

Letter to the Editor

Questions Camden Comp Plan

George "Jody" Sweeney, candidate for 5th District Levy Court Commissioner

The town of Camden was established in the 1780's. Since the 1780's, the growth of the town has been limited to very small advances, leading to the current 1.9 square miles of land. Within the next 5 years, the town plans to more than quadruple their size through annexations, starting with the nearly one square mile of annexation of prime agricultural parcels in the county that occurred at the recent Town Council meeting.

There are few benefits from annexations of this magnitude.

The parcels of agricultural land become more valuable. The annexed property gains services from the town, such as police, water, sewer, street maintenance (snow removal) and a potential decrease in insurance costs. These benefits also make it more valuable when resold to a developer. The owners of the new Camden annexed properties have vowed to keep the land agricultural, but that does not prevent the next owner from selling off to a developer or a change in mind.

The elected officials of town gain political influence with a larger resident base. This translates into power.

Town employees now responsible for larger areas to manage occasionally will obtain higher pay for their efforts.

The disadvantages to annexation also must be addressed. In a recent survey, 81% of the residents of town thought that the services offered by town had either stayed the same (33%) or diminished (48%). Annexation stretches the town's ability to maintain these services or to work to improve them without taking other fiscal measures.

Many residents of lands outside the town chose those areas for the rural atmosphere and may not be interested in the congestion and urbanization associated with a town. These residents also may have chosen the rural areas for the freedom from municipal ordinances, such as animal, water conservation and other ordinances and a loss of community identity when included in the town identity.

In the last five years, the southern part of town has grown tremendously. Wal-Mart and Lowes have both built superstore locations, The Camden Town Center, Roadhouse, Bob Evans, Applebee's, Newell's Creek, Chick-Fil A, KFC/Taco Bell, The Village of Longacre, Townsend Fields, Wynn Wood II, Barclay Farms, and many more have been approved and are contributing to the traffic congestion on Rt. 13 at Lochmeath Way, Voshell Mill Rd, Rt. 10, and Rt. 13. Waits at stop signs and traffic signals has increased to frustration points. The mayor of Camden has consistently directed the blame for the traffic problems at DelDOT, yet at the same time his administration is approving the annexation at a rate that the town and region cannot withstand.

On the west side of town, a new application for the Savannah Farms development has been submitted. This development has 1543 homes on 300 acres of land between Rt. 10 and Moose Lodge Rd. The area includes land set aside for a new school. The average of 4 trips per day will simply add to the number of cars that travel through Wyoming and Camden.

1200 of the homes are for families. The average of .6 children per household will introduce 720 more children to the Caesar Rodney School District. The Developer is donating 20 acres of land for a new school that will have entrances on Rt. 10. Add busses to the morning and afternoon drive times and Rt. 10 becomes a parking lot.

Camden Town Council is accomplishing all of this in the face of the Kent County Levy Court. Levy Court Adequate Public Facilities Ordinances would probably prevent Savannah Farms from being built the way it is planned. The APFO for road infrastructure would force the developer to improve road conditions into Wyoming and possibly through Camden. The APFO for school support would address

the need for Caesar Rodney to grow. But neither Camden nor Wyoming have ordinances to support EMS, Fire, or Police services. Camden Wyoming Water and Sewer will gladly grow to include these areas. This public service utility already has one of the highest rates in the East.

In addition to the agricultural lands, the town also included established developments east of Rt.

13. The developments of Fairfield, Sandy Hill, Traybern, Eagles Nest, Stonegate, and Royal grant were identified as 5+ year annexations. These parcels of land hold no commercial, agricultural, or TDR (Transfer Development Rights) value. The only value they add is to increase the tax revenue for the town. The mayor of Camden suggested that according to the town's charter, 75% of the development residents must agree to annexation. That is not a true statement. In fact, "a majority of the votes cast both from the Town and from the territory proposed to be annexed must have been cast in favor" for the annexation to proceed. For example, in the 75 resident development of Traybern, if a single voter from each household cast his/her vote in opposition to annexation and 76 voters in Camden voted in favor of annexation, Traybern would become part of the town. And while the Mayor also said that the Development must make application to the town, the Town Charter states

In order to provide the additional services to the lands that are annexed, the town must increase revenues. Revenues are increased through increased fees or property taxes. These are the "fiscal measures" mentioned earlier. If the developments east of Rt. 13 are not annexed, the current residents of town will bear the brunt of those revenues.

I believe that growth is a barometer for the health of the economy and necessary for survival. I am not opposed to growth, but I am opposed to uncontrolled and reckless growth. The questions that should be asked are these:

WHY? Why is the Town administration intent on growing at this pace?

What is the position of our two State legislators and Levy Court Commissioner in this proposal? I have only seen one Levy Court Commissioner at a town planning or council meeting and it was not the commissioner from the 5th District.

Where are all of the residents of Camden that were so beneficial to preventing the Kent County gymnasium from being built at Brecknock Park? The major concern of increased traffic for that facility is nothing compared to the congestion associated with this annexation plan.

On December 20th, at 7:00pm, come to the Camden Wyoming Water and Sewer building. Stand inside, stand outside, put your hand up and be heard. Let the town administration know that we have had enough.