



## **Sales tax erosion, roads present dilemma as a fast-growing county prepares to elect commissioners**

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a three-part series.*

COLUMBIA — Two of the Boone County Commission's three seats are up for grabs. Through video interviews with candidates and profiles of citizens, this series will explore three big issues facing Boone County: growth, disparity and government accessibility. This first part will focus on county growth.

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The commission is the center of power for one of the largest counties in the state. It oversees the Resource Management, Public Works and Human Resources departments, among others, and has the final say on the budgets for all county departments.\* The commission also is the legal owner of Boone Hospital Center and the caretaker for over 800 miles of roads. In November, citizens will vote on commissioners for the county's Northern and Southern districts.

In the Northern District, Democrat incumbent Janet Thompson is running against Republican Brenndan Riddles.

***Video: Northern District on growth from Columbia Missourian on Vimeo.***

Sales tax growth has been slowing for years.

That's a problem. Out of the almost \$70 million in revenue listed in the county's 2016 budget, over 73 percent came from sales taxes.

An increase in online sales means an erosion in sales tax revenue for a county that has the highest growth rate in the state.

This creates challenges as Boone County tries to provide basic services. Take road construction and maintenance, for example. The county has a sales tax specifically earmarked for roads. And keeping pace with the road projects made necessary by growth can be tough.

In the Southern District, Republican Fred Parry and Democrat Brianna Lennon are campaigning for the seat that Karen Miller will give up after 24 years in the office.

***Video: Southern District on growth from Columbia Missourian on Vimeo.***

Two roads help show how Boone County is changing.

Leatherwood Hills-Little General sits just off Route K in south Columbia. For more than 20 years, it has been managed by Wayne Roozen, who moved to Boone County in 1989. County growth has brought more traffic to the general store and Route K.  
Stephanie Mueller

South of Columbia, just off Route K, is Leatherwood Hills-Little General. For over 20 years, it's been managed by Wayne Roozen. He's originally from Minnesota, but moved to Boone County in 1989. He started managing the store soon after.

His wife, Vicki Roozen, emigrated from Canada in 2000. They trade shifts behind the counter, and their rapport would fit easily into a sitcom.

"Talk about Canada," Wayne Roozen said to his wife. "Tell 'em about being a frog."

"I'm not a frog!" she said.

"You're a frog," he said.

"Frog" refers to the French, and while many Canadians of French descent live in Quebec, his wife is actually from Ontario.

Over the years, the road outside the Roozens' small store hasn't changed much. But the number of people who walk and drive it have.

Wayne Roozen remembers a mother who would walk down the road with her little girl, then wait at a wall across the parking lot while her daughter walked inside alone to buy candy. This was around 1990.

Today, Roozen bristles when customers lock their cars before walking a few feet to the front door of his store. Still, he understands their caution.

When he's not at the register, Roozen works out of a back office. Stories spill out of him easily; he's seen a lot come through his front doors.

"My first experience with prejudice happened in my store," he said.

In 1989, about 7 percent of Boone County was black, compared to 9.6 percent last year.. Roozen remembers only a few black customers around that time.

One day, he was talking with a black man at the counter when a white customer entered the store, grabbed a soda and then waited by a cooler.

Roozen told the white man he could come check out.

"That's OK. I'll wait 'til the air clears up," Roozen remembers the man saying.

"That's OK, I'm leaving," the black man said.

Roozen paused while telling the story. His oxygen machine hissed in the background.

"To this day, I kick myself in the ass for not saying something," he said.

There are more non-white customers today. On a recent Friday evening, the shoes walking across the asphalt and onto the general store's mottled tile were as diverse as the people wearing them: black dress shoes and brown boat shoes, white Air Jordans and blue Skechers and tan work boots.

The number of shoes — and cars — moving down the road also has increased. In 1989, Boone County had just over 111,000 people. In 2015, that number had ticked up to 174,974, and the growth rate is increasing. According to the U.S. Census, while Missouri overall saw a 1.6 percent increase in population over the last five years, Boone County grew by 7.6 percent.

Several new housing developments are popping up just around Leatherwood Hills-Little General. Just a short drive down Route K, dozens of homes are being built in The Gates subdivision along Old Plank Road, a narrow, two-lane blacktop that leads to gravel. It continues a trend of steady growth in the area and is creating what surely will be a need for better and wider roads.

The growth so far has mostly been a positive thing for Roozen, whose business has been largely unaffected by online shopping. He estimated that "a good week" when he started out pulled in about the same amount of money as "a little-bit-above-average day now."

Campus Drive in south Columbia ends at a bank of trees. Residents of Campus Drive signed a petition in August to oppose the construction of Nursery Heights subdivision, which would turn the dead end into an entry point for the new subdivision. The Boone County Commission has voted 2-to-1 in favor of the new housing development.  
Stephanie Mueller

About two miles southwest of Roozen's store is a quiet, wooded street called Campus Drive. It dead ends in a cluster of trees.

The dead end won't remain much longer, though. In August, the Boone County Commission heard a final proposal to turn the street into an entry point for a new housing development. Neighbors who live around Campus Drive signed a petition opposing the 130 new homes that would be part of the Nursery Heights subdivision, arguing that the influx of new people would change their neighborhood for the worse.

But the commission voted 2-1 in favor. Commissioner Thompson supported the measure and said the homes, which will range in price from \$190,000 to \$240,000, were a more affordable option for many citizens.

Because the road has been a dead end since the 1970s, Campus Drive has often functioned as a big sidewalk. That was especially helpful for couples such as James and Maureen Coyne, who raised a family along that road.

"When we moved in," Maureen Coyne said a few weeks ago, "the Reynolds boy, he was just, he was a senior and James was —"

"Two?" her husband said, referring to their son James. "Five? I don't know."

"I think he was, like, two," Maureen Coyne said. "And now, both our kids are married."

When he was a toddler, James could run up and down the street without fear of cars. This was especially helpful during his first Halloween.

He was about 3 and fairly hesitant about the whole "approaching strangers for candy" idea.

But when the first neighbor dumped several fun-size candy bars into his bag, something clicked. The door closed. He rang the doorbell again. When his parents informed him it was time to move on to other homes, he was off down the street.

Campus Drive won't be the only way to enter the new subdivision. But it will certainly handle more traffic than it previously had.

Even the new subdivisions that are within Columbia city limits will affect county residents. County roads will need to be paved or widened to accommodate the hundreds of new people.

In the video interviews, all of the candidates were supportive of the roads and bridge tax that will be up for renewal by voters in 2018. But with the decline of sales tax revenue, the county will be under increasing pressure to keep up with the pace of development.

The Coyne's son is now grown up. Their road will soon be busier, just like the Roozen's'.

"I hope these guys are the right ones," Wayne Roozen said about the commission candidates. "'Cause we, we deserve a good county. And we have the basis of a great county."

*Supervising editor is Scott Swafford.*