

Does Your Community Need Professional Planning?

By Steve Troskey, Planner, CGA

In a recent study, 93% of City Administrators in smaller Iowa communities said they were tasked with planning, zoning, and code enforcement. 73% of these Administrators felt they did not have enough expertise to do an adequate job based on a lack of planning education and experience[i].

Common reasons for a smaller community to need planning include:

Separate conflicting land uses

Enforce the Comprehensive Plan

Promote quality development

To help, CGA can work with your community to provide day-to-day planning and zoning administration, which can free the City Administrator to work on managing the operations of the city.

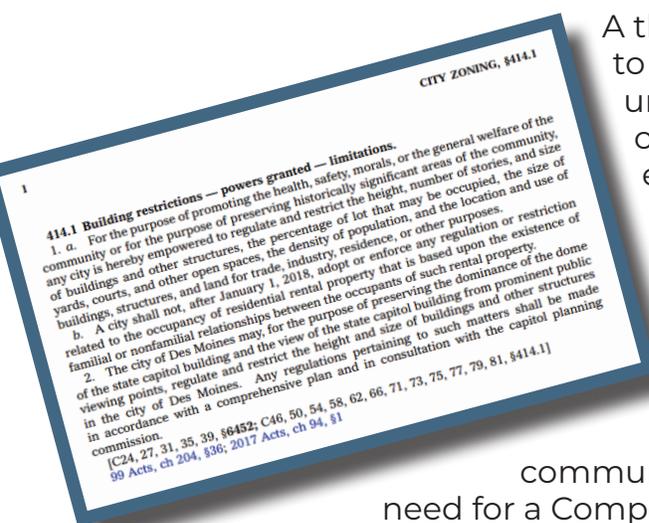
It is better to be prepared and proactive when development or redevelopment occurs rather than scramble at the last second to change codes to fit the potential project.

“Good planning” is hard to pinpoint because it reflects personal values. It may be difficult for staff to not get overwhelmed with contrasting opinions from multiple segments of the community. Since code must be equally applied to all, a third-party administrator may be an effective solution to remove personal bias.

Why do many City Administrators find planning/zoning to be so challenging?

A third-party planner allows Administrators/other staff to focus on their areas of expertise while allowing an unbiased professional to take a comprehensive view of planning and enforcement issues. The planner can evaluate the consequences of a decision in a larger context than local politics. The planner allows the Administrator to be an impartial professional focused on overall direction and management while the planner works the day-to-day administration of the Zoning Ordinance.

Iowa Code 414.1 outlines the role of Planning in your community if you have a zoning ordinance. It mandates the need for a Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance; however, it does not indicate what administration of these documents should look like. This vagueness is where many communities find themselves seeking direction.



What can a planner do that existing City staff cannot do?

Evaluate the consequences of decisions in a large, long-term context. A planner sees a project from a community-wide perspective, not in isolation. In smaller communities, everyone is a neighbor (which may unknowingly allow politics to enter the discussion.) A professional planner can:

- Apply equal enforcement of codes to all.
- Act as an impartial technical advisor for the city.
- Analyze development decisions in concert with established economic development guidelines.



With a **planner on staff**, we are ready and able to assist with your city or development plans.

Stephen Troskey, City Planner

Why is this important? Can't a City Administrator do this?

Land use planning and zoning are delicate subjects that often become political. An impartial third-party Planner can free the City Administrator to manage their city without worrying about the politics of zoning decisions.

Zoning can improve the values of some properties while causing potential loss to others, based on a variety of factors. That's why careful, unbiased planning must be administered from a neutral source.

When enforcement and/or guidance falls to the City Administrator, that person

must be careful that best-practices and equal protection is followed even if it may cause harm to some.

Creating and updating zoning regulations may only impact new development and leave existing property owners with the status quo. It may be easier to create quality codes knowing it only applies to new projects.

Isn't this what my local Council of Governments (COG) or Iowa State Extension does?

Your local COG and/or Iowa State Extension office may provide guidance on how to create a long-range Comprehensive Plan and involve community residents in the decision-making process. CGA is able to take these plans and ideas and administer the day-to-day operation and enforcement as necessary.

Things are working fine now. Why pay someone when we have volunteers to enforce code?

Smaller communities often lean on volunteers or other city staff to work with developers on planning issues and enforce existing zoning regulations. This can result in uncomfortable situations when a volunteer is tasked with guiding the city through a legal process that involves due process rights, state code, and other complex variables. CGA can provide the administration in this area that follows your city ordinances, meets state law, and is equal in application.

Our staff has spent a decade working for cities, creating and refining zoning ordinances, and understands the process, complexity, and politics of zoning regulations.

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[1] Bland, R. A. (2007). The role of the city administrator and small town planning. Ames, IA: Iowa State University.