

Energizing the Industry - Get More Active in your Community **by Robert J. Cantwell, RLA**

Perhaps the first question you might ask is "why"? Doesn't the town I live in have competent staff, elected leadership and volunteer boards, which all represent their constituency well and plan for growth 10 years or more in advance? The answer in many communities is yes! However, it is critical that these planning decisions are based on factual input driven by long-term sustainability of the community. That input has to come from a diversity of interest groups and stakeholders in the community (i.e. business owners, merchants, residents, bankers, and yes, the homebuilding and land development industry) in order to arrive at true consensus for establishing community goals and objectives. Unfortunately, there are many instances where community-wide zoning and/or land use decisions are made based on the current hue and cry of NIMBYS or special interests with little regard for how these decisions will effect growth for future generations. For example, how many times have you seen communities establish large lot zoning in an effort to 'control' growth only to see it result in little to none? As a business owner or other stakeholder in the land development industry, you have a choice either to be part of the solution or to risk a business climate in your community that is not favorable. There are many examples of homebuilders or others in the industry that have positively affected change by getting involved in their communities, whether orchestrating a roundtable discussion of business leaders, serving on a Planning Board or growth management committee, or taking the lead to organize a specific issue task force. The involvement and perspective of your experience is critical. Who knows, you may not only become a valued 'authority' in your community on a certain issue, you may also develop some business relationships through networking opportunities.

I have found that getting involved in revitalization efforts in the Fairport community that I live in, to be very rewarding. My original motivation stemmed from my desire to 'make a difference' and 'to leave things better than I found them.' What I realized from my involvement was a great deal of satisfaction in being part of a collective effort to help chart the course for how our community would look and function in the future.