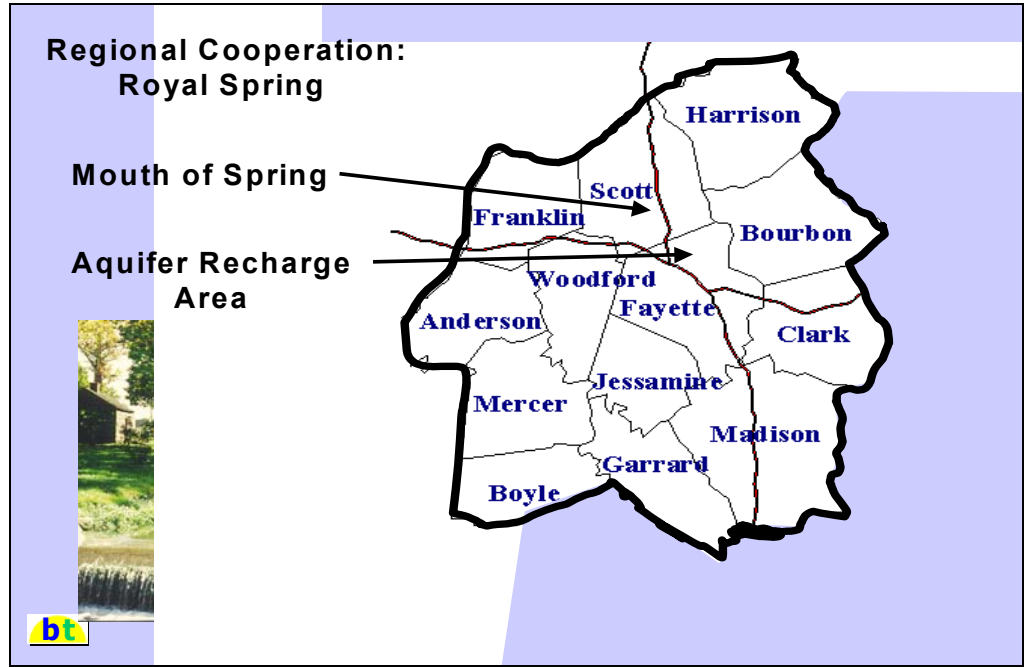


Figure 2.7



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Analysis of 1997 Plan...Regional Coordination Opportunities and Issues Identified

Does the 1997 Comprehensive Plan for Versailles, Midway and Woodford County provide a basis for ongoing planning coordination with adjoining cities and counties and within the Bluegrass Region?

Overview

Generally, the community's existing plan contains many of the positives, and suffers from many of the drawbacks, as most of the region's plans. The plan is conventional in that it follows the "if we take care of ourselves, we will be OK" approach. There appears to be little understanding, or concern, of forces and trends occurring outside the county.

What follows is a specific accounting of the areas analyzed regionally

Environment: Woodford's Plan recognizes the importance of protecting the natural environment. However, a shortcoming is that the goal does not stress the importance of working with other communities whose policies may negatively affect Woodford's environment.

Agriculture: Unlike the topic above, the Plan's goal for agriculture contains mandatory action language – "protect" – in relation to the County's agriculture economy and character. Neither the goal nor related objectives speak of regional action designed to protect and promote agriculture.

Recreation: The Plan recognizes recreation as a vital and desirable community service. Neither the goal nor related objectives speak of regional action designed to coordinate

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recreation planning or for the provision of a regional recreational resource. This is perhaps an oversight in that Buckley Wildlife Sanctuary is of statewide importance and draws visitors from a large area. The importance of the Kentucky River – and its shared possession - should also have guided the drafters of the plan toward regional recreation planning goals.

Tourism: The Plan acknowledges the importance of increased tourism to achieving other community goals, such as small town and rural character and agricultural development. The goal does not speak of regional action designed to coordinate tourism planning yet an objective hints at broader cooperation by stating, “To support new and innovative means to encourage tourism and to seek the assistance of state and local governments, as needed to bring this about.” For the most part, however, the Plan concentrates on improving cooperation among local interests, as well as increasing Woodford’s share of the Bluegrass tourism pie.

Cultural/Historic Resources: The Plan stresses the importance of these resources. No mention is made on developing coordinated preservation criteria across the region.

Redevelopment: Since the 1997 Plan allowed for basically no enlargement of the urban growth boundaries of Versailles and Midway, the plan necessarily promotes development and redevelopment of existing areas. This is a strategy that must have time to work.

Urban Land Use: As stated, the 1997 Plan’s desire to limit continued outward expansion of the county’s growth boundaries, has thus increased the effort for redevelopment in the existing centers and for more efficient new suburban development within the existing growth boundaries.

The groundbreaking planning that occurred in 2000 and was incorporated into the **Preserving Town and Country in The Bluegrass** document stands as a model for the rest of the region. Many communities are fearful that a decision to limit continued expansion of their urban growth boundaries would result in a cessation of growth. Woodford’s work is a demonstration that a balance can be achieved.

Rural Land Use: Woodford County’s goals, objectives, and policies, taken as a whole when relating to rural land use, are the most progressive in the region. While there is no specific goal relating to rural land use, the effect of the entire collection is to strongly limit rural development in conventional forms. Instead, rural housing growth is encouraged in existing small communities and in cluster developments. There is no apparent understanding, however, of the impact that other communities’ policies may have on Woodford’s rural areas.

Housing Affordability: The Comprehensive Plan Goals do not mention ensuring housing affordability. Woodford’s County’s 1997 policy of not expanding the Urban Service Boundaries of either Versailles or Midway, without an immediate increase in infill development, may be directly responsible for increasing the housing prices to the highest level in the region.

Infrastructure: The Plan ties growth rates to service provision. No mention is made of ensuring water supply or for acting regionally for water service.

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Economic Development: The Plan blandly approaches traditional economic development (ie. factories) with this goal: “To accommodate industrial development that will assist in providing for a broad and stable economic base conducive to the character of the area.” The goal’s objectives are more focused with industrial compatibility and environmental sensitivity than with defining a economic development strategy. The Plan makes no mention of regional economic development or of any possibility of sharing in the economic windfalls that other communities are enjoying.

Transportation Planning: Positively, the transportation planning goal seeks to provide for movement in a variety of modes. Negatively, no mention is made of regional transportation planning or coordination for automobiles or airplanes.

Regional Planning: As noted throughout this section, the Plan makes almost no mention of regional cooperation or coordination within any of the stated goals and objectives. Not surprisingly then, there is no goal statement regarding regional planning.

Other Regional Planning Efforts

Bluegrass Tomorrow’s *Framework Elements for a Regional Plan*

Bluegrass Tomorrow, after much regional dialogue in 1997 and 1998, put forth a guide to creating a regional plan. This was the first attempt of this scale in Kentucky. This document is not so much a regional plan but rather it is a prescription for unified action at the local level.

The intent of the document is to provide a context for coordinating local actions regionally in order to maintain the traditional patterns of development that have created such a high quality of life. Building on Bluegrass Tomorrow’s grass roots *Regional Vision*, the document outlines planning techniques to ensure that our communities remain separate and distinct, that our roadways remain safe, efficient and beautiful, that our best farmlands remain secure and productive, and that we are sensitive to our fragile environment. The document proposes that if we can achieve these ideals locally, and thus across the region, that we will ensure a high quality of life as well as a competitive edge in securing a front-line place in the global economy.

The document lays out several tools for achieving each of the vision points. For example, in order to ensure that our communities remain separate from one another and distinct from “Anywhere, USA”, the document proposes greenbelts and employing traditional development patterns. While Woodford County has embraced traditional development patterns, it has no experience with implementing a greenbelt around either of the two urban service boundaries in the County. Yet, Scott County does, and thus Woodford may learn from them.

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Tools to ensure roadway safety, efficiency, and beauty include adopting context sensitive design standards. The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet is a national leader in this type of planning, and Bluegrass Tomorrow and the Cabinet jointly developed a first-of-its kind planning and training manual to ensure that this philosophy is transmitted across the state.

The document recommends purchasing development rights, clustering development, and increasing minimum lot sizes as methods of ensuring that the best farmland in region remains secure and productive. The document also recommends suitable placement of rural septic tanks to ensure environmental quality, more dense urban development in order to stay away from sensitive land, and forming a regional environmental commission to constantly monitor the state of our environment.

Bluegrass Tomorrow is committed to implementing the recommendations contained in the document. To that end, Bluegrass Tomorrow has undertaken the region's most extensive public education campaign in order to illustrate issues, trends, and solutions. To date, Bluegrass Tomorrow, has spoken to nearly 400 regional groups comprising over 8,000 people.

Lexington Greenways Plan

The Lexington-Fayette Urban County Greenspace Commission recently completed work on a first-ever Greenway Master Plan. This plan is a comprehensive effort to identify opportunities and plan for their development. The plan hints at regional greenway ideas but does not make any recommendations for regional action in planning for or establishing them.

Paris-Lexington Road

In the early 1990's, Fayette and Bourbon counties created a first ever inter-county collaboration for road planning and land use development along what is commonly referred to as "Paris Pike". The road is now under construction, and the land use policies have been adopted by Fayette County. Bourbon County has yet to adopt the more restrictive policies that Fayette has.

Royal Spring Aquifer

In the late 1990's, Fayette and Scott Counties undertook a collaborative effort to protect Georgetown's drinking water supply. The source of this drinking water is the Royal Spring Aquifer. Most of this aquifer lies under Lexington, including some of the developing industrial land of Coldstream Research Park. Scott County, rightfully concerned about potential contamination, has worked with Fayette to ensure that development in this area is environmentally sensitive. Fayette has agreed to this, even

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though it gains little benefit for itself. This is a great example of regional cooperation on a vital issue.

Elkhorn Creek Inter-County Consortium

The elected leaders of Fayette, Scott, Franklin and Woodford Counties formed the Elkhorn Creek Land and Nature Trust in the early 1990's. Its purpose was to coordinate environmental, recreational, and promotional activities in the Elkhorn Creek watershed. While much was done through the early 1990's, little has been done since.

Kentucky River Authority

The Authority is responsible for a water supply plan for the entire Kentucky River watershed. Another area of responsibility is the planning of parks along the River, with a goal of creating a Kentucky River State Park. Little coordination has been accomplished on this goal, however, and recreational plans remain within the purview of local governments along the River.

Bluegrass Area Development District

In 1993, the Bluegrass Area Development District published a "Regional Land Use Plan" for the 17 counties of the Bluegrass ADD region. The Plan assessed the current status of planning activities in each of the communities it served. Elements of the Plan included housing, transportation, population projections, economic trends, environmental resources, community facilities, and historic resources. Bluegrass ADD literature states that the Plan "provided regional land use policies to be taken into consideration when local governments develop comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and other planning tools." According to the ADD, it was hoped that "all local planning units and legislative bodies should examine the recommendations of the Regional Land Use Plan and utilize them in the decision making process when appropriate."

Prospectively, the Plan did include sections on how to implement cluster regulations, sample goal and objective language, and exhortations to plan wisely, among other things. But in the final analysis, the Plan was little more than a review of current local plans and policies.

The major weakness of the Plan was that it contained no call for coordinated regional action on specific issues such as the Bluegrass agricultural landscape, recreational opportunities, or economic development. Perhaps the Plan's shortcomings are best demonstrated by a map entitled "Existing and Future Land Use in the Bluegrass Area Development District": it simply is a catalogue of existing land

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use plans. There are no regional natural resource preservation areas identified, no areas of prime farmlands to be protected, no analysis of the conflicts between plans.

In Woodford's case, this has dramatic consequences: the map shows all of southern Franklin County as being a development area, while adjoining portions of Woodford are shown to be in an agriculture preservation area. A true regional plan would have identified this conflict and made a recommendation to alleviate it. Now, nearly 10 years after the completion of this Plan, this area of Franklin County is one of the fastest growing in the state, whose visual character, traffic patterns, and proximity are beginning to negatively impact Woodford County.

Summary

Three opportunities and issues seem to stand out from the discussion and analysis. From an economic development perspective, one of the best opportunities for regional coordination involves promotion of the equine industry and preservation of the farms and natural resources that support this regional asset. Not only is this industry a major employer, but it also a major ingredient in capturing additional tourism related revenues for Woodford and the region. Woodford County should move aggressively to promote regional efforts in this area.

The second opportunity/issue lies in the mobility arena. Transportation facilities are one of the critical influences of and determinors of land use patterns. Woodford's geographic position in the Local Region, between two major employment centers, is an issue for this Plan Update. Regional coordination efforts should better recognize Woodford's mobility needs and support transportation improvements designed to accommodate this travel demand. In other words, promote regional coordination to prioritize road improvement designed to support travel between Lexington and Frankfort without damaging Woodford communities, i.e, Midway and downtown Versailles.

Finally, Woodford's significant frontage on the Kentucky River gives it a prime position, and significant responsibility, in any effort to ensure that the River will be a continuing potable water resource to the region, and that it's flow, water quality, and water storage features are preserved for future generations. This may be the most difficult of the challenges given the fact that other regional counties and communities do not touch on the resource and are removed from direct experience of the importance of this resource. This alone is a primary reason for Woodford to take a leadership position on this issue.