

BME In-Sites

Client News from BME Associates

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Development Collaboration

By Robert J. Cantwell, RLA

Over the past several months, I have had the opportunity to represent the Rochester Home Builders Association (RHBA) Government Relations Committee in outreach discussions with many local communities. Along with RHBA staff and builders from these communities, we have had very productive dialogue with town leaders and key staff personnel to identify key growth issues, as well as to convey a spirit of collaboration from the residential building industry. Not only is this cooperative spirit critical to the greater Rochester economic development future, it is also critical at the local level as it relates to the design and approval process for specific development proposals. We can all recall instances where the success (or failure) of a development application is the result of an applicant's willingness to work with (or not with) the community. And when a 'spirit of contention' (vs. cooperation) exists during the public review process for a project, it probably means that not enough communication, 'homework', sensitivity and/or understanding of the issues has occurred.

Collaboration must start with a basic understanding that working together is a two-way street between developer and community, and that a win-win results only when each side is willing to give and take. It also requires both to be open minded enough to understand and appreciate the

others' perspective. Builders, developers, and their team of design professionals need to be sensitive to the concerns of community boards, special interest groups and neighbors. They need to be able to effectively communicate and need to be willing to work closely, early, and perhaps often in the planning process. Likewise, the community (boards, committees, special interest groups, neighbors, etc.) needs to recognize an owners' property rights, appreciate the development risk factor, come to expect quality, and yes, appreciate the developer's objective and right to make profit.

An excellent example of recent collaborative success between a developer and community is the Lakewood Meadows project in the Town of Canandaigua, which is being developed by Morrell Builders of Fairport, NY. Scott and Jeff Morrell worked with the Town during its' recent update of zoning and land development standards to communicate the realities of the residential market from a home builder's perspective in terms of future demand projections. They also took the lead in assembling a very effective roundtable discussion of community and business leaders focusing on housing and its' positive effect on job attraction and economic development in the Canandaigua

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area. They also worked with the Town to develop their community master plan in consideration of the Town's newly developed standards for land development, environmental protection, and open space preservation.

The Morrells exhibited a collaborative spirit by voluntarily meeting with neighborhood groups, boards, and committees, independent of and prior to the formal public hearing process. This approach was strongly encouraged by many of the towns we met with to improve the project acceptance and approval process. This approach also results in a greater understanding and awareness of a projects' features by all, and if done early enough in the process, can avoid expensive design modifications later on. However, the development approval process

is not necessarily a 'we like it' or 'we don't like it' scenario. It is important that community feedback be constructive; and in the context of public health, safety and welfare, and respect to the developers and owners rights, as previously mentioned.

The RHBA's outreach effort also includes partnering with local communities and regional associations to communicate the need to grow and change to meet the realities of the market. For example, the RHBA conducted a study to assess reasons for the continued strength in the new residential construction market in the Rochester region and found that, despite the local population being stable, household formation continues to expand and is one of significant reasons for the residential construction activity being strong.

Finally, a cooperative relationship can be strengthened when development interests and community leaders are both involved in the update of community plans and in the search for innovative ways to achieve win-win. For example, creative approaches to open space preservation and acquisition can be realized through the use of tools which are currently available, but often not utilized, by communities. Involvement and sharing of success stories can raise the awareness to the benefit of all.

In conclusion, collaboration can result in a more efficient review process, avoid delays and litigation, can often result in greater support for the project, and can lower overall development costs.

Moratoriums

By Bruce G. Boncke, P.E., President

The dynamics of the Planning, Development and Housing industries are changing quickly and, for the most part, for the better. As Bob has pointed out in his article, the improvement in communication and education between builders and our communities is very encouraging. However, there is a significant cloud hanging over us and it's Moratorium Fever. Across our state and in many local communities, politicians are rushing to put development moratoriums in place in response to prevailing NIMBY attitudes to close the barn door.

The American Heritage and Merriam-Webster Dictionaries provide the following definitions for moratorium:

- A suspension of ongoing or planned activity.
- An authorized period of delay in the performance of an obligation.
- A waiting period set by an authority.
- A suspension of activity.

Based on these definitions, I find development moratoriums to be somewhere between ironic and a flat out oxymoron. Community planning and vision should be an ongoing,

educational and communicative process. But, often it is not, until some faction in a community has a cause and decides they should stop everything while they think! With little respect for property rights, land values or people who need to run a business, such as providing homes, the solution is to stop. I find it very ironic that these definitions refer to suspending or delaying "ongoing or planned activity", "obligation" and "activity." Experience shows that most moratoriums are put in place because there has been insufficient planning activity and some form of catch up is necessary.

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Moratoriums (cont.)

By Bruce G. Boncke, P.E., President

The real irony is with the perception, of the public, of the moratorium. The politicians imposing them appear as heros and presumably gain future votes. The public perception is that the politicians are doing a great job if they suspend the activity of growth. The reality is that, if a moratorium is truly necessary, it is probably a failure of the political body to meet the obligation for ongoing planning in the community, in the first place.

How many constituents in the community would be happy with a moratorium on their business or personal land use because someone needed to stop, think and catch up for a while?

So, what's my point in being a bit more negative than usual? The point is that moratoriums are a failure in our system and we need to get to some better common ground before one is necessary. Builders and developers need to get involved in

the planning and education efforts in the communities they work in. Likewise, the communities need to involve the builders and developers in their, hopefully ongoing, comprehensive planning process. After all, it is the building industry that will ultimately have to implement the community plan and vision. I have yet to see a moratorium that was healthy for improving this necessary communication process.

Under Construction

The Highlands at Pittsford



This year, The Highlands at Pittsford commenced construction on the next phase of development at their 52-acre campus in the Town of Pittsford. The Highlands is a senior living community operated by Strong Health Care.

The current phase of development consists of 36 detached cottage units and a 4,000 s.f. community center designed in a residential village setting. While part of the senior living campus, the site layout was prepared to use natural features and buffers to provide the cottage community its own identity. BME Associates provided full surveying, site planning, landscape design and civil engineering services for the community. In addition, BME was the lead for the municipal approval process for both zoning and planning issues, and BME

is currently providing construction stakeout and construction observation services. The first 18 cottages are constructed and residents are moving in, with the remaining 18 cottages to be completed in the spring of 2005. BME is pleased to have

worked with The Highlands and their design team to bring this unique and highly visible project to reality.





On the Boards

Bushnell's Basin Fire Department

In 2003, the Bushnell's Basin Fire Association determined a need to locate to a new modern facility to replace their current undersized facility in Bushnell's Basin. BME Associates was brought in to provide site planning and engineering services, and to work closely with the Association and their architect to prepare a plan that meets the Association's current and future needs. Given that the Fire Association is an all-volunteer organization not familiar with the site development process, they relied heavily on BME's expertise with the municipal and regulatory agency approval process to lead their project through this critical component of the project. The project required appearance before and approval from every advisory and permitting Board within the Town of Perinton, ranging from obtaining a Special Use Permit from the Town Board to obtaining site plan approval and area variances, to obtaining



a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Architecture Committee. BME Associates completed this approval process, and took the project from concept plan to final site plan approval in six months. BME Associates also coordinated the project with the ongoing reconstruction of Kreag Road by Monroe County so that the site access and utility connections were incorporated into the reconstruction project. Finally, BME coordinated two neighborhood meetings during

the concept plan stages to present the Association's project to the surrounding residents. The result of which was a community supportive of the relocation of the Fire Department into their neighborhood; support that was expressed during the municipal review process. The Fire Association intends to break ground in 2005 on the new station, and BME is pleased to have played a part in meeting their goal to better serve the community.

The Legends

Recently, the Rochester Home Builders Association held it's annual golf Routing. One of the teams that BME fielded was the Legends; four past presidents of the Association. The team included: (from left to right) Dave O'Brien ('74), Bruce Boncke ('92), Jim Barbato ('94), and Mike Amico ('90). The team came in at even par. Not bad for legends with a cumulative age of about 270 years.



Staff News

New Team Members

BME is proud to announce the addition of Tom Miller, Assistant Design Engineer; and Ryan Destro, also an Assistant Design Engineer, to its civil engineering staff.

Mr. Miller joined BME on March 12th. He is a 2003 graduate of Rochester Institute of Technology with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering Technology. A native of the Avon/Livonia area, Tom completed internships with the Town of Henrietta and SRF Associates while at R.I.T. Tom joined our staff after previously working as an Engineer Assistant for the Town of Henrietta Engineering Department. He is currently working on a combination of commercial and private sector development projects in both Monroe and Ontario County.

Mr. Destro joined BME on July 6th. He is a 2004 graduate of Rochester Institute of Technology with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering Technology. Originally from Fredonia, NY, Ryan successfully completed internships as a Field Engineer for Kiewit Construction Company in Augusta, GA, and as an Assistant Design Engineer for

Kreiling Associates in Ontario, NY, while at R.I.T. He is currently working on a number of private sector development projects in the towns of Penfield and Canandaigua.

One Year Anniversary

Anthony Bellomo has recently completed his first year with BME, working within the Planning/Landscape Architecture Department as an Assistant Landscape Architect. Asked to comment on his first year with the company, he responded:

"As a student of Landscape Architecture, I was always optimistic about how vital the profession is to the process of good planning and design. Upon graduation, the reality of what it takes to get a project designed and built, outside the philosophical walls of academia, was more than a little daunting. My goal was to find a company that was committed to creative, innovate and thoughtful design, and one with which I could grow as a practicing professional. In coming to work for BME, I feel lucky to have achieved that goal. As I reflect on having completed

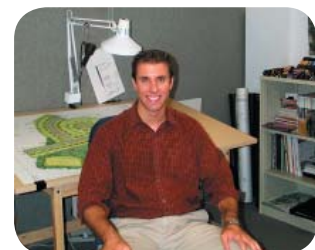
my first year with the company, I feel that I have joined not only a positive and dedicated work force, but in many ways a second family. I look forward to all of the opportunities and challenges ahead, as a contributing member of the BME team."



Tom Miller



Ryan Destro



Anthony Bellomo

Your Input

As we look forward to future articles of *BME In-Sites*, we would appreciate your feedback. First, if there are topics of interest you would like to see in future issues, please let us know. Secondly, if you would prefer to receive *In-Sites* by e-mail, rather than a hard copy, please let us know. Some of our clients have asked that we do that so they can forward or route it easier and we would be happy to do so. We also post *In-Sites* on our web site www.bmeperc.com.

Please give Berneda Tascione your input at btascione@bmeperc.com.



How about stopping in for a visit to our web site the next time you are on-line? There's a variety of resources, tools and articles that we hope might be of interest to you. If you would like any additional information, feel free to e-mail us at bmepec@bmepec.com or give us a call at 585-377-7360.



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