Florida State University Journal of Land Use and Environmental Law

Volume 1
Number 2 *Spring 1985*

Article 7

April 2018

Public Attitudes on the Cost of Growth

Jim Smith

PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON THE COST OF GROWTH

JIM SMITH†

First, let me say that I am pleased to be here and to share the program with some of the people who will be helping government find answers to Florida's growth management problems. I do not think there is any doubt among us that the new year has brought with it renewed emphasis on what many feel is the state's biggest challenge: balancing our inevitable growth with the need to preserve the quality of the environment.

Two recent opinion polls profile the concerns of Floridians on the problems of growth. The Florida State University Annual Policy Survey showed that people rank rapid growth as the major problem facing the state. They put it above such personal concerns as unemployment and crime. A survey by Florida International University and Florida Atlantic University showed that a sizable majority strongly favor growth controls and environmental regulation.

While these polls reveal that Floridians are aware of the problems of growth, my concern is that the public may also perceive that there is some "quick fix" solution to them.

I do not think the public realizes the magnitude of the costs involved in financing essential infrastructure. I have seen estimates of infrastructure needs through this year totaling $2.8 billion. Financing roads and water and sewer treatment facilities through the year 2000 will require $16.9 billion. These estimates do not count catch-up needs or such things as building new schools, state highways and prisons, improving our airports, or hiring more police officers and firemen.

Defining these costs and determining how to pay for them *equitably* is one of the most crucial tasks we have before us.

Once we add up the tab, we will have to convince the public that it is worth what they will be asked to pay. We need to convince people that our ability to preserve the Florida we presently enjoy will depend to a great extent on how much of the costs we can pay up front. We also need to get across the message that growth management can save dollars in the long run . . . and that unregulated growth multiplies costs.

We must develop incentives for cooperative growth management.

---

† Attorney General of the State of Florida; B.A. 1962, Florida State University; J.D. 1967, Stetson University.

Right now, for example, we set up road blocks to keep development off environmentally sensitive land. A better approach might be to encourage development in areas identified as suitable for growth.

Instead of chasing *after* growth with roads and water lines, we could put those roads and water lines where we *want* growth to occur. Today we respond to traffic jams by continuing to widen thoroughfares in areas of strong growth. Construction is no sooner completed than the road is again overloaded. Recently, I had a briefing about transportation problems and was a little surprised to learn that they are now in the planning stages to add eight more lanes to I-95 through Broward and Dade Counties — billions of dollars worth of construction. Does that really make good sense? I wonder.

We could use those same dollars to build a road in an area where there is less density and less pressure on the environment — and let the road serve as a drawing card for development.

Nor do I think government should subsidize the cost of water and sewage treatment facilities to serve developments on environmentally sensitive land. Both the short-term and long-range costs are simply too high.

Growth planning must have a vital role in Florida's economic development. Major corporations *plan* to get where they want to be in the year 2000. In order to ensure profits and expansion and meet goals, they plan for the next twenty years. It makes good sense for government to do the same to ensure Florida's future economic prosperity.

The state's role must be one of leadership in three major areas:

†seeing that the costs of growth are defined and assuring that an equitable, broad-based system of financing growth is developed;

†informing the public of the necessity of meeting the capital facilities needs of growth; and

†advocating the community of interest between the private and public sectors for a cooperative approach to planning for growth.

In developing methods of infrastructure financing, I hope the current momentum to pass significant growth management legislation does not lead to hasty decisions about financing. I would like to see us take the time to ensure that we distribute costs equitably between state and local governments and the public and private sectors.

While it is appropriate to ask developers to pay their fair share, we cannot and should not ask them to foot the entire bill. Impact fees and related charges, if based on equitable formulas, may be a solution in many cases. But they only cover certain costs. Cities and counties cannot expect new residents to foot the bill for a road that was needed twenty-five years ago.

With input from both local governments and private industry, I would like to see a number of broad-based financing strategies investigated. These would include:

†financial incentives to encourage development in areas where we want growth to occur — that was a goal of the Land and Water Management Act that has never been reached;

†state financial assistance to local government, possibly through state-backed bonds for capital facilities similar to the existing water and sewer bond program; and

†a uniform system of user fees to offset the cost of public facilities construction.

In closing, let me say that a couple of years ago, Florida's business community adopted improved education as a goal, realizing that quality education is good for business. The quality of *Florida* is good for business, too. It is the magnet encouraging people to locate here, invest here, and prosper here. Frankly, we have a very short time to develop a realistic, manageable growth management plan for Florida or we can forget it.