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October 19, 2010

Aaron Todd
Iowa Smart Planning Task Force
Wallace Building; 2nd Floor
502 E. 9th Street
Des Moines, Iowa
50319

Smart Planning Task Force Members:

Thank you for taking time on October 12, 2010 to discuss the Iowa Smart Planning Task Force's recommendations with City of Sioux City staff. However, many of Sioux City's concerns regarding the public input process and questions about the role that the various COGs will play in the comprehensive planning process remain unanswered.

It still appears that there was no meaningful input from western Iowa in the development of the recommendations. As with any planning process there must be an attempt to actively solicit public input. The City of Sioux City does not accept the explanation that the Legislature limited participation by setting the makeup of the task force. Input from Cities other than Dubuque and Mason City was absent and to prepare a proper set of recommendations, that input is essential.

This lack of public input now leaves many unanswered questions regarding the role of the COGs in the planning process. The proposed role of the COGs was not made clear in our conversation. I suspect the reason for this is that the Iowa Smart Planning Task Force members themselves are divided in their opinions of how the COGs should function in the planning process. Significant public input from all of Iowa is needed on this issue and the Task Force members must fully think through and vet all aspects of this proposal before it is sent to the Legislature. If this means missing the November 25 deadline while additional input is solicited so be it.

As you are aware, Sioux City's COG (SIMPCO) crosses state boundaries (as does MAPA and Bi-State). The concern about opening the door to having significant out of state influence on Sioux City's comprehensive planning process is a significant and I believe legitimate concern. You noted that if "the group" so chose it could limit representation to Iowa entities only. I am not

sure what "the group" is but the decision on how much if any COG input there will be into our comprehensive planning process must be the City of Sioux City's alone. We must be clear about this; opening the door to the possibility of giving out of state members influence over Sioux City's Comprehensive planning process is absolutely unacceptable.

As it now stands the COGs do not have the ability to prepare comprehensive regional land use plans. Given the present economic and political climate there are no funding sources available to allow the COGs to increase staff and resources in order to prepare regional comprehensive plans.

I believe the Task Force's goal is to require SMART planning at the local level. There are many more transparent and less cumbersome ways to do this than is proposed. State Code can be amended so that comprehensive plans by definition must include and meaningfully address the SMART Planning Principals. Zoning, subdivision activity, and capital projects must be consistent with the comprehensive plan, as they must be now. Deviations from or ignoring the plan endanger the ability to enforce a zoning ordinance. Local plans, as well as zoning and subdivision activities, are undertaken by a vote of local elected officials who are directly responsible to the electorate. This is much more transparent and an inherently more accountable process than review by staffs at COGs that have multiple layers of bureaucracy between them and the electorate.

City of Sioux City staff will be present at your Wednesday, October 20, 2010 meeting in Des Moines to address the Task Force.

Sincerely,

Michael M. Hobart
Mayor of Sioux City