

PREFACE

The Impacts of COVID and the Growing Importance of “Planning”

“The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry” - This interpreted line from the original 1785 Robert Burns poem, “To a Mouse”, is a proverbial expression which is now often used to acknowledge ***the futility of making specific plans when the ability to fully or even partially execute them is uncertain.*** This has become particularly true and relevant since 2020 with the advent of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As many can remember, other previous events such as the Farm Crisis of 1980’s, the terrible tragedies of September 11, 2001, and the Great Recession of 2008 all changed the physical and social landscapes as well as citizen’s attitudes toward our state and nation. Change is constant, but without a doubt, certain events can escalate the rate of that change.

The immediate impacts of the COVID pandemic were seen across our state’s landscape – think changes in traffic, increased use of parks, on-line shopping, and work from home orders, just to name a few. What have we learned, or can we learn, from our individual and collective experiences in dealing with COVID and its continuing impacts? What should Kekoskee consider when making land use decisions (and their associated investments) that may last for years, decades, or millennia? While there is a strong perception that “the world stopped – or was put on pause” in 2020, it is the furthest thing from the truth. “Change” is not going to stop because of a pandemic; and, if anything, the rate/amount of change will increase based on factors that are both known and unknown. Face it, some things were going to happen anyway, and COVID simply accelerated them.

A few things come to mind for consideration by communities in the post-pandemic world including:

- Today’s jobs are not tomorrow’s jobs
- Adaptation and resiliency are key ‘survival’ skills – for individuals AND communities
- Resilience needs to be considered in everything we do. Sustainability will simply not be enough
- Technology is (or should be) your friend (e.g., socialization, on-line shopping, cost savings)
- “Urban-ness” is still important but the “outdoors” is becoming increasingly important to mental and physical health
- The home’s function has become increasingly important. But challenging to find.
- Neighborhoods supply a level of comfort to the known
- The supply chain can be fragile, unpredictable, and costly
- Housing choice and the housing market will continue to evolve impacting affordability
- People still want and need to move around
- Education programs and school infrastructure may look very different moving forward

Certainly, the above list is not inclusive. The intent is to simply get leaders in the Village of Kekoskee to understand that the act of “planning” is very worthwhile, regardless of the underlying or overlying conditions under which it is done. If anything, COVID has taught us that many plans’ aspirational goals are still true and relevant, but the path which is taken to reach them (implementation) has changed drastically. In addition, major “disruptors” (both past and present) have taught us that “monitoring” a plan is very important. And, in many cases, this reinforces the need to update plans based on evolving trends. Look no

further than recent changes in housing choice by Millennials and “age in place” preferences by Baby Boomers which were well underway prior to COVID but now may be accelerated.

Which begs the question; “What game changers” could evolve out of the pandemic that could impact community planning? Many theories have already surfaced. Could rural communities see a renewed interest as a choice place to live, thereby reversing locational trends for housing? Will this nation see a surge in birth rates due to stay at home and/or working from home orders? Will building infrastructure that housed large gatherings be able to economically survive; and, if not, what will become of it? Will school districts see an increase in home schooling rates? Will broadband expansion to rural areas keep up to the increased needs? These are just a sample of discussion items that are ongoing by various professionals and only time will reveal the true answers.

However, we are beginning to see signs. For example, who would have anticipated that overcoming COVID would be a primary contributor to a 40-year high inflation rate and escalating interest rates to combat it? The outcome of both, hanging in the balance as of the writing of this plan with many economic experts forecasting a possible recession. Are high and continually rising gas prices (nearing \$5 per gallon at the writing of this plan) a result of supply issues linked to COVID? Or a response to a growing renewable energy movement?

We hope that Village of Kekoskee leaders take stock in these thoughts, as the simple act of planning, whether it be for transportation, housing, or economic development, has now become even more important. Any level of responsibility starts with understanding what is controllable. For communities like Kekoskee, planning becomes the foundational basis to understand just that; what they can and cannot influence.

The Concepts of Sustainability and Resiliency

A concept of sustainability has emerged, especially in planning, to better balance the use of local and global resources while protecting natural areas and ecosystems. It’s a basic “call to arms” in sustaining life on this planet. However, actions to support sustainability can be local, global and anywhere in-between.

Given the rise of sustainability as a concept over the last several decades, there are many different versions or definitions of sustainability. Most definitions reference the need to respect environmental, economic and social conditions. Another common element is managing resources for both current and future generations.

Although sustainability may be touted as a new planning concept, it is deeply rooted in plain common sense that has been around for centuries. Many grandparents preached phrases like “Don’t waste your food”, “Use what you take”, “Share with others“ and “Leave the campground better than you found it”. Generations who were US immigrants or children of immigrants, remember the sacrifices well, especially during the time of the Great Depression. Resources were scarce, costly and valued. With that respect, they were used wisely. Today waste and overindulgence seem to be common place and virtually accepted in society. Sustainability as a concept is not new (maybe except for the fancy name), but how it could be successfully embraced and implemented in today’s culture, is. The implementation of sustainable concepts will require adjustment to behavior patterns and social priorities.

However, as quickly as the concept of sustainability was launched, many experts within the science, engineering and architectural professions now believe it will simply not be enough to proactively adjust to the stress's climate changes will place on community infrastructure and agriculture. We must now be "Resilient"! Resiliency is a much more pro-active word. It implies action to react and prepare a strategy to address the anticipate change. For example, will roads, bridges and stormwater ponds need to be engineered differently to accommodate extreme events much like buildings in earthquake zones? Should certain soil types on the landscape be preserved due to their increased resiliency to combat drought or increased rains yet still be productive? Should retaining natural vegetation and increasing reforestation to act as carbon sinks be elevated in importance?

Specific community actions to achieving sustainability or efforts to increase resiliency is not a one size fits all solution. It can't be because all areas are different in terms of their resource value, land use and current infrastructure. Solutions will vary among small towns, large cities, rural and suburban environments. Simply stated, the Village through its planning, should address what it can ultimately influence. That action recognizes the Village's responsibility to the common good.

If this approach sounds relatively simple, it is. But truly, it sounds more like just good old common sense. Thanks Grandpa. And yes, we will leave the Village of Kekoskee better than we found it.

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