

BLUEGRASS BEACON

with
JIM WATERS



A Tea Party plan to put ‘Big Government’ on a diet

By Jim Waters

“No government ever voluntarily reduces itself in size,” said President Ronald Reagan.

And taxpayers in Kenton County in Northern Kentucky are about to find out: no bloated government agency goes down without a fight, either.

But if the Northern Kentucky Tea Party prevails, the Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission faces significant weight loss.

[Tea partiers want to gather 18,000 signatures](#) needed to allow voters to determine whether to shrink a planning commission three times the size — and cost — of other county planning commissions in the region.

I’m betting that when voters find out that the Boone County Planning Commission staff of 15 handles 300 percent more work than the area planning staff of 42 strong — with their Cadillac benefit packages — the votes will be there.

If “size” doesn’t matter to voters, this might: Kenton County’s planning budget is \$4.8 million, while Boone County gets by on \$1.6 million. Planning costs each Kenton County resident \$30.39 per year; Boone County residents pay only \$13.75.

So, playing small ball in Kenton County likely would result in smaller property tax bills for its residents. But forcing Big Government to go on the Slim Fast Plan always leads to bureaucratic bellyaching.

Enter commission chairman Bill Goetz.

He labels those supporting large-government liposuction as “anti-government.”

He hopes property owners are convinced that shrinking his agency would result in eliminating all planning and zoning — hinting that ramshackle mobile homes would roll up and park next to fine dwellings, thus driving down property values.

Such fear mongering bodes well for Tea Party efforts. It shows Goetz can’t provide solid evidence that Kenton County taxpayers reap three times the benefits of other counties, even though they pay three times as much for government planning.

If applied, Kentucky Revised Statute (Chapter 147) makes the commission illegal since 1984. That’s when Campbell County voted to secede from it, leaving only Kenton County within its jurisdiction. [KRS 147.610](#) states that such regional planning authorities must have at least two counties signed on, and that one of those counties must have a city of at least 50,000 residents. The commission fails both standards.

What it does have is 30,000 square feet of office space, 105 parking spaces and lots of unused space in the posh former Huff Real Estate Office overlooking Interstate 75. Yet, agency officials say security and

liability concerns keep them from renting the building's extra space, which would at least save taxpayers a few bucks.

I can understand liability concerns. The building might collapse under the weight of its staff and size. But security concerns – at a planning and zoning office? Please.

Despite having millions in the bank and a building valued at \$1.4 million, the planning commission still insists on collecting taxes on anything anybody owns — cars, boats and even recreation vehicles.

What exactly do RVs have to do with planning policy?

Tea Party concerns don't end with costs. It wants elected officials holding unelected agencies accountable.

Currently, a council made up of officials from [Kenton County](#) cities appoints the seven-member planning commission. The commission establishes tax rates and spends, spends and then spends some more — without elected officials answering for how taxpayer money gets handled.

Voters can hold magistrates accountable since they are elected. But “appointed” planning-commission bureaucrats escape the election process. So, Tea partiers rightly want a Kenton County planning board overseen by a locally elected body, and that's more in line with nearby county planning budgets.

Sounds reasonable, doesn't it? Especially in the current economic funk in which everyone from families to businesses must find ways to slim down.

But just because things make sense doesn't mean government bureaucrats accept them without a fight.

Goetz's fear mongering simply proves: Reagan was right.

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