

Special District Impacts

In most instances a special purpose district is created to provide a service which is not available from a governmental entity. Oftentimes a special district is necessary to alleviate a problem or satisfy public demand. However, fragmentation in the delivery of services acts as a deterrent to orderly and efficient growth patterns because there is no coordination among the various service providers.

The Renner Sanitary District was created to eliminate the use of septic systems above the Big Sioux aquifer, thus reducing the potential for contamination of the Sioux Falls municipal water supply. In return for accepting the district's sewage, the city limited hook-ups to a maximum of 400 users. This figure was based on the number of existing residences plus undeveloped lots.

A significant amount of undeveloped land within the Renner Sanitary District could be served by the sewer system if hook-up restrictions did not exist. Additional development could potentially increase revenue and reduce monthly user fees but such growth would be premature without other urban infrastructure.

In the case of the Prairie Meadows Sanitary District, immediate action was required to abate a health hazard caused by septic systems constructed in an area with a high water table. Operation and maintenance costs proved to be costly to the district due to poor installation, excessive flows from the discharge of sump pumps into floor drains, and a slowdown in new residential construction within the district which produced lower revenues than initially projected to retire the construction bonds. These factors forced the board of trustees to substantially increase monthly user fees. It is unlikely that these problems, or at least the severity of problems, would have occurred if proper growth management practices had been in place.

Special purpose districts can impact growth patterns by encouraging development where a particular service is available. This is illustrated quite vividly in the case of the rural water system. Farmers were to be the main recipients but to qualify for federal financing and reduce unit costs, landowners were encouraged to buy additional hook-ups to service future building sites and bulk user permits were offered to future rural subdivision developments.

This is one of several factors that contributed to the explosion of nonfarm residences during the 1970's. The county was ill prepared to handle the increased growth pressure under zoning regulations in effect at the time. Today many rural water hook-ups go unused because demand has shifted or developmental problems exist in subdivisions where rural water is available.

Special purpose districts provide a unique and invaluable service. But some districts could have been avoided through proper planning. The county must move toward a growth management system which addresses the complexities and conflicts from development promoted by single purpose districts.