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Exurban Avon wants highway interchange

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Submitted by Marc Lefkowitz | Last edited October 18, 2007 - 12:47pm

Posted in: Land regional agenda

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An interesting debate is raging over a proposed highway interchange in Avon, a small exurban community located 20 miles west of Cleveland as I-90 goes. Larger regional issues such as added traffic and artificially inducing development further away from urban centers in a region with no growth are being weighed against one community gaining direct access to the highway.

Avon Mayor James A. Smith and consultant TranSystems presented their plan for a new interchange and an industrial park/shopping center at Nagel Road before NOACA's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) on December 15, 2006. Avon has a \$10 million commitment from retail developer Dick Jacobs and seeks a \$5 million TIF to privately finance the interchange, but it needs the regional transportation agency's approval since it will impact air quality and traffic on local roads would lead Avon to seek public funds to widen Nagel.

GCRTA director and NOACA board member Joe Calabrese challenged the sustainability of Avon lowering its residential density requirements from 18 to 10 apartment units per acre at the same time seeking approval for highway access. "It's really more sprawl with negative growth," he said.

Avon is struggling to pay for schools and city services strained by an influx of residents fleeing the city and inner-ring suburbs. Smith told NOACA that highway access is needed to retain its light industry, but also admitted the city can no longer afford the 56% growth in housing it absorbed from 1990 to 2000 (the plight of exurban communities across the country are budget deficits from not enough commercial income tax to make up for new residents, which are a drain that property taxes cannot account for).

Bay Village Mayor Deborah Sutherland voiced concern about the interchange pumping up vehicle traffic—not to mention retail competition—in the western suburbs. Nearby Westlake is home to successful lifestyle center Crocker Park, which could see a competitor arise if Jacobs builds a shopping center at the Avon interchange. NOACA board member Deb Janek questioned the need for more retail, citing a Cuyahoga County Planning Commission study that concluded the region is saturated with retail for its population.

Some 1,600 acres around the interchange are still available for development (not counting Jacobs-owned land and a large parcel owned by German concern Henkel Adhesives). The goal, Smith admits, is to increase Avon's tax base.

NOACA told Avon officials the proposal currently lacks the proper traffic counts. Avon will conduct present-day and projected traffic counts on Nagel and hopes to get the proposal back in front of the TAC in February, 2007. The TAC would need to approve the plan before NOACA's board votes in March. Even if NOACA approves the plan, it will still need to clear requirements set by the National Environmental Policy Act.

Related questions

- How do we as a region currently handle the impact of more highway-induced sprawl?
An economic impact study should look at the cost born by the region in general and by existing retail centers such as Crocker Park and Midway Mall in Elyria in particular.
Perhaps it's time NOACA tied approval of major highway construction to a regional land-use plan? At the very least, communities that benefit from highway interchanges should be required to contribute to a regional fund for natural space preservation.
When private funds are involved to encourage more sprawl built on farmland and natural spaces, how else can the region support balanced growth?

Upcoming Events

Calendar for October showing dates from Sun to Sat.



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