

GROWTH from B1***Townships' development plans collide with growth controls***

At the regional level, the issue is testing the Metropolitan Council's will to enforce its own planning rules and its ability to manage the growth of the seven-county area in an orderly, cost-efficient way.

The importance of the issue is heightened because the council, which has a reputation for vacillation and ineffectiveness, is about to decide whether to adopt a plan for regulating urban growth in the decades to come. Its credibility problem has left many doubting the effectiveness and even sincerity of any new plan.

Part of the history that led to that perception can be seen in Credit River itself. Since 1971, Credit River has been allowed to develop variously on 2.5-acre, 5-acre and 10-acre lots. Two years ago, the Metropolitan Council acquiesced when Scott County allowed the development of a 70-acre parcel and a 160-acre parcel into 2.5-acre lots, even though county and council rules set a minimum lot size of 10 acres.

So, there's a hodgepodge of residential development in the township, with city-size lots in the northwestern corner near Savage and Prior Lake; in other pockets of the township, 2.5-acre and 5-acre lots are adjacent to 10-acre lots surrounded by areas of 20-acre lots.

The owners of the rest of the land — concerned least about global issues such as urban sprawl and most about personal

issues such as financing their retirement — want to divide their land into small lots, too. And they don't want outsiders telling them what to do.

John Kane, chairman of the three-member town board in Credit River Township, said: "We're designing this township because it's ours. We grew up here."

There are only three major working farms left in the township, he said. They include his 160 acres and several hundred acres owned by Bill Feldman, another town board member, and Feldman's brother Peter. The Feldmans — operating as Feldman Land Co. — already have developed a 160-acre parcel into 2.5-acre lots selling for as much as \$77,000.

The Credit River Township board — Kane, Feldman and Myles Mares — adopted a three-phase plan for allowing the development of 2.5-acre lots, opening the area closest to the freeway for development now and the final phase in 2002.

Kane maintains that their motives are not self-serving. Under the plan, the area his farm is in would be eligible for 2.5-acre development in three years, and Kane acknowledges he may want to develop it in about five years, when he's 61. The main Feldman farm of about 260 acres is in the area that would be opened to 2.5-acre development in six years.

Kane disputes the contention that development in Credit River

will drain the resources of the Lakeville schools, arguing that people who build and pay taxes on houses valued at \$300,000 to \$1 million are paying their own way.

No one in the township has objected to the growth there, either in the past or in recent public hearings, Kane said. In fact, he said, some people complained that they were not able to develop their land into 2.5-acre lots fast enough.

Fast growth

The Metropolitan Council estimates that the population of Credit River has increased 28 percent since 1990, to 3,650 people in 1995. It estimates New Market's growth at 25 percent, to 2,508 in 1995.

That rapid increase in population and growing demand for services is one reason the council objects to more 2.5-acre development. The council and Scott County are willing to allow 2.5-acre lots as "in-fill" near existing 2.5-acre lots close to the freeway but not farther west.

The council's general rule is that land outside the urbanized area should not be broken up into lots of less than 10 acres. The urbanized area is that serviced by municipal sewer and water systems and is called the Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA).

The MUSA stops in Lakeville, and the council has no plans to extend it farther south and west to New Market and Credit River.

The council also objects to 2.5-acre development because it is generally thought that such lots cannot be subdivided in the future. And because the houses are so far apart, the cost of supplying sewer and water service to each

house is high.

Ten-acre lots, however, can be subdivided into more dense developments for which sewer and water service can be supplied less expensively.

Seeking compromise

The townships maintain that small-lot suburbanization will never reach Credit River and New Market, except in the areas near Prior Lake and Savage that now have septic systems but are expected to need sewers eventually.

The staff of the Metropolitan Council, which has the authority to accept or reject growth plans, sent Credit River's and New Market's plans back to the county and the townships, asking them to conform to the council's rules and the county's comprehensive growth plan.

New Market reduced the area in which it had planned to allow 2.5-acre lots, retaining it in a corridor along County Rd. 62 that includes several 10-acre lots and a 40-acre development of 2.5-acre lots. The county has not sent that revised plan back to the council yet.

Credit River has not changed its plan, but Kathy Bongard, a Scott County planner, expects a compromise.

Even though the plan conflicts with the county's own comprehensive plan, she said, the County Board passed it along to the council without recommendation because "it was an attempt to get the negotiations going."

She said the County Board could have rejected the proposal itself, but "we're dealing with elected officials who were representing their constituents. We try to cooperate with town officials, not come down on them."

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