

INDIANAPOLIS BUSINESS JOURNAL

CENTRAL INDIANA'S BUSINESS AUTHORITY

VOL. 28 NO. 31 • OCTOBER 8-14, 2007

Region is missing benefits of planning

Good urban design can create value for communities, individuals, the economy and the environment. The potential benefits include better public health, greater social equity, enhanced land values, a more vibrant local economy, reduced vehicle emissions and a more sustainable use of non-renewable resources.



**BRIAN
WILLIAMS**

Commentary

Central Indiana lacks geographical barriers to growth. Land is abundant and reasonably priced. However, the region lacks a cross-jurisdictional plan to manage growth and maximize the benefits from it. Instead, fields grow corn one season and homes the next. Massive home developments place a strain on the community's physical infrastructure, including police and fire protection, utilities and schools.

Homeowners in these developments protest rising tax rates needed to expand community infrastructure to support them. On top of that, the uninspired commercial and residential development leaves communities around Indianapolis devoid of local character and the connectivity that make a place stimulating and enjoyable to live in.

One of the key elements of urban

design is connectivity. Connectivity is the degree to which networks—streets, rail-ways, walking and cycling routes, services and infrastructure—link together. Good connections encourage physical activity and reduce car dependence. Connections can also reduce the public costs associated with car use, such as traffic congestion and the provision of road and parking facilities.

We must question if the development of outlying areas has had an adverse effect on the wider city—social isolation, greater pollution and traffic congestion. Economic development policy has aided the growth of businesses in these areas; however, a regional net benefit from this development—such as functioning, efficient mass transit—has not been achieved. This low-density development or urban sprawl has been costly to the region environmentally, socially and economically.

Good urban design results in a high-quality public environment that increases the use of space and supports associated businesses, encourages participation in community and cultural activities, and enhances personal safety. The quality of the public realm relates to the physical and psychological comfort it offers people. It also reflects less obvious comfort, such as aesthetic pleasure from public art, architecture and history, giving a sense of belonging and civic pride. The Cultural Trail and nascent public-art displays are exemplary

aspects of working to improve the public space.

Central Indiana needs an urban-design initiative that is supported by complementary economic, social and environmental policies and programs to maximize benefits.

Years ago, J. Irwin Miller, co-founder of Cummins Engine, instituted a program in which Cummins would pay the architect's fee on any building, if the architect were selected from a list compiled by Cummins. The plan was used in the design of public schools, fire stations and public housing.

Today, Columbus contains works from some of the greatest architects in the world and it is ranked sixth in the nation for architectural innovation and design.

The city of Indianapolis and its partners have been working diligently the past few years to increase public awareness of the arts through transitory public art displays. Perhaps the city and region should formulate and fund the design of high-quality permanent arts displays in buildings and public spaces, all within the context of a greater focus on integrated development. It would be wonderful if we enjoyed a reputation equal to our neighbor to the south. •

Williams is regional venture partner of Hopewell Ventures, a Midwest-focused private-equity firm. His column appears monthly. To comment on this column, send e-mail to bwilliams@ibj.com.