

Development

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River development because someone on the council staff had written a letter giving tacit approval to the plan. Instead, he said, the council is working to address larger growth issues for the county.

Hearings are scheduled to begin today on a proposed regional blueprint that Ballentine said could strengthen the council's ability to control future sprawl.

He said that the Legislature may strengthen the council's powers to control growth as a result of the Scott County issues. "We'll probably see some changes in the law because of this," he said.

In essence, the council has surrendered the battle in order to try to win the war, Ballentine said.

But the letter he referred to did not

give specific approval to the Credit River project. The letter, dated Sept. 11, 1989, approved only general plans for a different portion of the township.

It describes the county's request to change the minimum lot size "in the western two-thirds of the township" from a 10-acre to a 5-acre minimum.

According to the letter, the council decided that the change would not affect the metropolitan area as a whole, so it could not prevent the county from acting.

Ballentine said in an interview last week that the current project also would not affect metrowide systems, such as the highway network.

In a July 7 letter to Scott County officials, he expressed concern about the Credit River development plans.

But no changes were made in the proposals before the county approved them.

Jon Westlake, the county planner, said the county has been operating for years under the assumption that it could have 2½-acre lots in rural areas. He said that there are many such lots nearby and that the county's comprehensive plan was written in 1969 to accommodate them.

Metropolitan Council Attorney Brian Ohm and other staff members said counties, townships and cities frequently breach council rules on housing density and development, partly because the staff has no way to monitor many development proposals.

If it weren't for Mary Barsness, the staff would not have known about the projects at issue in Scott County, Ohm said. Barsness leads a group of

neighbors opposed to the Credit River development. It is considering a lawsuit to force the council to enforce its own rules, she said.

Her frustrations echo criticisms from legislators and others who complain that the council has not done enough to restrain urban sprawl. Leapfrog growth increases costs for schools, highways, police and fire services, they contend, and requires subsidies from the state and other cities.

In recognition of Scott County's rapid growth, the County Board imposed a moratorium in March on developments with lots smaller than 10 acres. But that action did not apply to projects already planned.

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