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Opinion:

Urban sprawl can be stopped

Smart growth is a difficult phrase to define, largely because it is defined within each community by the people charged with the responsibility of making it a safe, desirable place to live.

In many communities, those people are local legislators — those elected to fiscal courts and city councils. But in addition, it is the people who are appointed to planning and zoning commissions that have the daunting task of determining what smart growth is in their community and how to implement it.

We face such a problem in Oldham County. While we have an active board that has taken large steps forward in creating a comprehensive plan and capacity ordinances that attempt to address the abundant growth in our community, we're not quite there yet. It's evident by the types of development we still see popping up in our community.

There's no blame to be placed, because planners are approving subdivisions that they believe, by looking at statistics and studies, have adequate road, school and sewer capacity to handle development. It's all they currently have the ability to do. But it's the sporadic nature of these developments and the haphazard way they are crawling across our countryside that we think should make planners take a second look at the regulations that are already in place.

In an enterprise piece last week, The Oldham Era defined the term "urban sprawl" and looked at the types of developments that cause it. Just a quick look around Oldham County and they're found everywhere — causing traffic back-ups on major roadways, crowded schools and strain on infrastructure.

So what are some solutions to this problem of urban sprawl? Limiting growth to inner circles or predetermined areas, like Lexington or Boone County, would help direct growth and preserve rural areas. Growing up and not out would also help Oldham County preserve some of its rural character while offering attractive development. A change in zoning regulations would be needed to approve such a measure. And a real push for mixed-use, new urbanist development is important, which has already been a positive step for our planning commission in the passage and implementation of Planned Unit Development zoning. These developments, which incorporate commercial business and residential living, assist the tax base and also encourage walkable community living.

These are steps our planners definitely need to consider. Before long, urban sprawl will be out of control and we will wish we stepped in front of it when we had the ability.

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