

Q: What is The Hills project?

A: The Hills project is designed to build public consensus on how this community should respond to growing pressure to develop its hillsides.

Q: Why is it important and why is it being done now?

A: State law requires Kentucky planning commissions to prepare and adopt a comprehensive plan every five years. Comprehensive plans make policy recommendations and serve as guides for public and private actions. Kenton County's next comprehensive plan is slated to be adopted by late 2011/early 2012. Because land usage is one of the required elements of the plan, and because hillsides—specifically their development—tend to spark emotional debates within the community, NKAPC staff is working toward recommendations to be included in the plan.

Q: Can you give us an example of where or when hillsides have prompted calls for this sort of public study?

A: Recent residential developments in Covington and Taylor Hill where hillsides were cut and stripped prompted considerable complaints. So too did a large commercial development in Fort Wright. A recent proposed hillside rezoning in Covington filled the public hearing room with angry opponents. SD1 is bombarded with complaint calls whenever heavy rains prompt storm water problems for downhill property owners.

Q: Who is paying for this study? How much will it cost?

A: NKAPC is paying for The Hills project as part of its required responsibilities for crafting the comprehensive plan. Since 2009, NKAPC has spent approximately \$2,800 on The Hills project, virtually all of that on public outreach and rental fees for public forum locations.

Q: What is NKAPC and why is it involved in this process?

A: The Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission is the professional planning staff for Kenton County's 19 jurisdictions. It is responsible for researching and preparing the county's comprehensive plan.

Q: Has the public been asked to give its opinion? Can the public still participate?

A: Yes... to both questions. The Hills project has included three public forums, two online surveys, and an online discussion forum where citizens can join others in expressing themselves about various facets of the hillside debate. The online discussion forum is still open at nkapc.org. Another public forum will be held once hillside recommendations are complete and ready for review and comment, probably in November or December. More opportunities will be provided throughout 2011 and early 2012 for citizens to weigh in on other issues that will be covered in the comprehensive plan.

Q: Okay, you're taking public opinion. Are others involved in this process? Who will prepare the recommendations to be included in The Hills report?

A: In addition to its public outreach efforts, NKAPC staff is relying on several groups for additional information and technical assistance. A panel of 16 people that covers all aspects of the hillsides debate is engaged and providing input; it includes public officials, developers, hydrologists, geologists, and engineers. A small technical group is also providing feedback on questions raised in public forums and panel discussions. Ultimately, it will be up to staff to pull all this information into a final project report that will be presented to the community for review and comment.

Q: There are usually two or more sides to every issue. How is this issue divided; in other words, who is for and who is against?

A: A sizable segment advocates conservation of our hillsides. This group generally includes: property owners who live on residential lots on, below, or near hillsides; property owners who value the green space the hillsides provide in urban areas; utilities that must deal with the storm water runoff generated on these hillsides; and environmentalists. Another sizable segment advocates development on these hillsides. This group generally includes: developers and property owners with larger-than-residential-size hillside land holdings; advocates for building the community's tax base; and growth and property rights activists. A small segment of population advocates for a balance between conservation and development.

Q: Can a balance be reached between conservation and development?

A: Discussions of the 16-member panel with staff have prompted staff to believe that a balance can be achieved.

Q: Will The Hills project final report promote using public dollars to buy private hillside properties? Will it include new regulations?

A: No... to both questions. As noted earlier, The Hills project report will be incorporated into the new Kenton County comprehensive plan. Comprehensive plans do not include regulations and do not generally get into tax policy issues.

Q: Is there an economic benefit to pursuing The Hills project?

A: Yes. Those who advocate for conservation do so because they believe hillsides are an asset that makes Northern Kentucky unique. They cite quality of life issues as evidence for their concerns and argue that the area's quality of life is important to the community's economic development efforts. Those who advocate for development do so because they believe hillsides can provide unique living environments. They cite growth and increased tax revenue as evidence for their concerns and argue that growth and vibrancy fuel the community's economic development efforts. Both arguments are correct. But, until some consensus is reached, this issue is going to fester and continue dividing the community. Divisiveness is not an economic development tool. Reaching consensus will allow the community to move on, economic development officials to facilitate the creation of new jobs, and everyone to benefit from our hillside assets.

Q: Where can I learn more about The Hills project or keep up with its progress?

A: nkapc.org.