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County adopts sweeping development regulations

by: Frank Taylor
(11/19/2008)

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Development of property for businesses and homes in Lincoln County is changing dramatically.

After months of sometimes contentious debate in the public sector, Lincoln County commissioners offered little discussion Monday as they unanimously approved the county's new Unified Development Ordinance.

The measure will take effect March 31, 2009. County Planning Director Randy Hawkins told commissioners that the significant lag between board approval and the law actually taking effect is by design, to give county staff time to work with local business groups, such as the Lincoln Economic Development Agency (LEDA), and others to fine-tune some portions of the plan.

"There are going to be a few bugs that we'll discuss," Hawkins said.

The Unified Development Ordinance attempts to carefully delineate the most appropriate use of land in each portion of the county, whether its character is primarily rural, urban or suburban.

Monday's action from commissioners follows similarly unanimous approval from the county planning board earlier this month, as well as more than a year of carefully crafting the measure and hammering out solutions to various concerns and disagreements.

The measure will impose the county's first-ever landscaping standards, carve out new districts targeted for various types of development, enact tougher aesthetic and building standards and tackle what has become a growing concern for county planners, traffic.

Planners have said they believed the measure was essential to streamline the patchwork nature of previously existing laws and clarify the steps used to guide future development.

Some of the comment and political back-and-forth surrounding the issue in recent months has featured the county's familiar east vs. west divide, with the measures tighter controls being especially favored in the east.

But there was no note of disharmony as the county acted Monday.

Outgoing board chairman Tom Anderson, at his final meeting as a commissioner, thanked county planning staff for their diligent work on the measure.

Anderson recalled the types of comments he heard a decade ago from newcomers settling in the eastern portion of the county who complained that "we didn't have planning."

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He noted that the county now had a document that would now administer correct management of development, as well as chart a strategy for all future growth.

Staff writer Olin Ericksen also contributed to this article.

