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# Part 3

**SMART GROWTH BY COLLABORATION**



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## Smart Growth and Community Preservation: One Citizen at a Time

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In states like the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with strong home-rule traditions and little political support for state-imposed planning directions, moving toward the goals of smart growth has been challenging. Local control, legislatively organized in Massachusetts and many other states as home rule, is fiercely defended here, making state-mandated smart growth a political chimera. Instead, implementing smart growth will have to occur town-by-town, city-by-city. For that to happen, the citizens who make many of the planning decisions—town planning board members, conservation commissioners, housing nonprofit groups, town meeting members—must understand smart growth principles and have a sense of how they can be implemented.

It is to this end that the University of Massachusetts (UMass) and the commonwealth's Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) entered into a partnership designed to provide smart growth education to current and future local leaders. In Massachusetts smart growth is also known as community preservation, and the citizen training is acquired through the Community Preservation Institute (CPI). This chapter describes the implementation of the institute and its outcomes, the design of the university-state collaboration, and the lessons learned from the effort.

### **Designing the Community Preservation Institute**

The Community Preservation Institute is one of the most successful results of a collaborative effort between UMass and EOEA, as each partner seeks coordinated mechanisms to leverage what each does best, while benefiting the citizens of the commonwealth and their own institutions. In January 2000,

after preliminary discussions, the Commonwealth Partnership (CP) was officially formed, with the goal of developing opportunities for collaboration in teaching, research, and community-based outreach between EOEA and the university. EOEA previously had been preparing a smart growth policy called Community Preservation, which included several efforts: to increase geographic information system (GIS) capacities in all municipalities across the state and provide data and maps describing likely futures for all towns and cities, given their current zoning; to provide funding for community development plans; and to increase investments in land protection and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

While the partnership did explore collaboration in a variety of environmental disciplines, community preservation seemed to be a natural connection between the university and state entities; they formed the Community Preservation Working Group composed of a diverse mixture of state managers from the environmental agencies and professors and administrators from the university. They quickly recognized that the university and EOEA had similar missions—to use their resources and expertise to serve a wider community. Both groups are centralized organizations composed of several component, self-sustaining entities, with five UMass campuses and four units under EOEA. One of the challenges—that ultimately became a key to the success of the partnership—was recognizing the need for representation on the Commonwealth Partnership organizing committee and the need for input from each of the five campuses and each of the four agencies, instead of from just a few representatives from UMass or Environmental Affairs as a whole. Such inclusion established “buy in” to ideas early on, allowing for quicker, easier, and more lasting consensus on basic issues.

The working group developed a list of programs, community outreach opportunities, and departments within the university and the state that were related to smart growth. The list revealed a wealth of experience embedded in both programs and people that, once combined, could be a powerful educational tool for local leaders. Thus was the Community Preservation Institute born. The goal of the CPI is to promote a point of view that challenges sprawl development and replaces such an approach with smart growth principles, at the same time expanding the constituency of leaders who will make bold smart growth choices at the local level. As described below, each partner—EOEA and UMass—had a somewhat different perspective on smart growth. Through the development of the CPI, the Working Group was able to ensure that those perspectives were integrated into an effective program for community leaders.

EOEA was very committed to changing land use patterns across the state and believed that the best way to achieve such change would be to provide

tools and information to local leaders to enable them to make informed, balanced decisions about growth in their communities. After exposing local leaders to GIS-based tools, thereby graphically illustrating potential growth scenarios, it was important that leaders be informed about practical ways to establish the principles of community preservation in their growth decisions. To have the widest impact on the landscape, where land use is controlled locally, local decision makers needed to be empowered, and EOEA knew that a bottom-up approach would work best. For that, citizens would need to be engaged and active. The Working Group was a way to produce such engagement by, in effect, starting a conversation about community preservation across a spectrum of policy and opinion makers.

Working with UMass also gave EOEA an opportunity to influence research and teaching agendas while at the same time helping the administration and faculty to become more aware of EOEA's issues and perspectives. And, finally, the administration knew that there is strength in coalitions; individual agency administrations and agendas may come and go, but developing long-term coalitions among powerful groups can make real policy implementation easier and more lasting. For the CPI, EOEA's hope has been that the initial evening course devoted to citizens might become a fuller curriculum for regular university students. EOEA has taken steps in that direction, but this slow-growing idea remains long-term.

Just as EOEA had agency-specific goals for the partnership, UMass did too. The memorandum of agreement (MOA) under which the Commonwealth Partnership was established is filled with language about what each of the partners—EOEA and the UMass system—hopes would be achieved by entering into this relationship. The MOA indicated that each partner intended to move together beyond the arm's-length, short-term contacts that had characterized past efforts and find ways to deepen those collaborations so that each partner would be better prepared to tap the other's resources as new opportunities such as the CPI emerged.

The goals of the university in undertaking the partnership were varied. First, the CPI was seen as providing an opportunity for UMass to increase its impact through close connection with a relevant and successful agency initiative. The collaboration required the individual campuses of UMass, which often act entirely independently, to develop innovative, nimble ways to work together as a system. The UMass leaders hoped to uncover hidden talent on the individual campuses and to see if such new talent could be "grown" by challenging faculty to engage in interesting integrative tasks. In many ways UMass is trying to create a new kind of lean, distributed state university system, and the CPI offers opportunities to test out some of these ideas. UMass will always be an underresourced system within an otherwise wealthy state.

Therefore, all of the needed expertise will never be available on any one campus. The system must find ways to work across the campuses and to be nontraditional in its approach to collaboration with groups such as Environmental Affairs.

The characteristics of smart growth make it an excellent arena for this sort of institutional development and experimentation. Addressing smart growth requires interdisciplinary efforts. Campuses all over the United States have begun to confront thorny questions about how to increase communication among disciplines that traditionally have gone their separate ways and, therefore, have not been effective in working with outside partners. For example, faculty in engineering who focus on transportation would typically have little contact with faculty in economics who analyze the costs of development. Smart growth discussions cannot progress, however, without faculty from very different disciplines finding ways to integrate their areas of expertise. UMass faculty need to bring their research into the CPI training and find ways to change this research so that it will provide resource materials for smart growth initiatives. In other words, the CPI, if done well, can be seen as an intervention that will in subtle ways change the faculty and the institution while it informs the participants who are taking the CPI courses.

### **Program Design and Implementation**

In spring 2001 UMass and Environmental Affairs launched the first Community Preservation Institute in Westborough, Massachusetts; through 2003, the program has had 252 graduates from 136 communities. The CPI attracts a wide and diverse array of participants, ranging from teachers and elected officials to lawyers, developers, activists in the environmental, housing, or historic preservation communities, state employees, nonprofit representatives, and concerned citizens. CPI is a nine-evening course designed to introduce twenty-five local leaders per class to innovative planning concepts and practices; the core classes are described in Table 7.1.

All of the courses were derived from key smart growth insights interpreted for the New England landscape. First, all planning begins with environmental realities so that important lands and ecological processes are protected. Each program includes initial sessions on water resources and land preservation, and many devote an entire evening to biodiversity. Second, smart growth supports existing town centers. New Englanders are fortunate that smart growth corresponds well with the traditional land use form; for this reason, community preservation can be discussed when advancing a smart growth agenda.

The classes recognize the functionality of the traditional regional landscape, with its compact towns featuring a mix of uses and a variety of housing types

Table 7.1

**CPI core curriculum**

1. Introduction, including a role-play to get participants thinking about the actors in a development project and their various motivations.
2. Land Preservation and Natural Communities, which includes information on how developers value land, along with conservation easements, conservation subdivision design, and so forth.
3. Water: Managing a Finite Resource, which demonstrates how to develop a municipal water budget and calculate the impacts of new development on water resources, as well as ways to mitigate the negative consequences of development.
4. Creative Housing, which describes how to undertake a simple housing-needs analysis as well as the various programs the state and feds have to support affordable housing.
5. Breathing Life into Old Places: How Historic Roots Can Help Revitalize a Community, which explores how elements of a historic and cultural landscape can assist a community in defining a theme that will drive its future in terms of economic development, downtown revitalization, and historic preservation.
6. Adaptive Reuse, which describes how to undertake projects to reuse existing buildings, especially those with historic or community value.
7. Creative Zoning: A Blueprint for Development, which provides an overview of both tried-and-true zoning approaches and also emerging techniques for smart growth.
8. Tying It All Together: Where Do We Go From Here?, in which students review the course and present their projects.

**9. Curriculum added to particular sites to address regional issues:**

- Natural Resources as an Economic Catalyst: Farms, Forests, and Recreation
- Downtown Revitalization
- Transportation: Connecting People and Places
- Community-Based Biodiversity Conservation
- Green Development
- Green Neighborhoods
- Environmental Justice
- Brownfields and Community Revitalization
- Diversity in Community Preservation

and prices, all set in a walkable neighborhood design context. Major challenges to this traditional urban form include changing technological needs (obsolete mill buildings, for example) and difficulties in providing housing for moderate-income families. Therefore, sessions on adaptive reuse and providing affordable housing are featured in the curriculum. Another challenge is that existing zoning in Massachusetts towns often does not support the desired smart growth/traditional form. Sessions are included, therefore, that describe alternative approaches to zoning so citizens would be savvy enough to press the town meetings, planning boards, or city councils to consider alternatives to

the widely prevalent 1950s suburban zoning codes. Achieving change, however, always requires political support from the community and its decision makers. Almost every session considers which groups one could turn to for coalition building on that topic, and how to combine agendas to maximize political support in town meetings or city council hearings.

While the curriculum is designed to highlight a different community preservation theme each week, smart growth is also about making connections among all the challenges to good planning. For example, the class entitled *Breathing Life into Old Places: How Historic Roots Can Help Revitalize a Community* focuses on adaptive reuse of buildings, using case studies of historic mill buildings converted to affordable and market-rate housing, thus reemphasizing concepts learned in the Creative Housing class. The class entitled *Water: Managing a Finite Resource* illustrates the importance of conducting water analyses and negotiating budgets to ensure that high water quality and quantity are safeguarded as communities continue to grow. As examples of practical applications, instructors discuss creating water-district zoning as well as other measures to protect the water supply, again touching upon the material covered in *Creative Zoning: A Blueprint for Development* and in *Land Preservation and Natural Communities*. These connections across sessions are vital in helping students see the realistic complexities of smart growth and how necessary it is to consider many components while still taking action where possible.

Participants also needed to recognize that each campus and its surroundings were unique, so specialty classes were created that respond to particular needs in certain regions. For example, *Diversity in Community Preservation* was offered at UMass Lowell, located in a historic industrial city with the highest Cambodian population in the nation as well as other immigrant communities. This course was designed to show both how cultures and traditions reflect perceptions about growth and development and how important it is to be inclusive of diverse interests when making decisions. At UMass Dartmouth, located in a southeast coastal community near the busy fishing port of New Bedford, a course was offered that described such natural resources as agriculture and aquaculture as catalysts for economic development. In Westborough, along the I-495 high-technology corridor that has experienced unprecedented growth in recent years, a course on zoning was held. The class showed students that the automobile-dependent, big-box retail outlets that they did not like was the very development that fit the community's zoning scheme, and that the mixed-use downtown villages, a traditional growth pattern in the commonwealth, were deprived of development because of current zoning. In Amherst, a course on the preservation of working farms complemented the town's longstanding



commitment to agriculture. Finally, in Boston a course on brownfields and environmental justice assisted urban leaders.

Almost all evening sessions include a lecture component followed by an exercise that students undertake in class to make the lecture more meaningful. An example is the role-play exercise used jointly by professor Robert Ryan and attorney Arthur Bergeron. They describe a piece of valuable farmland that would be sold for development unless it could be purchased. They gave the purchase price of the land and likely sale price of the new homes, and then assigned roles to each of the students (developer, landowners, conservation commissioners, etc.). It was up to the students to use the principles explained in class for determining profits and costs, and then finding community coalitions that could raise the money needed to save the property and negotiate with the landowners. Other instructors ran similar exercises, asking students to think through the potential connections of affordable housing and adaptive reuse, or to calculate storm levels and aquifer recharge and then imagine zoning solutions to storm-water problems.

A second way individual sessions are made more meaningful is through the inclusion of a project component in the curriculum. Participants are divided into teams before the first night class, based on their interests regarding smart growth—housing, historic preservation, land protection, and so forth. The teams are asked to select a project, preferably addressing a growth issue facing their own town, where they could really make a difference. Students research the issue, find smart growth solutions, and then make a presentation to the class on the last evening of the institute. These presentations are intended to serve as dry runs for presenting their projects to town meetings for actual funding or support, and in several cases, students did exactly that. Completing these projects is the most ambivalent part of the course for students. Many are very busy professionals, and, since no significant class time is allowed, out-of-class meetings for the teams are difficult and sometimes almost impossible. For others, however, the project is the best part of the class, and, in the end, via e-mail, phone, and limited outside meetings, all teams have produced excellent projects that provide a good class summary of topics discussed throughout the CPI sessions.

A team of an academic and a policy maker teach most evening sessions. Team teaching is important for two reasons: it provides academic background about any given issue along with a practical and/or political application, while also giving two different viewpoints. Both academics and practitioners become resource people for students to consult when addressing community growth issues in the future. These “people tools” are some of the best tools provided to local leaders grappling with land use issues. A point was made of bringing in such key people, as university or state department heads to teach

at the institute and thereby become its champions. To keep courses running smoothly, a project coordinator from the university's Donahue Institute attends each class to organize and distribute materials, pass out the next week's reading or explain its location on the Internet, and in general handle administrative tasks.

### **Feedback, Evaluation, and Changes**

The institute is still evolving, incorporating changes with each offering based on participants' responses gained through official feedback sessions. Class and course assessments are repeatedly sought from students, and their critiques are considered carefully. With each new offering, UMass and EOEI adjust the format of CPI to meet the needs of the constituency. One issue that became apparent was that while students enjoyed the team teaching, they were frustrated by the lack of continuity in instructors, since no one except the project coordinator was there each evening. For the most recent offerings of CPI at the Amherst campus, an alternative structure was explored for the course: a lead instructor with knowledge of smart growth and only one guest instructor for each evening. As expected, there were gains in continuity over the different course sessions but some loss of multiple perspectives on a particular topic. Both structures are viewed as successful, and the choice for future classes probably will relate to ease of administration and costs, rather than reflecting a clear pedagogic preference. As the program developed, the Internet was relied upon more for delivering reading materials and extending discussions among students. This resulted in creation of a Web page (<http://commpres.env.state.ma.us>), with access to a wide range of documents and articles available to students and alumni long after graduation.

Since its initial offering at one UMass location, the institute has expanded to all five UMass campuses, allowing greater access for local leaders throughout the state. Participants requested longer classes and more of them, so the institute added thirty minutes to each class and ran two-and-a-half-hour classes for nine weeks instead of two-hour classes for seven weeks. Participants requested that there be more interaction with classmates, so team projects were established. They wanted to "experience" their course work, so field trips were organized to explore farms, housing developments, and city sidewalks. Responding to student requests, the CPI now offers alumni classes in GIS, coalition building, and public participation, and a pollution prevention and advanced water policy course. The continuous distribution and assessment of student evaluations are basic to the program's success, along with actually implementing changes when student opinions clearly point to the need of such changes.

A major challenge that all such programs face is that the time commitment for this training deters some leaders from attending. Since the goal is to expand the constituency for smart growth and good planning, the partnership is exploring the possibility of offering the nine-week program on a limited basis and presenting the community preservation curriculum in an abbreviated weekend format in order to reach a larger audience. An important initial step was to determine which nights most local towns held their commission and town meetings, and thus schedule the CPI on a different night, as many students already serve in some town capacity.

When creating the institute, EOEA and UMass decided to provide full scholarships to local leaders to attend CPI and to limit classes to twenty-five at each location. The entities reasoned that scholarships were investments in communities since the local leaders whom the institute was designed to attract were already the most active in their communities and in the best positions to affect land use change. Further, CPI served essentially as a reward for their taking additional evening time from already overloaded schedules. The small class size was the most conducive to an interactive format; however, the cost per pupil was high, especially at a time of tight budget constraints. It started at \$5,600 in the first year, including significant curriculum design and startup costs, and fell to \$1,400 per student in the most recent year. It may be necessary to either charge a nominal tuition or seek foundation support to help subsidize the nine-week institute, and perhaps to increase class size.

The initial evaluations of the CPI focused on assessing the extent to which this high-quality, innovative set of courses had met the needs of diverse adult leaders; increasingly, attention is turning to assessing the long-term impacts of the training. The intent is to understand how the training is being used to address smart growth issues. Graduates are reporting that as a consequence of the training, they are running for local- and state-level elected office, presenting their team project findings at local forums, and using the team projects to actually preserve land and to lobby for affordable housing projects. An example of the connections between the institute training and the realization of smart growth outcomes highlights the power of educating citizenry on this key topic, as reported by Environmental Affairs in the January 2003 issue of *Community Preservation Press E-Letter*:

Marc Connelly and Jane Sears Pierce from Holliston, and Tammy Gilchrist from Westborough decided to go beyond the classroom when they selected their team project as part of the Community Preservation Institute. When student teams were asked to explore solutions to current issues taking place in their home cities and towns, the three decided to develop

their project around a land purchase that was rising to the top of the Town's agenda and to use their work as the foundation for a presentation before a future Town Meeting.

The group examined the purchase of a 210-acre parcel in Holliston known as the Fairbanks property. The unique property, included in the state's BioMap of critical biological resource areas, contains vernal pools with several rare species including yellow and blue spotted salamanders and spotted turtles. The parcel additionally abuts a large piece of Milford conservation land on one side and 172 acres of Holliston Town Forest on the other. The group presented their land acquisition strategy to classmates and received constructive feedback that helped them finalize their presentation to the Town.

Using knowledge and skills gained through the Institute, Connolly and Pierce, also Holliston Open Space Committee members, found coalition stakeholders in the community and examined and worked out the final details of the land purchase. "Many of the town boards had to be notified, advised, etc. to get everyone on board and in agreement. That was the hardest of all tasks. It was a real eye-opener for all of us," remarks Marc Connelly about this exploratory and support building process. At a Special Town Meeting on December 17 [2002], the Town voted unanimously to purchase the property using a combination of funds from an EOEA Urban Self-Help Grant, the Conservation Commission, the Trustees of Reservation, Community Preservation Act, and private donations. This parcel and the abutting conservation and town forestland is now considered the largest piece of open space inside the I-495 belt, with a total area of about 2,500 acres. (<http://commpres.env.state.ma.us/Newsletter/e-letter.asp>)

Yet another important way that feedback has been gathered about the CPI was by having a faculty member with expertise in planning (Dr. Elisabeth Hamin, the second author of this chapter) oversee the CPI offerings at UMass Amherst; as a part of that role, she sought to identify possible benefits for traditional and nontraditional students of incorporating CPI courses and approaches into the regular UMass curriculum.

It is not often in academia that faculty has the opportunity to hear other faculty as well as practitioners present not only their research but course content, too. As the lead instructor for the Amherst fall 2001 Institute, Dr. Hamin had the chance to learn from the guest presenters as well as from the students, who were highly motivated and brought to classes the sorts of questions that can only come from real-life experience: Why did agency XYZ do that when they said they would do this? How can I reach out to my Conservation Commission? What are the possible funding sources for this housing project? Surprisingly, even planners from a local regional planning associa-

tion attended, which suggests that holistic training in new approaches will be welcomed by a wide range of audiences.

The institute is not directly connected with the university's undergraduate or graduate curricula, being instead centered on the adult nondegree learner. Discussions are under way on how the institute could become a part of the regular course offerings, and to test this, a planning graduate student and a landscape architecture graduate student were invited to participate in the curriculum for course credit. One nondegree student and one student in an unrelated discipline also ended up in the course by their own initiative. Conversations with these students suggested that they found it remarkably worthwhile, in that it presented topics in a holistic fashion, allowing them to make connections across topics in a way that is more difficult in discrete courses. In addition, they found the other students—the citizen planners and activists—to be marvelous role models for future activism, and they reported that they developed increased respect for the knowledge of the residents with whom they would be planning. Upon reflection, it seems that the CPI course as it has been constructed would be a very valuable general education course, particularly appropriate for those entering professions that affect land use and communities, such as transportation engineering, public policy, environmental design, sociology, and other disciplines. Even as a general-education offering, courses should retain a majority of nondegree students in each class, thus providing a valuable alternative learning experience for full-time students while keeping the core mission of the curriculum intact.

Overall, the sessions included in the CPI curriculum worked well. The curriculum started with some grounding in science through the biodiversity and water management classes. As might be expected, the sessions led by academics tended to center on lectures that provided significant background but perhaps less policy than might be useful, while the classes led by policy makers tended to skip some baseline knowledge that students may have needed. Student course evaluations suggested that the most successful sessions were ones that struck a balance between basic learning and current policy, providing them with a sense of deeper learning on the topic as well as concrete ideas about how to apply that learning—a constant challenge in a brief session. Additionally, students really wanted to participate in each session. This is not surprising, in that many students brought a great deal of both practical and scholarly knowledge to the classes, were investing their own free evenings, and thus felt empowered in their knowledge and their right to ask questions.

From the perspective of a faculty member in planning, the central role of the CPI is in developing future social capacity. Conversations and results to date suggest that the students who take this course are more likely to feel

enabled and qualified to participate in local government. It helps move the planning profession toward its goals of working with the public rather than for them, as it helps create a knowledgeable and engaged public and a potent lobbying and coalition-building force for smart growth at the local level. The CPI's long-term impact will have been in sensitizing a wide range of citizens and future professionals to the connections between natural and social systems, finances and land use, regulation and incentives, and the value structure (which often brings them to the course in the first place) of vibrant, livable communities with clear urban/rural divides. In this way it makes smart growth a normal way of thinking for a wide variety of people, rather than exotic or added-on rhetoric in civic policy.

### **Institutional Challenges and Outcomes**

The development of the CPI did not come without some frustration. EOEA and UMass had to overcome significant barriers, both internally and between institutions. No doubt the biggest challenge has been political, as administrations have changed both in Environmental Affairs and UMass. Because EOEA provides funding for the CPI and the state is facing fiscal challenges, it is difficult to assess the stability of the full nine-week course. It may be time for the working group to aggressively pursue additional partners or grants that can provide the necessary operational financial support. A major impediment of the working group is each player's differing perspective of timelines and political responsiveness. Environmental Affairs, as a cabinet-level state agency, operates in a short time frame consonant with its political nature. With administration turnover every four years on average, it is necessary to develop and implement cooperative ventures within a short time span. Environmental Affairs operates on a day-to-day schedule with meetings that reflect the ever-evolving priorities of the administration, and personnel are expected to be responsive to administration agendas. In contrast, UMass operates on a longer and more protracted timeline shaped by an academic calendar set a year in advance. Faculty exhibit a certain ambivalence about political agendas, as well as very little free time to devote to outreach projects when they must carry a full-time teaching and research load. In addition, the value assigned to outreach activities varies department-by-department and administration-by-administration.

The process of working together to overcome these barriers and differences has solidified the tie between UMass and EOEA in the Commonwealth Partnership to a point where collaboration is common with respect to smart growth. Concrete examples include the three authors of this article collaborating on a citizen-oriented book on smart growth; discussions on coordinat-

ing GIS software purchase and skills training between Environmental Affairs and the university's Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning and related centers dealing with GIS; and preliminary development of high school workshops in smart growth and community preservation delivered by the university's Extension to Communities program.

Within UMass the collaboration has yielded outcomes often subtle but still quite real. There has been an increase in resources directed to land use and smart growth amid a university-wide period of resource scarcity. Faculty can more easily identify others outside their own discipline who have related interests, again increasing the viability of research on specific topics. There is also a certain recharge of faculty interest that comes from the challenge of teaching experienced community members, discussing issues with policy makers, and gaining greater awareness of their policy agendas. In the state government, results have also been nuanced but are real. Upper-level department managers from environmental, housing, and transportation agencies are now meeting regularly as a working group to develop a smart growth agenda for the commonwealth. This has the potential to significantly change the way the state does business over the long term. The partnership has vaulted smart growth and community preservation to the top of political agendas in ways that would have been difficult for the agency alone.

Even outside of official partnership activities, this strong relationship opens doors for new opportunities. One of the institute's professors took his landscape design studio class to an UrbanRiver Visions charette sponsored by EOEA in Easthampton, Massachusetts, to help community leaders redesign the downtown riverfront as a catalyst for economic development. This program was recognized with a 2003 Charter Award from the National Congress for the New Urbanism, and students benefited from interacting with local leaders grappling with real community issues.

## **Conclusion**

At times the partnership has seemed to move very much against the tide—that is, the swift currents of local control, political change, the policy-making enactment process, and the expectations of universities for how their faculty will be promoted and rewarded. The group has had to recognize and work with many paradoxes, including: (1) in Massachusetts smart growth can be accomplished only through local actions, yet it requires state-level leadership to encourage this to happen; (2) community preservation is focused on retaining the positive characteristics of towns and cities, yet, by its very nature, community preservation often entails radical changes in how cities and towns must act if they are to preserve community characteristics;

and (3) universities often undervalue community outreach at the same time that students call for courses to be relevant to real-life issues and administrators push faculty to generate funding for projects.

The partnership has prospered through individual relationships, though it increasingly needs to transcend them if it is to sustain itself through leadership and personnel changes. Everyone involved remains convinced of the value of this collaboration, which joins pressing political views with longer time frames, and knowledge of day-to-day needs and resources with bigger-picture connections. The surprise has been that the slow, often unwieldy process by which universities adopt new elements also serves as a stabilizing force. Whereas Environmental Affairs is buffeted by sharp political winds, the university is much less affected by political change. UMass can continue to act as a repository for the partnership's ideas well into the future, testing out the viability and coherence of different approaches for pursuing community preservation and suggesting which ones hold promise and which ones do not. This ability to build on the strengths of each institution is a model that promises wide replicability in many states.



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## Smart Growth and Landscape Conservation in Rural Pennsylvania

*David W. Gross and Edward W. LeClear*

This case study describes a collaboration between Cornell University's Department of Natural Resources and the Edward L. Rose Conservancy, a local land trust in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. The objective of the study is to inform community leaders, land trust volunteers and staff, and academic faculty about the promise of partnerships between universities and land trusts as an approach to helping communities address various landscape conservation and smart growth planning issues. Two basic goals of smart growth are demonstrated in this study: (1) preserving open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas; and (2) encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration in planning and development decisions.

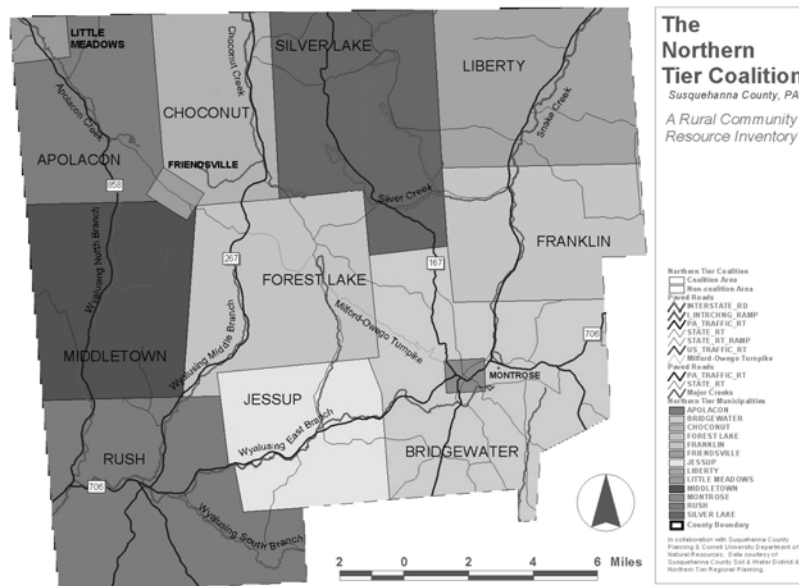
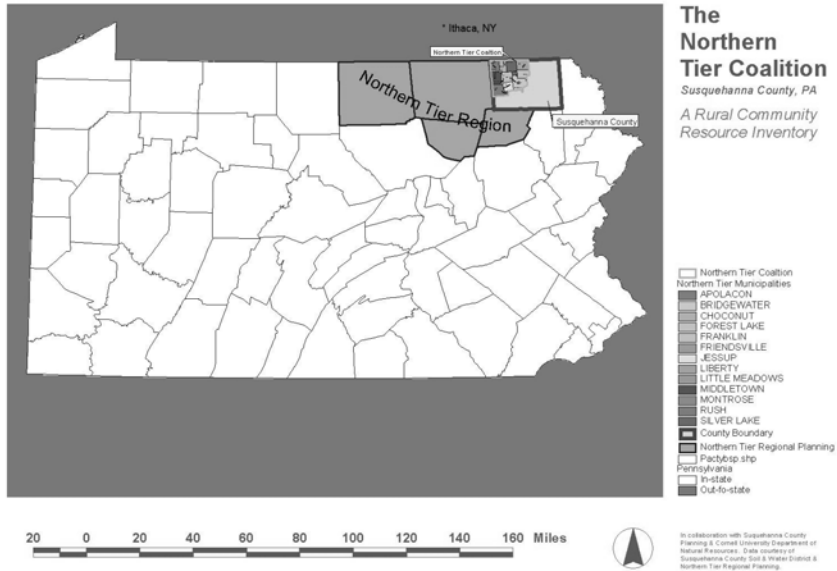
### **Program Planning and Collaboration**

#### *The Place*

Susquehanna County is located in the Endless Mountains region of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, on the northeastern border with New York State. The primary area of interest for our purposes is the northwestern corner of the county (see Figure 8.1).

As did much of Pennsylvania, this once forested landscape underwent dramatic change during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as forests were cleared for timber, which opened up pastures and cropland and led to the establishment of farmsteads, mills, and small businesses (see Figure 8.2). Today, farming is in decline and the forest is returning. Timber production, quarrying, and recreation have become important economic uses of the land.

Figure 8.1 Project area in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania



Source: Barney, Gross, and LeClear, 2002. *A resource inventory and report for the Northern Tier Coalition of Susquehanna County, PA.* Ithaca, NY.

Figure 8.2 Various locations in the Susquehanna County project area



Source: Gross, D. 2002. Susquehanna County partnership assessment, stake holder interview survey. Unpublished. Ithaca, NY.

Rural hamlet development has been replaced by commuter, retiree, and second-home amenity development (Barney, Gross, LeClear 2002, 2).

Preservation of its rural character is a major concern for this area as it faces outside development pressures from commuters working in New York State (primarily in Binghamton) who seek the amenities of the region as well as Pennsylvania's lower tax rates. Slow, steady growth, coupled with the increasing conversion of seasonal vacation homes to year-round residences, has led to rising concern about "rural sprawl": very low-density residential development around small villages, suburbs, and natural attributes such as lakes, and strip-style commercial development along rural arterial roads. The natural elements—rolling, tree-covered hills and green pasturelands—must be protected to preserve the rural character of the area. In addition, the health of the farm economy rises to the forefront of any discussion of land use protection.

### **Organizing Process and Goals**

In 1999 the chairman of Cornell's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) received an inquiry from an alumnus seeking technical assistance for a small land trust, the Edward L. Rose Conservancy (ELRC), in Susquehanna County. The ELRC was established in 1987 as a nonprofit, 501(C)3 organization, whose bylaws call for pursuing natural resource conservation, providing sanctuary for wildlife, and preserving scenic beauty throughout Susquehanna County. The alumnus, an active ELRC board member, welcomed an infusion of fresh ideas to advance the organization's conservation planning and resource management interests.

A partnership soon developed between the ELRC and DNR, through the generous support of a small foundation headed by the alumnus and his family. Early in the collaboration, the Cornell team observed that attention to the ELRC's organizational development needs was essential for it to fully capitalize on new information and potential for expansion. Thus, research aims that the team identified for the group required a better understanding of the organization's long-range goals. A full-day retreat for board members helped the ELRC refine its direction: to more specifically map out its geographic area of concern (i.e., lakes, watershed, and highlands); to identify pressing issues potentially impacting the area; to define key goals that respond to conservation concerns; and to explore collaboration options. The retreat confirmed the ELRC's primary conservation goals for the area: (1) to retain the rural character, including scenic quality; (2) to preserve the cultural heritage; and (3) to enhance and protect surface and groundwater resources. The most immediate research need identified for the ELRC was to make an inventory of the area's natural and cultural resources.

As the partnership with the ELRC evolved, participants came in contact with an ever-widening set of community-based organizations, since developing a resource inventory required networking with numerous local agencies. As such involvement in the community became better known, more people reached out with information as well as requests for assistance in their own ongoing planning and resource protection interests. By the second year the Cornell team was invited to help the newly formed Northern Tier Coalition of Townships (NTC) to develop a multimunicipal comprehensive plan for much of the geographic area in which the team was working. The information collected and the community relationships established in the collaboration thus far would provide the basis for the subsequent spin-off effort between Cornell and the NTC, which became the ideal community-public policy companion to the continuing collaboration between the DNR and the ELRC.

Each of the three partners (the private foundation, the ELRC, and the DNR) had its unique vantage point and goals for the collaboration. As the projects progressed, the team realized that understanding each other's perspectives was essential to developing and sustaining a productive partnership. The family administering the foundation sought to provide resources that will support the growth and development of the ELRC; will sustain the conservation and cultural heritage protection efforts in Susquehanna County; and will enhance the DNR's ability to teach students about the conservation of rural areas. Cornell saw the collaboration as an opportunity for professional development of faculty, staff, and students through specific land conservation planning and management projects, in partnership with a land trust. Clarification of the ELRC's goals evolved only gradually as it adjusted to the idea of having new resources available and as the team better understood how to align expertise to its needs. Each workshop, consultation, and site visit resulted in a fuller appreciation of the range of possibilities. A convergence of ELRC needs and Cornell resources evolved after many meetings.

### **Program Activity Implementation**

#### *Community and University Resources and Roles*

Resources committed to the effort are diverse, but core support for the collaboration comes from the family foundation, which negotiates with the chair its annual contribution to the department at the end of each year. In advance of that meeting, faculty and staff discuss with ELRC leadership annual work proposals. The foundation grants have met a range of expenses, from direct graduate student support, student internships, staff salaries, and travel ex-

penses to lesser costs for publications and events. Many class contributions to the area used grant resources only for travel or publication costs.

Community resources directed at the effort are substantial, but largely not financial. The principal direct cost borne by local partners was the NTC contribution to cover the expense of producing a report and accompanying maps. Although a modest amount, this represented an important commitment to planning by townships that lack discretionary resources. Impossible to measure is the vast investment of time that community hosts have generously given to Cornell staff and students.

Whereas community stakeholder and university roles in this collaboration might at first seem to be those of client and resource provider, respectively, the relationship is far more nuanced. The collaboration is a three-way relationship: the foundation provides funding; the university commits staff and students; and local organizations (principally the ELRC and the NTC) are the beneficiaries. This is not the typical relationship between an organization securing assistance from a contracted technical provider, for the university and the benefiting organizations have independent relationships with the foundation. Consequently, communication occurs in many directions, and coordination among the three participants is sometimes difficult. This unique arrangement gave the Cornell team the impetus to view itself as a *full* partner rather than solely as a resource for a client. The level of trust and confidence needed to assume this full partnership role is substantial.

### *Deployment of University Resources*

As an initial investment in the partnership, the DNR dedicated a portion of one faculty member's time to serving as team leader; he sustained local relationships, brokered resources, and guided many projects. The department also used a part of the grant to acquire necessary staff, including a half-time employee who worked for more than two years on several projects. More recently, a portion of another faculty member's time has been devoted to overseeing student summer interns.

Students participated in a number of ways in addition to their course contributions. Three students have been summer interns in the project area. The first intern developed a trail plan for an ELRC preserve, and more recent interns have conducted biological assessments for important properties identified through collaborative conservation planning with the ELRC. A graduate student, also supported through the partnership, developed a greenway planning strategy for the borough of Montrose, the Susquehanna County seat.

Four classes have been placed in projects in the county. The first was the department's senior practicum course, in which students visited the area to

conduct a rapid, one-day threat assessment of several upland lakes. Local watershed groups, the County Soil Conservation District, and the ELRC hosted the event. Aware that Cornell's Department of Landscape Architecture welcomed engaging new communities in its studio classes, the team arranged to have portions of two courses held in Susquehanna County. One studio assessed the promise of a Montrose Heritage Greenway, and the other developed designs for a memorial park on a local family's farmstead as a tribute to their son (and all the other victims) lost on September 11, 2001. Finally, a class on conservation planning taught by Cornell team members developed a natural resource inventory of the coalition area and did research on conservation concerns raised by the township supervisors. The course examined issues relevant to current conservation planning, and lecture topics included bioreserve system planning, private conservation and the land trust movement, public planning for conservation, and the social implications of the conservation movement.

### *Planning Techniques*

Initially, the ELRC focused on developing a resource guide and an inventory as the core items needed to launch the conservation planning collaboration. As information was collected, the Cornell team introduced board members to GIS maps and other landscape and cultural resource information. Much of the data was later utilized in developing a companion document for the NTC.

Landscape architecture studio presentations also were utilized. Numerous community organizations participated in the Montrose Heritage Greenway studio. At a public meeting students introduced their planning and design ideas needed to protect an area farm, to revitalize a community park, and to more fully recognize the community's black heritage as part of the Underground Railroad. Students in the other studio course presented their individual designs for a memorial at the end of the semester to a family member, a local volunteer leader, and members of the Cornell team.

Planning workshops and field trips were important elements as well. ELRC board members participated in several workshops, helping to build capacity in identifying conservation issues and strategies and facilitating critical decision making in the conservation planning process. The Cornell team took numerous field trips to the area, and both landscape architecture courses had one-day on-site visits. The conservation planning course had two field visits, one for an overview and the other for students to work with individual township leaders on specific planning issues. Another field trip was organized for the lake assessment effort.

Each course resulted in documentation, varying according to the scope of

the student projects as well as the amount of faculty and staff follow-up. The landscape architecture classes created maps and design schemes; the conservation planning students contributed to the *Resource Inventory and Report* for the NTC and developed team reports for small groups of townships. Students in this class also produced individual reports on such topics as the Clean and Green property tax-relief program, forestry issues, intensification in animal agriculture, water quality, intermunicipal cooperation, development planning, and wildlife management. The class presented its findings at a well-attended public session at a local school.

The Cornell team has participated in several planning processes established with both the ELRC and the NTC. In a series of meetings, a special Conservation Planning committee of ELRC volunteers appointed by their president worked with the Cornell team to produce the *ELRC Conservation Plan* as a companion document to the *Natural Resource Guide and Inventory*.

### ***Barriers and Challenges***

At times the three-way relationship of the foundation, department, and ELRC led to confusion about program direction, expectations about use of departmental resources, communication channels, situational control, and accountability. The Cornell team sensed, particularly at the beginning, that ELRC leadership thought the multiple agendas hindered their attempts to direct the organization. Furthermore, the rapid flow of new ideas and the additional demands on volunteers and staff often outstripped the ELRC's capacity to capitalize fully on the partnership. On occasion ELRC members have been frustrated by maintaining less control of products and outcomes than they might have had with a consultant. A candid discussion of these issues at a meeting of the three partners at the beginning of the second year resulted in a strengthened partnership, renewed commitment, better understanding of roles, and improved communication.

### **Introducing Conservation Planning and Smart Growth Concepts**

In the collaboration with the ELRC, the Cornell team focused mainly on applying landscape ecology analytical tools to conserve the scenic surroundings. Landscape conservation was described as maintaining and enhancing the functional elements critical to a community's sense of place (e.g., landscape diversity and water quality) and blending such interests as farmland protection, biodiversity conservation, historic preservation, sustainable development, and community building. The landscape conservation process



introduced was threefold: mapping and inventorying all important natural and cultural elements, developing conservation plans, and taking action to conserve landscape diversity through partnerships and projects. The team also focused on strengthening the ability of the ELRC to be more strategic in selecting target conservation opportunities.

Several key principles of smart growth—including natural resource and working lands protection and stakeholder involvement—drove our attempts at helping community leaders and decision makers to preserve the rural character of the community and protect significant environmental resources. To achieve these two objectives, the team used innovative technologies and participatory planning processes. As the collaboration expanded to include other community partners, a variety of smart growth strategies were utilized: (1) developing a system of greenways and trails, (2) building collaborations among local government officials to focus on a regional perspective toward land use and open space protection, (3) collecting data on natural resources, biodiversity, agriculture, cultural heritage, and development trends through a systematic inventory, and (4) encouraging the NTC to design and implement zoning and other regulatory and programmatic tools to protect natural resources and working lands.

The participatory strategies utilized by the Cornell partnership also urged citizen and stakeholder involvement in developing the various products and the subsequent drive by the NTC to generate a multimunicipal comprehensive plan. For instance, the GIS-driven data analysis conducted by Cornell students was based on interviews with local stakeholders and yielded information that would have been difficult to obtain through traditional sources.

The team realized, however, that while many of the smart growth strategies were conceptually sound, the unique aspects of the NTC area required innovation. A distinction lay between the broader smart growth tools and the more specific “Smart Growth Toolbox” of ordinances, design overlays, and other regulatory practices. Once the NTC process began, the team soon found that many of the tools of smart growth did not appeal to rural stakeholders as effective solutions for preserving rural character. Similarly, a number of the smart growth options discussed in the conservation planning course required significant adaptation to the rural setting. As only one community in the study area had dense residential development and its land prices were low, density bonuses for development and conservation design options were poorly suited. Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs were also difficult to promote because of the quantity of open and inexpensive land, the small market for dense development, and the increased rate of farm loss. Unlike in areas such as southeastern Pennsylvania, prime agricultural land was removed from production in Susquehanna County not for development, but by poor

commodity prices and lack of interest among family members in keeping up the family farm.

Finally, one smart growth tool—differential tax assessment for agricultural properties (known as the Clean and Green program in Pennsylvania)—appeared to work against the stated objective of protecting farm- and forestland and instead encouraged purchases of land for subdivision. Because Clean and Green requires a ten-acre parcel or larger for admission to the program, and subsequent assessment of land at agricultural/forest value instead of best use value, many property owners in Susquehanna County have subdivided larger parcels while simultaneously discontinuing production. The result is a landscape riddled with ghost subdivisions, increased fragmentation of rural land, and a reduced tax base for local government services. Hence, a smart growth tool helpful in a high-growth area proved a hindrance for sound land use and planned development in a rural setting (Berger 2002, 14).

### ***What Was Learned in the Process?***

The collaboration made it clear that open and frequent communication among all partners is essential. Throughout the process, the Cornell team sought to better understand the roles played by the foundation, the department, and the ELRC. Clarifying the specific contribution of each player has led to more precise detailing of product and process expectations.

The team also learned that utilizing contemporary GIS technologies is essential to engaging local partners. The ELRC's *Natural Resource Guide and Inventory and Conservation Plan* and the *Resource Inventory and Report* for the NTC all made extensive use of GIS technology to portray resource information. Each inventory identified, mapped, and quantified areas of conservation significance, cultural heritage, water quality, and other functions. GIS may also be employed to overcome resistance to zoning by focusing on potential development outcomes on the landscape. As in many other rural counties, when the partnership began, none of the local governments that constituted the NTC had passed a zoning ordinance, and land use regulation through zoning was a contentious topic. Through a community-based GIS approach, which emphasized local knowledge of resources and resulted in a broad array of information layers and maps, the compatibility of zoning with resource and landscape protection became evident to many NTC participants. Resistance to zoning abated as local leaders could envision which resources might potentially be lost or protected by a zoning classification system.

But not all smart growth tools work as designed in rural areas; sometimes they require adaptation to the landscape, development patterns, and economy of the region. Smart growth for a rural setting is different from

those for other environments, and university curricula do not always illustrate the differences. Students enrolled in the conservation planning course noticed that the growth management and agricultural preservation techniques taught in class and in other courses in the university did not accurately reflect these differences.

Multimunicipal thinking, a shared understanding of issues, overall receptivity to fresh ideas, and a willingness to take political risk are all key elements of the NTC's planning endeavors. A combination of these four characteristics in the leadership team that created the NTC guaranteed its success and provided a foundation for a workable multimunicipal comprehensive plan. Another lesson learned was that revisions to state planning enabling law and program funds dedicated to emphasizing those revisions can have a direct and profound effect on innovation at the local government level. In recent years the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has been at the forefront of progressive land use legislation to protect thousands of acres of agricultural lands, open space, and natural resources, while encouraging regional planning and maintaining local authority over land use. The revisions to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) in 2000, known as Growing Smarter acts 67 and 68, provided a number of innovative land-use tools and paved the way for a legally recognized multimunicipal planning process. Municipalities thus gained relief from the "any and all land uses" rule requiring each community to provide for all land uses within its borders. Growing Smarter allowed communities to spread land uses among all municipalities *within* the multimunicipal comprehensive plan. This change was significant, because fear of specific land uses was a strong catalyst for NTC cooperation, and the ability to designate undesirable zones across a wider geographic area was viewed favorably. In addition, grant money set aside by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) for contracting outside consultant services to develop the NTC's multimunicipal comprehensive plan spurred the NTC's smart growth innovations. By securing outside funding for the comprehensive plan, the NTC ensured that the resource data collected by the Cornell team would be used systematically as part of a broader land use plan.

### ***Operational Issues: Opportunities and Challenges***

The volunteer organizational leaders with whom the Cornell team worked in Susquehanna County are an exceptional group of advocates committed to protecting the quality of life in this rural area. They have astounded the team on many occasions by their generosity, thoughtfulness, and determination. But as these projects evolved, their limitations were recognized, particularly

of time, and the team made special efforts to sustain communication and to focus on administrative and logistical details.

Land trusts have been criticized by some as elitist groups seeking to protect their own conservation interests without regard to other environmental and social justice issues (Raymond and Fairfax 2002, 638). The ELRC has received this criticism from local residents who considered their initial focus to be too narrowly related to their own property concerns. As the focus of the ELRC has expanded both geographically and conceptually during this project, the organization is now seen as a valued resource to other conservation efforts, both private and public. The Cornell collaboration helped the conservancy enhance its credibility, but its presence and participation in community-based efforts were the primary catalyst for change.

With limited resources, the question always remains, how can a land trust get the biggest conservation payoff? One reason the Cornell team sought to bridge private conservation efforts (ELRC) with public planning efforts (NTC) was to make fuller use of the resource information and conservation planning ideas. The team realized that it could achieve a greater conservation payoff by enlarging the discussion about resource issues.

## **Outcomes**

### ***Local Impacts***

The ELRC is now at the threshold of achieving its goal to help “preserve the area’s rural character and natural environment” (Edward L. Rose Conservancy 2001, 1). Since 1999, the partnership between ELRC and Cornell has resulted in a greater understanding of the area’s natural and cultural resources. All participants in the process recognize that the ELRC’s aim to protect area rural attributes depends on responsive local planning, sustaining working landscapes, and paying attention to specific conservation opportunities. Considerable progress was made in organizational development during this period, including the establishment of an executive director position. Additionally, the graduate student supported through the ELRC partnership completed a master’s project titled *The Montrose Heritage Greenway: A Planning Guide and Summary of Recommendations*. The ELRC subsequently received a state planning grant to contract with a consultant to further the effort.

The NTC initially regarded the Cornell collaboration as supportive, non-threatening, and attractive because of Cornell’s prestige (Gross 2002, 4). Some observers considered the collaboration to be a prime impetus to the formation of the NTC. Its teaming up with the university captured public attention and enabled the NTC leadership to more fully comprehend the

issues. Further, the discussion of bylaws has led to specific follow-up actions. The NTC has recently been awarded a Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development Grant to continue its comprehensive planning effort.

### *University Impacts*

Faculty and staff characterized the partnership as a “conservation laboratory” linked to their ongoing resource management, landscape ecology, and public policy research interests. It allowed them to test and work through new conservation strategies and tools derived from natural resources research and to better appreciate issues faced by land trusts. Students in courses participating in this collaboration had a chance to apply their knowledge and skills in a real community situation. Individual trips to the area provided firsthand looks at community issues and rural life in Pennsylvania. Student interns learned how to organize community-based projects.

The greatest reward for Cornell faculty and students has come directly from the people with whom the team worked in Susquehanna County; local residents have made a special effort to express their gratitude. They characterized the Cornell group as “open, honest, professional, and practical” (Gross 2002, 4). Similarly, the Cornell team valued the sincerity, generosity, and dedication of their hosts. The Pennsylvania House of Representatives also recognized the Cornell team for its “unique planning and conservation partnership with the people of Susquehanna County” (Pennsylvania House of Representatives 2002).

### *Challenges in Producing Outcomes*

The intensity of these projects, together with the logistical complexity of workshops and field trips, tested local sponsors’ capacity to meet all their commitments. Although this was never a major problem, it did strain relationships at times and put an additional burden on the Cornell organizers. Maintaining oversight of multiple ongoing projects involving several different local organizations, courses, graduate students, and staff was also a formidable challenge.

Susquehanna County is at very least a ninety-minute car trip from the Cornell campus. Although maintaining direct contact with local sponsors was not easy, the team made at least two weekly trips to the area during the course of the most intense work. E-mail and phone communication proved essential and quite productive. Nonetheless, multiple projects called for careful attention to communication needs.

## Conclusions

### *What the Cornell Team Would Do Differently*

Using resources to provide for a graduate student scholarship proved to be the most challenging way to support the collaboration. Finding a balance between meeting the academic demands of a graduate program and attending to community organizing aspects of the project was difficult for all parties. In addition, the scope of the project was changed frequently, and the travel logistics proved complex. Nonetheless, the student successfully completed the project, and the participants in the process were pleased with the outcome. University–land trust collaborations present excellent opportunities to utilize graduate research, but the projects need to be carefully mapped out to meet all the expectations. If the team were to start this collaboration anew, a graduate student would be chosen who is at the research phase, having completed his or her coursework.

### *Perspective Changes at the University and Local Levels*

Cornell's involvement has helped the ELRC become more science-based as it seeks land protection opportunities. The *Conservation Plan* considers a host of different natural and cultural resource protection criteria that result in a more defensible approach to project selection. The ELRC also has expanded its area of interest and engaged the community in conservation planning, including the launching of a greenway project. According to one NTC member, working with Cornell has helped them to start thinking positively about the area's future and how it can grow in smart ways (Gross 2002, 4). For the university, the DNR is now more comfortable in pursuing partnerships with community-based groups. Moreover, the experience has introduced it to the promise of more direct involvement with the land trust community.

The Cornell partnership with the ELRC continues. Another DNR faculty member has capitalized on the resource inventory and planning efforts to help the ELRC further understand the ecology of its current holdings as well as to identify specific conservation targets to add to its project portfolio. The Cornell team recently arranged a day-long exchange between NTC leaders and local officials in the Tug Hill region of New York, near Syracuse. The Tug Hill Cooperative Council has a twenty-five-year history of multimunicipal planning and has much to share with the NTC. Participants from New York and Pennsylvania state agencies, local officials, and land trust leaders spent the day learning about the Tug Hill experience. A similar exchange is planned in Susquehanna County.

### *Transferability*

Most of the 1,300 land trusts in the United States are in close proximity to a university or college. The authors hope that this case study will inspire land trust leaders and college faculties to explore direct collaborations. Although an assessment of the current level of university involvement with land trusts has not been made, clearly the most frequent connection between local land trusts and area colleges centers on biologists and ecologists sharing their knowledge of a local area as board members or as technical advisers. A less common but major resource are faculty and students who may be enlisted through courses and applied research. This case study outlines a number of different contributions by these individuals, from basic resource inventory and assessment to more direct planning efforts.

The Cornell collaboration with the ELRC demonstrates the importance of identifying a local source of funding such as a community foundation of a kind to invest in the land trust–college partnership. As well, land trusts should expand their involvement with local planning agencies, because land trusts have much to offer in the way of resource information and conservation strategies. As communities seek to apply smart growth principles, land trusts can team up with college faculty to collect natural and cultural resource information, to analyze the current planning framework, and to apply special assessment tools like build-out analyses.

### *Important Issues for Replication*

University collaborations with land trusts should be multidisciplinary. The Cornell-ELRC collaboration assembled faculty, staff, and students from natural resource disciplines, landscape architecture, and planning. The team leader had training in natural resources and a PhD in planning. The part-time staff member had degrees in landscape architecture, environmental management, and law. Their combined multidisciplinary perspectives were essential to the success of the effort. Universities need, as well, to introduce the best thinking about landscape science and planning practice that considers smart growth. Every land trust is organized differently and has its own particular fit in its community. University faculty, staff, and students can assist land trusts achieve more community-supportable outcomes through tighter accountabilities, enhanced scientific integrity, and with attention to social equity issues; in other words, they can help refresh objectivity and widen community contribution. The Cornell team can claim without hesitation that through its involvement, the ELRC has adapted to a much more community-based mandate, establishing its conservation voice in the area.

### Acknowledgments

The authors give special recognition to their colleague John Barney, a key catalyst and contributor to much of the work described in this case study. He is now a consultant in Albuquerque, New Mexico, working in conservation planning and landscape design. We also express our appreciation to Edward L. Rose Conservancy administrators and the many other community leaders and volunteers without whom none of this would have happened.

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## **United Growth: Michigan State University's Rural and Urban Land Use Strategy in West Michigan**

*Richard W. Jelier, Carol L. Townsend,  
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Recognizing the need for a united coalition to address sprawl issues in West Michigan, Michigan State University (MSU) in 1999 developed United Growth, an organization that unifies urban and rural interests. United Growth's mission is to contribute to the development of a vibrant and sustainable West Michigan region by forming a stable, citizen-based coalition of rural, urban, and suburban residents focused on promoting positive land use. From the beginning the project has concentrated smart growth efforts at the county level, despite the blurred lines of the metropolitan region that extend beyond county borders.

Two citizen committees guide the project. The rural committee primarily educates landowners, developers, and township officials on the tools and techniques to preserve farmland and natural resources, promotes agricultural productivity, and provides alternatives to low-density development. The urban committee addresses the disinvestment and abandonment associated with urban sprawl by assisting community-based organizations in mitigating specific manifestations of sprawl in their central city neighborhoods. In addition to the standing committees, more than eighty-five organizations have joined United Growth as project partners, extending the networking function and stakeholder participation of the program.

United Growth demonstrates that rural and urban residents have enough in common to significantly impact land use decisions. Three primary goals have driven the joint coalition: (1) promoting public education around land use issues, (2) building the capacity of organizations that impact land use

decisions, and (3) pursuing applied community leadership and policy development. Dozens of individual projects and activities have been created around these goals. In its sixth year of operation, United Growth has become a model organization for grassroots engagement around land use. The program is comprehensive in incorporating the community and fostering strong relationships between interests that likely never would have met, unique in its special linkages between rural and urban constituencies, innovative in its approaches to combat sprawl, and inclusive in mobilizing not just MSU but other regional colleges and universities.

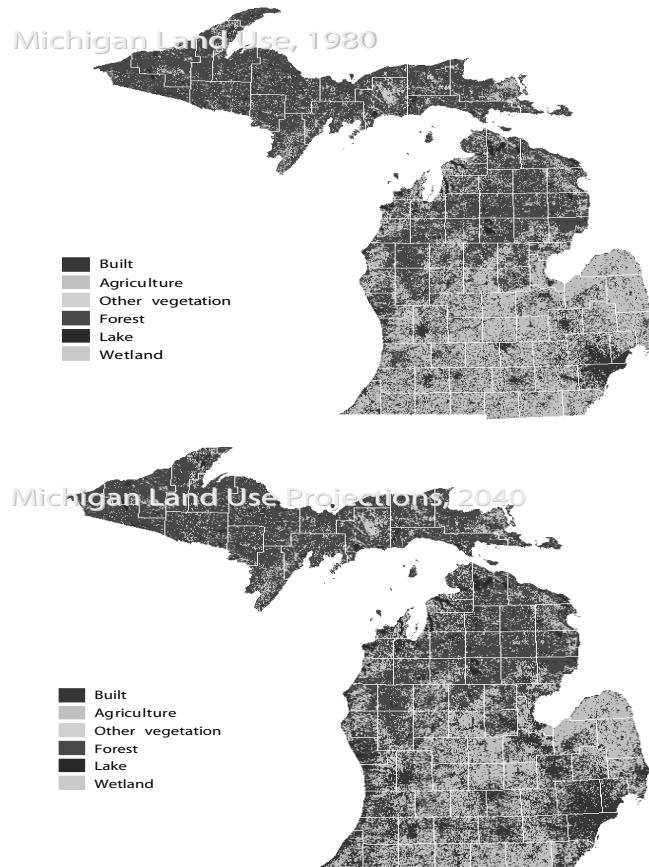
### **Urban Sprawl in West Michigan**

Kent County, home to Michigan's second largest city, Grand Rapids, is a rapidly urbanizing area in one of the fastest sprawling metropolitan regions in the United States. It is the most urbanized county in West Michigan and yet the fifth most productive agricultural county in the state (Kleweno and Mathews 2002, 71). For the past twenty years, land in Kent County has been consumed by development four times faster than population growth (Kent County Land Cover 1997). In 1960 the Grand Rapids urbanized area (central city and contiguous suburbs) numbered 294,000 residents in 94 square miles of urbanized land; by 1990 the urbanized area included 436,000 residents in 223 square miles of urbanized land. The population grew by 48 percent, and the amount of land used to accommodate the increased population rose 137 percent (Rusk, Orfield, and Richmond 1997, 3). According to the latest U.S. Census of Agriculture data, Kent County lost 36,750 acres of farmland, 16.5 percent of total acreage, between 1982 and 1997. In February 2001 *USA Today* ranked the metropolitan Grand Rapids region as the sixth most sprawling area in the nation (of regions of 1 million or more people). Michigan land use projections portray a clear trend toward significant loss of agricultural land in West Michigan (see Figure 9.1).

It is estimated that between 1990 and 2020 there will be a 63 to 87 percent increase in Michigan's developed land, accompanied by only 11.8 percent population growth. Putting this into perspective, the amount of currently undeveloped land to be converted to residential and commercial use that will accompany the projected population increase of 1.1 million people will be roughly the same size as the land that served 9.2 million people during the entire state's history up to 1987 (Machemer, Kaplowitz, and Edens 1999, 6).

Kent County, in particular, is at a critical juncture. With a population of 574,335 in 2000, a 14.7 percent increase since the 1990 census, the county proved to be the appropriate physical setting for a partnership such as United Growth. In a population study, Nederveld Associates (2002) projected that

Figure 9.1 Michigan land use, 1980 and 2040



Source: Michigan Land Resource Project. Used by permission.

Kent County will grow another 197,864, or 34.5 percent, between 2000 and 2020, while the state of Michigan is expected to grow only about 5.2 percent during that same period. A more recent study by David Skole (2001) on Michigan land resources forecasts land use pattern changes in 2020 and 2040 based on current trends. The project demonstrates the need for immediate action to change current inefficient land use patterns before Michigan's land-based industries, which include agriculture, forestry, mining, and tourism, are dramatically weakened. Together, these resource-based industries account for \$63.2 billion in Michigan's economy (Skole 2001, 2).

MSU Extension conducted its own comprehensive survey of 3,076 agri-

cultural landowners in Kent County, which revealed alarming concerns. Over 75 percent of the more than 1,000 landowners who responded to the survey revealed that they had been farming for an average of fifty-eight years, yet 45 percent responded that they planned to sell their land for retirement. Furthermore, 67 percent reported that they were not able to make a profit from farming, while 74 percent agreed their land is more valuable for development than for farming. About 53 percent of landowners were not familiar with farmland preservation programs, including Purchase of Development Rights, Agriculture Security Zones, or Transfer of Development Rights (Bulten and Schaaf 1998, 3).

Central city Grand Rapids neighborhoods also had been showing signs of abandonment and disinvestments associated with urban sprawl. Most of these neighborhoods continued to lose population and several fell below 50 percent home ownership rate (Grand Rapids 1990 Census Profile). Despite a robust regional economy, the city is increasingly becoming poorer in comparison to the region. According to Rusk, Orfield, and Richmond (1997, 9), in 1970 the city of Grand Rapids commanded 88 percent of the average regional household income. By 1990 that share had slipped to 81 percent. Neighborhood commercial districts were also deteriorating and were no longer effectively serving the needs of their residents. Looking at the city of Detroit in the eastern part of the state, Grand Rapids could see clearly the negative consequences of unplanned growth in the region, resulting in disinvestment in the core city, overdevelopment on the rural edges of the metropolis, and pronounced racial and economic segregation.

### **Organizational History of United Growth and Role of MSU**

In response to such trends, including urban core disinvestments, low-density land use patterns, loss of farmland, and deteriorating urban infrastructure, the United Growth project was born. Such a pioneering program is consistent with Michigan State University's status as the nation's first land grant university, which was instituted through the Morrill Act of 1862. An integral dimension of the act was public service, and a major feature of the land grant idea was that the work of scholars, particularly their research, could be directed toward serving utilitarian needs. MSU Extension was established in 1914 through the Smith-Lever Act, creating a longstanding affiliation for the university with farming and rural Michigan, with Extension agents operating in each of the state's eighty-three counties. Urban sprawl undermines both of these directives and provides an ideal opportunity for the engaged land grant university to advocate for positive land use planning, despite any controversy.

The seeds for United Growth were cultivated in large part by the Frey

Foundation, which formerly had directed resources to address urban sprawl in Grand Traverse County in northern Michigan. The foundation had invited regional government advocates and authors David Rusk (1993, 1999) and Myron Orfield (1997, 1999, 2003) to West Michigan to examine sprawling land use patterns. Local political and business leaders were already engaged in regional issues through the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC), founded in 1988, and the West Michigan Strategic Alliance, launched in 2001. The Frey Foundation was interested in supporting a non-CEO approach that was more grassroots and representative of farmers, neighborhoods, religious organizations, and other community-based groups. The foundation awarded a grant of \$176,400 for United Growth's startup efforts; support from other funders has grown throughout the project. From 1999 to 2003 United Growth was able to generate over \$800,000 from more than twenty-five foundation and funding agencies, including the Americana Foundation, Comerica Bank, EPA's Environmental Education Grants Program, Grand Rapids Community Foundation, Steelcase Foundation, and People and Land (a project of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation).

Much of the early success of United Growth can be attributed to the direct involvement of MSU, which brought critical resources to the partnership, including financial backing, office space and supplies, utilities, salary and benefits, legal assistance, taxes and audits, and personnel administration. MSU also has provided a large share of funding; by 2003 it covered 32 percent of total operational costs (not including in-kind contributions). All told, this is a large investment, needed not only to adequately fund the project but also to demonstrate to the broader community MSU's support of United Growth.

MSU, through Kent/MSU Extension and the MSU Center for Urban Affairs-Grand Rapids (MSU/CUA), also served as the coordinating bodies for United Growth. United Growth invited full participation from other key area universities and schools, including Calvin College, Aquinas College, and Grand Valley State University. Faculty and students from MSU and other participating colleges have provided significant technical assistance on United Growth projects. United Growth then solicited project partners to help build the regional coalition, which would soon encompass more than eighty-five West Michigan organizations, touching every aspect of land use (see appendix to this chapter). Each organization formally commits to providing support and expertise to United Growth initiatives.

As with many university efforts, the success of United Growth has been dependent on grant funds. If the West Michigan funding environment had not been conducive to supporting projects like this, MSU never could have initiated United Growth. Due to this reliance on grants, United Growth generally plans only on twelve-month schedules, which has led to problems in

creating comprehensive project goals and a long-term funding plan. Another weakness has been lack of a formal evaluation of the entire project.

### **United Growth's Three-Tier Approach**

The partnership is geared to changing long-standing land use patterns. At the very beginning, United Growth established a three-pronged strategy for developing the coalition, based on its primary goals for land use: promoting public education, capacity building, and developing community leadership and policy. Project planners knew that focus on the public education phase was important because the issue of urban sprawl was not fully understood by many local actors at that time. United Growth started using a second strategy of capacity building by working with the Kent County townships on the rural side and with Grand Rapids neighborhood and community associations on the urban side. The third strategy of applied leadership and policy development saw committee members taking more active roles in legislative and policy matters.

#### ***Public Education***

The first tier, public education, promotes grassroots awareness of current land use patterns and their implications for policy makers, educators, students, area practitioners, local citizens, and the media. United Growth's accomplishments in this area are especially noteworthy. As an educational tool, United Growth takes national trends and programs and from them articulates a local vision, adapting broad smart growth principles grounded in the West Michigan community.

United Growth has an annual project partners meeting, where participants listen to a keynote address and learn about all the partner projects related to the region's smart growth activities. United Growth also publishes a quarterly newsletter that is mailed to almost 10,000 households in Kent County and all the local, county, state, and federally elected officials as well as many statewide organizations. A comprehensive land use Web site (<http://www.msue.msu.edu/unitedgrowth>) links to most of the eighty-five project partner organizations and provides hundreds of resources and related links of interest to teachers, students, and practitioners in West Michigan. As part of its public education focus, United Growth publishes a list of current land use events, updates the activities of the urban and rural committees, and provides the online newsletter. The United Growth coalition has generated a database of more than 1,500 participants, which has become an important resource for information, mailings, upcoming meetings, and updates, and is

used by a variety of organizations concerned with land use. The program provides frequent topical educational workshops on land use issues to a variety of organizations and has become a resource for the local media.

### *Capacity Building*

The second tier, capacity building, equips community residents and organizations with skills and tools to implement both land preservation and urban redevelopment. The rural and urban committees have worked together to implement the Mini Grant program that provides assistance to small-scale community land use projects in both rural and urban settings.

The rural component of United Growth has pursued several strategies to assist townships in preparing for development and managing it when it does occur. It has:

- Identified prime and unique farmland and natural resource areas that should be considered for preservation, and created and implemented a survey measuring the public's estimation of the value of farmland preservation.
- Implemented a Citizen Planner Program that has trained more than sixty citizens, township planning commissioners, and zoning board of appeals members on key planning tools and methods. This noncredit course series leads to an optional certificate of competency awarded by MSU in land use and community planning with the successful completion of six core classes and a service project. United Growth has helped secure funding for thirty-two citizen planner scholarships. In northern Michigan, according to Wiesing (1996), the average planning commissioner term is two years. High turnover makes this training invaluable if not imperative.
- Played a significant role in the passage of a four-step conservation site planning process by Cannon township as a result of a United Growth-sponsored workshop. Indeed, classes on cluster development in Cannon township actually implemented a cluster development ordinance.
- Conducted an educational series designed on open-space conservation and compact design for sixteen townships (by national expert Randall Arendt and MSU faculty). As a result of the series, three townships in Kent County implemented open-space design ordinances. Arendt's concepts were incorporated into new state legislation in 2001, requiring about half of Michigan's local units of government (based on population) to adopt an open-space development ordinance.
- Assisted fruit growers on the "Fruit Ridge" in organizing and exploring

economic development opportunities, working to unify growers and townships. The Fruit Ridge is one of the most fertile fruit growing regions in the United States. The project has promoted its markets, historical sites, and attractions in an effort to increase profitability in farming, which will aid land preservation efforts. The project has helped the growers create Ridge Economic Agricultural Partners (REAP), a 501(C)3 organization, to formalize the partnership between Fruit Ridge growers and help ensure that its efforts will continue.

- Conducted four “Tours de Sprawl” of West Michigan for local leaders and created an educational Tour de Sprawl video for instructional use. The bus tour through inner-city neighborhoods, suburban congestion, and farming areas around Grand Rapids is narrated along a planned route. The local Catholic diocese, after participating in the United Growth Tour de Sprawl has made smart growth a key platform to engage parishioners, now incorporating Catholic pastoral positions to land use in eleven Michigan counties.
- Provided scholarships for twelve individuals to attend an Ultimate Farmland Preservation Tour to learn best practices in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey over a four-year period.

The urban component of United Growth has pursued a variety of community-based strategies for the redevelopment and revitalization of central city neighborhoods. It has:

- Actively involved itself with the city of Grand Rapids Master Planning process, the first revision since 1963. In the new land use plan recently published, mixed use is a key strategy for central city redevelopment. United Growth held workshops with the city manager, planning director, and master plan community organizer for input and discussion.
- Partnered with South West Area Neighbors (SWAN) for two years in a neighborhood planning process. A leadership team of eight to ten residents was organized and led the neighborhood through the planning process. Three action teams helped to implement the action plan. Two “neighborhood summits” were organized by SWAN and the leadership team that involved more than 125 people. The housing action team and SWAN won a zoning victory with the city, downzoning part of the neighborhood to single-family, residential. A neighborhood-wide cleanup, with flower planting and other beautification measures, was held.
- Conducted a study of the SWAN business corridor. MSU urban and regional planning students recommended improvements and received the annual student award from the Michigan Society of Planners. The



planning process was written into a step-by-step manual entitled *Building Great Neighborhoods* so that other neighborhoods in Grand Rapids could follow this process. There is interest from a statewide urban initiative, the MSU Urban Collaborators, in making the manual available across the state. The Grand Rapids Planning Department has assured SWAN that the land use parts of their neighborhood plan will be incorporated into the city's master plan through an amendment process.

- Invited national expert Dan Burden of Walkable Communities to lead a walking tour in the Creston and Stockbridge business districts in Grand Rapids.
- Published a gentrification study on two target Grand Rapids neighborhoods, documenting the process of gentrification in one neighborhood and describing the potential in the other.
- Consulted on a redesign project of an urban pocket park that was experiencing problems with loitering and alcohol consumption and worked on crime prevention through physical design. MSU landscape architecture students prepared twenty-six designs for the park.
- Studied redevelopment along a key historic main street in Grand Rapids. Published the Wealthy Theatre District Historic Revitalization Plan, which mapped every commercial parcel, created visual maps, collaborated with other local organizations, including local neighborhood associations, business districts, schools, churches, and the city planning department.

### ***Applied Community Leadership and Policy Development***

The third tier, applied community leadership and policy development, works to advance change to promote better land use strategies. The joint urban and rural legislative committee strives to create important links with local and state policy makers. Michigan passed term-limit provisions in the state legislature in 1992 (three two-year terms in the house and two four-year terms in the senate), and this constant turnover is viewed by some as the major obstacle for land use reform. United Growth has met with each of the eleven house and senate representatives for Kent County and maintains important connections during the legislative session each year. The joint legislative committee meets monthly and tracks important state legislation, including monitoring and reviewing relevant bills to promote positive land use policies. They report their recommendations for action to the rural and urban committees, which must give approval. United Growth has become a vital resource on land use for elected officials at the city, county, and state levels.

### **United Growth's Key Projects**

Of the dozens of United Growth initiatives, a select few will be illustrated here in greater depth. First, United Growth partnered with a Grand Rapids neighborhood to identify and consider the negative effects of sprawl on their community. Second, a youth land use learning series for Michigan's K-12 schools was developed. Third, United Growth joined forces with a township facing intense development pressure resulting in an open-space ordinance. Finally, the passage of a county-wide purchase of development rights program provided testament to the importance of the United Growth coalition.

#### ***Garfield Park Neighborhoods Association (GPNA) Project***

The project undertaken in partnership with the Garfield Park Neighborhoods Association (GPNA) is an example of how United Growth's urban committee has implemented a citizen-based approach to urban land use planning. With limited funding, neighborhood associations usually do not have the resources to conduct research and technical work on their own; United Growth has provided assistance on a number of neighborhood revitalization projects.

The Garfield Park neighborhood is a diverse area in Grand Rapids and has one of the larger neighborhood associations with more than five thousand households. Since public education about sprawl is a principal strategy of the United Growth framework, several research and informational pieces were developed for GPNA. United Growth documented the decline in household income in the neighborhood, the decline in the white population, the decline in school test results, and how these specifics fit into the overall picture of resources leaving the city as a result of sprawl. The information was presented to the association's staff and board of directors. When asked to identify one issue related to urban sprawl, they instead named three:

- Negative perception of a local elementary school, Dickinson School, even though it has excellent test scores and is highly rated;
- Significantly lower than the city average home ownership rates in the Dickinson School area; and
- Crime/drug activity in the commercial area located one block from Dickinson School.

The neighborhood and United Growth worked together to identify strategies that would deal with these three issues. The project was able to acquire a \$4,000 grant to develop marketing materials that highlight the positives of Dickinson School to the surrounding neighborhood. An MSU economic de-

velopment class studied the small commercial corridor where drug activity occurred to consider what could be done to revitalize the business district. MSU conducted a survey of the houses in that part of the Garfield Park neighborhood, analyzing their condition, determining whether they are owned or rented, and gathering other baseline data; they then prepared a research report for the neighborhood.

In such a process, it is extremely important that community-based organizations gain the skills needed to properly put to use these tools and programs. Some of the specific activities undertaken to build the capacity of the GPNA to mobilize its residents and implement their revitalizing strategies include:

- Writing a proposal to a local foundation to financially support the project, especially staff time—\$75,000 for three years was obtained;
- Surveying the Dickinson neighborhood to measure the attitudes of neighbors toward the school. A business class from Calvin College assisted the marketing committee in carrying out the survey. The information served as the basis for the development of a promotional brochure that was widely distributed within the neighborhood and elsewhere as well.
- Conducting multiple workshops on how to become a homeowner were held at GPNA's office, and participants were encouraged to buy in the Dickinson neighborhood;
- Encouraging neighborhood cleanup and beautification efforts; and
- Organizing residents into block clubs to fight crime as well as provide input on how the commercial area should be redeveloped.

Through partnership with United Growth, GPNA has become very proactive in attacking this multifaceted social and spatial phenomenon called urban sprawl.

### *“This Land Is Your Land” Learning Series*

Land use has been named as the number one issue confronting Michigan's environment and yet was not a topic included in the K-12 curriculum. Without education, we cannot expect future leaders to be willing and able to change and improve current land use patterns. In summer 2000 the rural committee of United Growth embarked on creating a curriculum, “This Land Is Your Land: Lesson Plans for Land Use,” designed to help students grow and develop into involved citizens who are literate in positive land use. Several grants were obtained to hire a curriculum consultant and pay for related project expenses.

The resulting curriculum, designed by United Growth members and the consultant, is linked to state testing standards and raises the students' consciousness about the importance of land use and growth management. Four

primary units of emphases were established: community, geography, environment, and civics. After close examination of the standards, third, fourth, and fifth grades were identified as the levels where land use issues would best fit the state and local curriculum standards.

In fall 2001 “This Land Is Your Land” was reviewed and piloted in 15 classrooms, reaching approximately 375 students from several West Michigan area schools as well as one district near Lansing. In early spring 2001 and in 2002, the curriculum was featured at the Michigan Council for the Social Studies annual conference, which attracts social studies and civics teachers at all levels from around the state. The series was completed in winter 2002 and launched in early 2003. The Youth Land Use Curriculum also involves frequent teacher training. More than 75 teachers received in-service training for the curriculum. Starting in 2004, MSU Extension is developing a statewide youth land use educational program based on “This Land Is Your Land” curricular materials.

“This Land Is Your Land” will help young people contribute solutions to current and future land use issues. In an effort to make the learning series as accessible as possible, it was made available for downloading from the Kent/MSU Extension Web site (<http://www.msue.msu.edu/kent/yourland>). A brochure for marketing the curriculum was also printed to promote the materials in intermediate school districts, including every school in Kent County, professional teacher organizations, and others. The brochure includes a CD-ROM of the learning series. All MSU Extension offices in eighty-three counties have been informed of the series and encouraged to post the Web site link on their home page. “This Land Is Your Land” includes:

- Creative teaching strategies and learning methods with experiential and hands-on components;
- Lesson plans that meet the Michigan Curriculum Framework Content Standards and Benchmarks and prepare students for Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) testing;
- An introduction to controversial land use issues, presenting all sides of an issue in a fair and honest manner;
- Projects at the end of each unit that can be displayed; and
- Additional background information, data, facts, resources, and reference material for each lesson plan.

The series was also highlighted at the fall 2002 United Growth project partners meeting as a great success and example of how different land use interests can work together and create a useful public education tool. “This Land Is Your Land” was also featured in several member and partner news-

letters, Web sites, and conferences, including the American Planning Society's national conference in 2003. Today the Web site receives approximately one thousand hits per month from educators all over the United States. In Michigan, more than fifty school districts have been directly informed of the series and have used the materials.

### *Open Space Preservation in Vergennes Township*

Vergennes township in southeastern Kent County is a rural community of rolling hills, winding tree-lined roads, historical covered bridges, and family farms. Due to new highway construction, growth toward Lansing (the state capital) and excellent schools, Vergennes is experiencing development pressure. United Growth partnered with the township for three initiatives during a four-year period to respond to the township's desire to promote open space preservation.

### *Better Designs for Development in a Michigan Workshop*

Randall Arendt, an internationally recognized expert on open-space conservation development, collaborated with MSU Extension land use experts to design a four-session, hands-on workshop on the four-step method to open-space conservation development design. The Better Designs workshop was offered to township officials and residents at no charge through a grant from United Growth.

### *Citizen Planner Program*

To build upon the knowledge gained by the Better Designs workshop, United Growth brought MSU Extension's Citizen Planner Program to the community. Session topics include the basics of planning and zoning, legal foundations, subdivision regulations, open-space conservation techniques, running effective meetings, and managing conflict. United Growth secured grant funding to support scholarships for area residents to attend the ten-session training program. More than forty-five area residents participated in the program.<sup>1</sup>

Using the knowledge they had acquired, the Vergennes Township Planning Commission appointed an open-space preservation committee to promote citizen awareness of the issue and the techniques that can be implemented. The committee successfully sponsored two events targeted at large-parcel landowners and developers to encourage them to preserve valuable open space. The committee also conducted a township-wide survey to identify lands that residents thought should be preserved.

### *Mini Grants*

The Vergennes open-space committee realized that in order for their goals to be achieved, the township must have an ordinance that encourages developers to preserve open space. United Growth awarded the committee a \$1,100 grant to increase their capacity by hiring a planning consultant to work with them to develop an ordinance. The committee worked for more than six months on the ordinance, which was passed by the board in fall 2002.

United Growth also worked with the township and a private development firm to secure a \$2,800 grant from the Frey Foundation to bring Randall Arendt back to the township to create a site plan for its first open space development. Since 2002, this site plan is still being used as the foundation for the development plan. The proposal is a likely candidate for the first development using the open space ordinance and will serve as a regional model.

### *Purchase of Development Rights Program in Kent County*

A significant event in West Michigan since the inception of United Growth was the passage of Kent County's purchase of development rights (PDR) ordinance. In 2002 the county initiated a PDR program, a voluntary farmland preservation program that pays landowners the fair market value of their development rights in exchange for a permanent agricultural conservation easement on the land. After failing in committee by one vote, the board of commissioners' chairperson used his authority to bring the issue to a full vote of the board, where after heated public debate and intense lobbying it passed by a 14–5 vote. This was the first significant land use effort the county had undertaken since the mid-1970s, and the first policy issue directly acted upon by United Growth.

The rural and urban committees of United Growth passed resolutions to support the PDR program, and many United Growth members directly participated in writing the county ordinance. Staunch opposition was organized, which included the Home and Building Association of Greater Grand Rapids, the Grand Rapids Association of Realtors, and the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce. The Association of Realtors has subsequently withdrawn as a United Growth project partner. To implement the program, the county appointed an agricultural preservation board. Early on, six of the twenty-one townships in Kent County passed resolutions to allow farmers to participate in PDR, even before direct contacts and public relations had been fully employed. At this time, eighteen townships have passed resolutions in support of PDR. The immediate goal is to preserve 25,000 acres of farmland in the county.

The passage of the PDR ordinance is a good example of urban and rural

interests working together to impact policy. The large support of urban committee members and their organizations demonstrated the urban-rural connections. When United Growth started, urban committee members did not even know what PDR was. Then they actively, on their own initiative, participated by testifying at the public hearing, contacting their county commissioner, and other advocacy. Urban committee members demonstrated that they understood how a rural issue is inextricably linked to urban revitalization.

### **Conclusion**

United Growth is a successful model of bringing disparate interests together to form a rural and urban coalition, united around a common framework to promote better land use. The intensity of concerns about the loss of farmland, urban disinvestments, land fragmentation, social and economic polarization, and the general disengagement of community stakeholders around land use decisions, which led to the formation of United Growth, are not unique to West Michigan. Replication of the program's efforts to combine rural expertise and urban engagement is possible in other regions. In Michigan every county has an MSU Extension Service office that provides potential sites for replication across the state. MSU is currently in discussion with Muskegon County, Ottawa County, and Genesee County, which includes Flint. In addition, every state in the nation has an Extension Service through its land grant university, which could perform a similar outreach function if such activity is supported by the larger institution and the local funding community. The United Growth model is especially transferable to all states with a township structure.

At this writing United Growth is at a critical organizational juncture. Land use issues are intensifying in Michigan, with Governor Jennifer Granholm's appointment of the statewide Michigan Land Use Leadership Council, which developed a strategy to promote smart growth and planning coordination. The twenty-six-member bipartisan council was charged with addressing the trends, causes, and consequences of unmanaged growth and development in Michigan. It recently provided recommendations to the governor and the legislature designed to minimize the impact of current land use trends on the state's environment and economy.<sup>2</sup> United Growth could play an important role in implementing the recommendations developed by the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council in West Michigan.

United Growth is now attempting to transition from a solely MSU-managed project to a member-driven effort with a balance between staff and committee members leading the organization. During the transition the project management team has expanded to include more urban and rural committee members. The challenges include working on a sustainable funding strategy

for United Growth to take the partnership into the future, which will likely include membership dues. United Growth has succeeded in achieving the first objective of bringing urban and rural together to promote a joint coalition. The litmus test for the future is whether urban and rural interests can together sustain an organization less dependent on MSU's stewardship.

### **Appendix. United Growth for Kent County Project Partners**

Ada Township  
AJS Realty  
Algoma Township  
Alpine Township  
Americana Foundation  
Aquinas College  
Calvin College  
Cannon Township  
Center for Environmental Study at GRCC  
City of Grand Rapids  
Creston Neighborhood Association (CNA)  
Diocese of Grand Rapids  
Disability Advocates of Kent County  
Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids  
Dyer-Ives Foundation  
East Hills Council of Neighbors (EHCN)  
Fair Housing Center of Greater Grand Rapids  
Frey Foundation  
Gaines Charter Township  
Garfield Park Neighborhoods Association (GPNA)  
GRACE/Faith in Motion  
GRACE/West Michigan Call to Renewal–Urban Sprawl Action Group  
Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce  
Grand Rapids Community Foundation  
Grand Rapids Dominicans  
Grand Rapids REACH, Inc.  
Grand Rapids Urban Cooperation Board  
Grand Valley Metro Council  
Grattan Township  
Habitat for Humanity of Kent County  
Heartside Mainstreet  
Heffron Farms  
Heritage Hill Association (HHA)



Home and Building Association of Greater Grand Rapids  
Home Repair Services  
Howard Christensen Nature Center/Kent ISD  
Inner City Christian Federation  
Interurban Transit Partnership  
Kent County Board of Commissioners  
Kent County Conservation District  
Kent County Michigan Farm Bureau  
Land Conservancy of West Michigan  
Land Information Access Association  
Langworthy Strader LeBlanc & Associates, Inc.  
Lighthouse Communities Inc.  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce  
Madison Area Neighborhood Association (MANA)  
Michigan Catholic Rural Life Coalition  
Michigan Environmental Council  
Michigan Farm Bureau  
Michigan Farmers Union  
Michigan Farmland and Community Alliance  
Michigan Land Use Institute  
Michigan State University  
MSU Center for Urban Affairs CEDP  
MSU Extension Services  
Mountain Ridge Development LLC  
Neighborhood Wetland Stewards  
New England Financial, Agribusiness Unit  
Office of Senator Ken Sikkema  
Pettis & Associates Inc.  
Pulte Homes  
Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute at GVSU  
School of Public and Nonprofit Administration–Grand Valley State University  
South East Community Association (SECA)  
South West Area Neighbors (SWAN)  
Sparta Township  
Standard Federal Bank  
Steelcase Foundation  
The Delta Strategy  
The Right Place Program, Inc.  
Timberland Resource Conservation & Development  
United Methodist Metropolitan Ministry of Greater Grand Rapids

USDA Farm Service Agency  
Vergennes Township  
Wege Foundation  
West Grand Neighborhood Association (WGNA)  
West Michigan Environmental Action Council  
West Michigan Regional Planning Commission

### Notes

1. For more information on MSU Extension's Citizen Planner Program, visit [www.msue.msu.edu/cplanner](http://www.msue.msu.edu/cplanner).

2. See [www.michiganlanduse.org](http://www.michiganlanduse.org).

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## Promoting Smart Growth Through Participation and Partnership: The Community Design Team in Rural West Virginia

*L. Christopher Plein and  
Jeremy Morris*

In spring 1997 West Virginia University began a small-scale and tentative effort to develop teams of faculty, students, and professionals to assist rural communities in identifying challenges and opportunities for community and economic development. The project was called the West Virginia Community Design Team (CDT). Response to the initiative, by communities, academics, and professionals across the state, surpassed expectations. To date, twenty-four communities have participated in the program. The focus and tenor of the visits have varied according to need. Some communities face a loss of population and economic base, a few wrestle with sprawl and strip development as activity moves outside the town centers, and all face difficult choices regarding paths of community and economic development. The program has achieved a high degree of recognition and visibility across the state, not only as a community development approach, but also as a successful university outreach effort.

In addition to providing a case study in university outreach, this analysis illustrates the broad applicability of smart growth principles in the rural setting. Smart growth is primarily associated with urban and suburban contexts. It also has been pursued in some rural community planning and design efforts—especially in places facing pressures from suburban expansion or growth associated with resort and second-home development (Arendt et al. 1994, xix; Wells 2002, 3–4). West Virginia provides another perspective. Smart growth principles have been applied and promoted there in what some schol-

ars (Stewart 1996; Lewis 1998; and Williams 2002) now call a postindustrial rural setting, made up of declining towns—once dependent on such extractive industries as coal and timber—that are experiencing population decline, infrastructure deterioration, and limited economic development prospects and are far from metropolitan growth areas. Through the CDT smart growth is encouraged as a proactive strategy for communities seeking to overcome economic decline and promote development.

### **Program Origins, Approaches, and Evolution**

The West Virginia CDT is not without precedent. The program utilizes approaches from planning and design charrettes, especially those developed by the Minnesota Design Team (Loveridge and Plein 2000, 11–12). Established in the early 1980s, the Minnesota Design Team focuses on community and economic development and is grounded primarily in the design of place and space through architecture, landscape architecture, and related disciplines (Mehrhoff 1999, xiv). University-based community design centers have also provided inspiration for the West Virginia effort. Over time, the CDT has emerged with its own distinct character and approach. For example, whereas the Minnesota team relies primarily on professionals in the field to organize and staff team visits, the West Virginia group depends mostly on faculty and students for this function (Loveridge 2002, 333–34). And although university-community design centers tend to be focused on one or a few disciplines, the CDT is multidisciplinary and more loosely structured than many of these centers. The CDT visits provide guidance on physical design issues for landscape, architecture, and transportation. They also encourage civic engagement and participation to build social capacity (Loveridge and Plein 2000, 12).

Each team consists of between twelve and twenty individuals, and is assembled after the program leader confers with the host community to ascertain the needs and interests to be addressed through the visit. Team participation is voluntary, and members are not compensated for their efforts. Participants represent fields as varied as civil engineering, public administration, sociology, landscape architecture, forestry, medicine, and public health. Visits are characterized by a deep immersion in the social, political, and economic affairs of the community and a concentrated effort to understand the landscape, infrastructure, and physical appearance of the locale. In less than forty-eight hours, the team learns about the community, identifies challenges and opportunities, prioritizes matters to be addressed, makes initial recommendations, plans, and renderings for design and strategy, and convenes the community to share suggested paths of action. The

visits consist of information-gathering sessions that allow input from various stakeholders and the general public, community tours, and work sessions, and conclude with a town meeting where the team's initial recommendations are presented. After the visit, a written report is provided and a follow-up with the community is held approximately six months later (West Virginia CDT Manual 1998, 7–10; Loveridge and Plein 2000, 12; and Loveridge 2002, 338–39).

As a land grant institution, West Virginia University places an emphasis on community outreach and public service. Successful university outreach requires an appreciation of the challenges facing faculty and institutions in engaging in service, and the CDT program has been particularly sensitive to these challenges (Loveridge 2002, 332). Institutional outreach efforts necessitate a balance that provides a framework for service, but does not impose so much structure as to constrain or dictate the type and character of activity. Ideally, the institution should offer opportunities for outreach and blend faculty roles in teaching, research, and service. Thus, the CDT was designed to promote a flexible and integrative approach to faculty participation. A thorough review of the program's features aimed at facilitating participation in the CDT can be found in Loveridge, who identifies several keys to faculty engagement. In reviewing the initial phases of CDT program development and implementation, he notes a variety of factors crucial to success. For example, the time commitment for most faculty is limited to the short design team visit. In addition, faculty are recruited so that they can apply their expertise and engage in "scholarly public service," and they are provided the opportunity to further interact with the community after the visit (Loveridge 2002, 333–35).

Over time, other program features have further strengthened CDT. Initiated with a small seed grant from the university, the program is now sustained through nominal fees charged to participating communities, which help cover transportation and material costs, and through university support, which underwrites staff and overhead costs. The program has become institutionalized, with its own coordinator, office, and Web site. Initially, program operations were more or less ad hoc, with a few faculty members giving time not only to serve on teams but to provide administrative leadership as well. Now, with staff support and resources, the project is able to carry out and sustain multiple activities and visits. The CDT also has benefited from a close association with the West Virginia University Extension Service, which provides such material support as underwriting printing services and hosting the program's Web site. Technical specialists from the Extension, representing such fields as economic development, watershed management, and land use planning, are important members of CDT. County Extension agents help

promote the program, act as liaisons between the community and team in some visits, and often serve as team members.

The CDT program has been very successful in recruiting faculty from across the academic spectrum. Perhaps most significant, a sizable core of faculty have become regular participants in the process, bringing knowledge and experience to each successive visit. By early 2003 more than thirty faculty members had participated in the program. Of these, about twenty-four had been on two or more CDT visits. The program has also offered a valuable learning opportunity for more than seventy students who have served as team members. The Extension Service has provided about twenty team members. In addition, approximately seventy-five have come from outside West Virginia University, including professional landscape architects, representatives of nonprofit community development organizations, state officials from various agencies, and faculty from other academic institutions.

### **Program Implementation: Positive Outcomes and Collaborative Activity**

The West Virginia Community Design Team is notable for its longevity and breadth of activity. It has matured from an initiative led by a handful of faculty who gave time from otherwise busy teaching, research, and administrative duties to a program with its own staff and resources. Along the way, the capacity of the program has grown. Where once only a couple of visits could be carried out annually, it is now common for five or more visits to be conducted during the course of the year. A large roster of participants has grown to provide a recruitment base for team members. A steering committee, representing campus and community stakeholders, helps to provide guidance and review. The program has developed to a point where, in addition to regular CDT visits, the team approach has been applied to specific projects, such as health professional recruitment in small communities, helping to encourage a regional identity among communities connected with forest uses and assistance in recovery efforts in flood-ravaged communities in West Virginia.

But the true measure of program success comes from the participating communities. The CDT embraces a philosophy that change must be led by the community and that outside experts should play a consultative and facilitative role. This philosophy has deep roots in community planning and design and is one of the guiding principles of smart growth practice (Hoiberg 1955, 187; ICMA 2002, 79–81). Communities are encouraged to consider steps that have short-term, intermediate, and long-term objectives. In this regard, the CDT follows a smart growth practice that encourages communities to identify short-term action steps while planting the seeds for longer-

term planning and development activities (ICMA 2002, 85).

Short-term goals and activities often center on improving the physical appearance of the community or correcting immediate concerns and problems. Communities frequently act on recommendations for making areas more pedestrian friendly and improving traffic patterns, with safety and access in mind. For example, suggestions for cross-walk placements and new parking arrangements have been adopted in communities as a means of improving access to services, sights, and surroundings. Other improvements, such as upgrading signage and installing attractive streetlights and planters on sidewalks, have also been adopted in response to CDT recommendations. One community on the banks of a popular white-water and fishing stream created river access points for boaters and anglers. Short-term activities tend to be clustered around projects that are considered doable with existing resources or that demand attention due to safety concerns.

Intermediate goals rely on community leadership but also require the cultivation of new resources and assistance from within or outside the community. The CDT often responds to citizen sentiments and longstanding concerns with suggestions on resources and programs that might be utilized to help achieve goals. The teams help communities visualize what the next steps might be. In this regard, the CDT helps promote efforts aimed at strengthening neighborhood-watch initiatives, accelerating planning and development for rails-to-trails and other recreational activities, and planning for the creation of community centers.

Longer-term goals recognize the importance of building and sustaining community capacity through collaboration, planning, and investment. Any long-term project requires sustained cooperation and effort by community stakeholders. Encouraging a shared sense of purpose can be particularly challenging in communities facing difficult economic circumstances, and the team addresses this in various ways. In its visits and reports, the team provides a baseline of not only community needs but assets as well. Building from an asset base is more encouraging than being presented solely with problems and challenges to be addressed. The team also promotes comparative analysis by helping communities understand their relation with state and national trends and by highlighting best practices and approaches used in other towns. Communities are also encouraged to set long-term goals by building on short- and intermediate-term successes. Finally, communities are urged to build long-term capacity by accessing resources and building partnerships with those outside the community, such as the university, various state agencies, and philanthropic organizations.

The CDT process reflects the essential smart growth practice of bringing together stakeholders to engage in networking and collaboration. For ex-

ample, in one site, consisting of a string of old coal-camp communities, the team helped to bring together interests that did not regularly interact, such as coal companies, the local health clinic, and various community groups. Together, these stakeholders began to outline ideas to improve health care access in the area and initiated strategies for recruiting health care professionals and revitalizing the community's clinic. They have worked together to develop a community center; land for the facility has been acquired, and construction planning is under way. In another case, the team visit provided added energy and focus to an already rich base of civic organizations and community service organizations. Team activities helped to reinforce and forge partnerships between the local main street organization, the local hospital, and a nonprofit collaborative called the Family Resource Network.

An emphasis on continuing community collaboration and interaction with the university and others permeates the CDT process. On the last night of the visit, a town meeting is held where the team presents recommendations and offers visual depictions in the form of maps, posters, and architectural renderings. These materials are incorporated into a formal report that is provided to the community and helps lay the foundation for follow-up efforts. CDT program leaders originally envisioned the report as a simple collection of materials presented at the town meeting. However, the reports quickly evolved into lengthy, well-crafted products featuring color printouts, transcriptions of team members' presentations, elaborate drawings, graphs and maps, and contact information for faculty and resources to assist in follow-up efforts. Communities have used them to support grant applications and other funding efforts. The content of the reports has become the basis for various other civic projects. There is a sense of community ownership in these reports; as one local participant put it, "it was our plan, it wasn't done by outsiders, what we said is in there."<sup>1</sup>

Approximately six months after the CDT, a follow-up visit is made. This provides an opportunity for residents to report on community building activities and efforts undertaken since the team's visit. Some activities are directly related to team recommendations, others are not. What is important is that the community has the chance to articulate activities to an interested audience, gain feedback and advice, and reconnect with faculty and others who may assist in follow-up projects and efforts. In the beginning, the follow-up team was made up of a few CDT representatives from the original visit, usually team leaders and the program coordinator. Now, a general invitation is put out to all those who served on the community's design team. This allows for broader participation and more opportunities for collaboration and interaction between team members and communities. In short, follow-up visits can play an important role in sustaining community action



and in improving community design outreach efforts (Mehrhoff 1999, 117; Loveridge 2002, 339).

### **Program Activities: Hard Lessons Along the Way**

The purpose of a case study is to reveal success and review failure; lessons can be learned from both types of experiences. Although successful in many ways, the West Virginia Community Design Team has not been without its problems and difficulties. Conflict over land use issues and schisms between groups have been encountered in some visits. The CDT is usually adept at facing conflict head-on, encouraging communities to recognize shared interests and to break down differences between both sides of an issue. As is widely recognized, one of the purposes of community design is to help bridge these gaps by identifying common interests and complementary approaches to addressing opportunities and needs (Plein, Williams, and Green 1998; Mehrhoff 1999; and ICMA 2002). Despite best intentions, these efforts do not always work.

Divisions between groups, especially those who are new to a community and those who have been long-term residents, are not uncommon and have been recognized as a barrier to cooperation and planning (Hoiberg 1955, 58–59). The CDT found itself in the midst of such a conflict in the early days of the program when it was approached by a group of energetic and interested community members who saw the team visit as a means of leveraging capacity building efforts. While the host committee secured the support of some major interests in the region, such as the local district office of the U.S. Forest Service, other stakeholders, primarily long-term residents, did not buy in to the visit. In their eyes, those hosting the visit were newcomers interested in disrupting the status quo. As a result, the CDT was not able to reach all community stakeholders, was seen by some to be in league with the newcomers, and, unfortunately, had limited success in encouraging community development and change (Loveridge and Plein 2000, 15–19). This sobering lesson taught the CDT the importance of thoroughly probing the level of community representation as part of the screening process and that key institutional players, such as local officials, need to be involved or, at a minimum, kept apprised of CDT-related activities.

Sometimes issues, rather than social status, stand in the way of success. In one community, team members were aware of a longstanding disagreement over land use planning policy. A recent controversy over a countywide comprehensive plan had helped fan the flames of debate. Prior to the CDT visit, team leaders met with community representatives and local officials to clarify the purpose of the visit: to concentrate not on the county, but on a downtown business district and neighboring residential areas. There was

plenty of work to be done downtown, and a focus here was seen as a viable strategy for illustrating how smart growth initiatives could be adopted in a piecemeal and productive fashion. While the visit proceeded smoothly—there was good representation from local officials, community service organizations, citizens groups, and the public at large—the team’s report was given a cold reception by some. Despite the team’s best efforts, the CDT visit was caught up in a larger, enduring debate over land use planning. According to a local press report, some local officials criticized the presence of outsiders offering design suggestions. A few community leaders unsuccessfully sought to suppress the team’s final report. This led to a change in program policy that clearly states in the memorandum of understanding that final reports must be released to the public. The experience also served to remind the team that larger political issues can sometimes overwhelm best intentions and preparatory efforts.

### **The CDT and Smart Growth Principles: A Closer Look**

By practice and design, the West Virginia Community Design Team process embraces various smart growth principles. The most fundamental of these is fostering “distinct, attractive communities with a strong sense of place” (ICMA 2002, ii). To achieve this, four other principles play a supporting role: “encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions”; “mix land uses”; “create walkable neighborhoods”; and “preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas” (ICMA 2002, ii). All CDT visits stress the importance of sustaining a strong sense of community identity. Communities are encouraged to explore and understand their heritage, to examine historic events and eras that shaped their development, and to appreciate the importance of imparting this knowledge to future generations through proactive planning and design efforts. Physical attributes and characteristics of the community, combined with a sense of culture, help create an identity. Because teams include specialists in historic preservation, landscape architects, and civil engineers, such matters as building design, historical identity, transportation and pedestrian flow, and physical appearance are emphasized in community visits. Establishing a sense of place is key to planning charrette approach in general, and is a defining characteristic of design team approaches (Mehrhoff 1999, 62; Loveridge 2002, 337).

Establishing a sense of place requires an appreciation of the community’s context not only across time but across space. Understanding the community’s relationship to other communities, to its geographic setting, and to its regional context is crucial to smart growth planning. It is well recognized that communities transcend political boundaries, especially in rural areas where

there has often been a strong identification between a town and the surrounding countryside (Lancaster 1952; Hoiberg 1955; Toner 1979; Radin et al. 1996; and Wells 2002). West Virginia's CDT communities reveal the variety of spatial relationships that exist in the rural context. In some cases, they serve as hubs for a region; in others, they are small hamlets and towns that look to other communities for services and diversion. Much of the work of a CDT visit concentrates on how the community relates to its surroundings and how it can find a niche in regional markets, such as in tourism, and in regional service delivery areas, such as in medical care. A central theme is that a sense of identity and purpose need not be sacrificed when efforts are made to cooperate with others in the region.

Many towns have a rich history rooted in extractive industries such as coal mining and timber. With these industries in decline, several of the communities are in transition. Smart growth planning and action require the restoration and revitalization of activity and a sense of identity in the community. One way this has been addressed by CDT is through focusing on how buildings and spaces that once defined an area can be renovated to play a renewed role as a focal point for a community. For example, in one coal field community that is suffering from a loss of population and employment, the CDT helped to develop a community center in an abandoned school building. This center will provide both recreational and job training opportunities. In another coal town the CDT visualized a market square that would provide not only business opportunities, but also youth facilities, an arts-and-crafts cooperative, and other events. While still on the drawing board, this plan is helping to guide activities in the community and has become central in grant applications (see Figure 10.1). These are but two examples of how recognized features in community landscape can be revitalized to act as magnets for activity and interaction.

Smart growth success depends on achieving an inclusive approach to planning and development and the capacity to manage planning decisions and policies. Interaction can lead to mutual understanding, respect, and trust. Otherwise complex and complicated issues can be demystified and broken down into understandable pieces and components. This is particularly important for successful land use design, which requires cooperation in both planning and implementation. Of all community-based pursuits, deliberation over land use can be the most challenging. Suspicion of planning is well entrenched in American society, especially in rural areas. Overcoming this sentiment depends on generating trust and resolving conflict. Decades ago a sociologist noted, "In rural areas throughout the nation the zoning idea has not made much headway to date. With the present growing emphasis upon community improvement the idea is probably destined to take root, but the

Figure 10.1 Plan of town center in West Virginia



Source: *Community Design Team Report—Spencer, West Virginia*, ed. Elizabeth Messer-Diehl (West Virginia University, 1999): 11.

highly personalized relationships of the small community must be recognized as a major deterrent” (Hoiberg 1955, 145). In the late 1970s a manual for newly appointed planners in rural communities advised, “To be effective, a new rural planner must sell himself first and planning second” (Toner 1979, 13). Rural communities may lack the administrative capacity to engage in planning activities and manage their results (Wells 2002, 6), thus increasing the need for community-based collaboration between government and non-governmental actors. The most successful CDT communities are those that have been able to use the team visit to further generate and encourage this type of interaction.

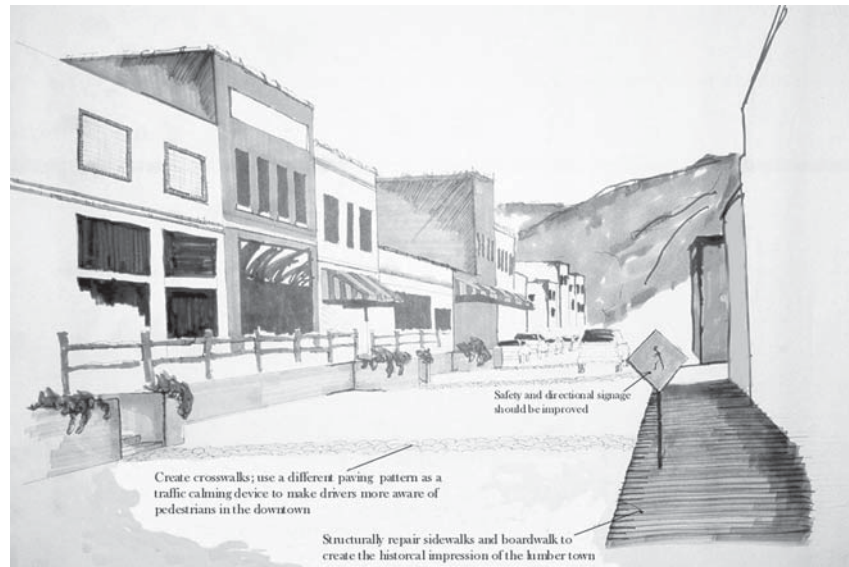
Ultimately, effective community design must be a collaborative process involving stakeholders with differing viewpoints (Bacow 1995, 150–52). The CDT encourages broad stakeholder participation in community deliberations and town meetings associated with the visit and follow-up efforts. By positioning itself as a neutral actor in the process, it advances specific recommendations that have practical utility and are obvious in their benefit, rather than becoming embroiled in abstract and rhetorical clashes over the relative merits of zoning and land use planning. The program stresses that its recom-

mendations are advisory and not binding. In the short run, this helps community members see the possibilities of particular options and strategies—such as developing a historic district that will attract tourists and promote small business development.

In a number of CDT visits, initial team recommendations have catalyzed and inspired planning and action. Tangible visualizations of future land use and building design can help set into motion and guide efforts to revitalize a community. For example, working with a community long dependent on the timber industry, the CDT depicted renovated facades on the main downtown strip bordered by homes and neighborhoods (Figure 10.2). The community is thus engaged in an active effort to revitalize and develop the business district. In this and other cases, the CDT has acted as an intermediary between aspiration and action. This design provided a vision for the community, which then retained the services of professional designers who have further developed ideas and plans articulated and illustrated by the team and the community. In addition, inspired by team recommendations, the community was successful in gaining a historic district designation for this area. The community also responded to the CDT's encouragement to build capacity through collaboration and citizen participation. These efforts are being recognized by government agencies and philanthropies that are providing grant dollars to help sustain community planning and cooperation.

Smart growth has emerged as a means of remedying planning practices that have resulted in a homogeneous landscape of separate land use areas typical of much of the urban and suburban landscape. By emphasizing mixed land uses, planning mistakes can be corrected (ICMA 2002, 1–3). Mixed land use can also be promoted where there has not been a legacy of regulation and control. In West Virginia rural communities are characterized for their eclectic and accidental land use patterns. Business districts intertwine with neighborhoods in many locales, and schools and public services are often found in the community rather than in outlying areas. Land use in many towns is decidedly mixed. This is a product more of history and topography than of design. In West Virginia rugged terrain and the fact that so much land is held either by coal and timber companies or is in federal hands means that developable space is limited. As a result, many rural communities have tightly clustered, mixed land use patterns. While recognizing some jarring and unsettling results in terms of visual appearance and compatibility, these accidental patterns provide opportunities for smart growth development. Design team visits often focus on how communities should embrace and enhance these patterns in order to preserve quality of life and to attract visitors and new residents.

The mixed land use patterns found in many rural towns offer promising

Figure 10.2 **Renovated facades on downtown strip in West Virginia**

Source: *Community Design Team Report—Spencer, West Virginia*, ed. Elizabeth Messer-Diehl (West Virginia University, 1999): 11.

opportunities for walkability, which creates a better sense of place and helps make possible economic growth and social capacity building (ICMA 2002, 26). It is in this aspect of smart growth development that the CDT often has its most immediate impact. In many of the towns that the CDT is called on to visit, sidewalks and other pedestrian amenities have fallen into disrepair; teams often recommend immediate action to repair them and address pedestrian safety issues. Several communities have done so, securing resources to improve sidewalk and pedestrian access. Some proposals are imminently doable. In one town, a CDT suggestion to simply reroute traffic allowed an alternative option for transiting the town, thus easing pressure on an arterial road. A once-congested and dangerous thoroughfare has been returned to its original purposes of accommodating local traffic and pedestrian flow. Team members also have assisted with follow-up efforts aimed at addressing transportation and pedestrian issues. The CDT has a close relationship with the West Virginia University Transportation Technology Transfer Center, which has provided team members and expert assistance to communities.

The CDT offers walking tours and trails depicted through maps and designs. Various facets of the community are integrated in the walking tours, which guide visitors and residents through neighborhoods to places of his-

toric and cultural interest and to downtown shops and restaurants. Some communities have been encouraged to capitalize on their logging and coal heritage by envisioning trail development, especially those situated on abandoned logging and coal railroads. The CDT has assisted various communities in offering plans for rails-to-trails development and use; one town acquired its old railroad depot to serve as a trail head on its rails-to-trails system.

Trails and greenways provide an essential link between community and the adjoining environment (ICMA 2002, 47). Community connection to the surrounding countryside, as exemplified by the adoption of rails-to-trails in many design communities, illustrates the importance of relating community and economic development to the smart growth principle of preserving open spaces and natural assets. This has been important in all of CDT cases, especially in those that serve as gateways to public lands in West Virginia, such as national forests and state parks. Because of the intergovernmental dynamic that exists in connecting community to adjacent public lands, considerable attention has been given to opening lines of communication and fostering cooperation between federal, state, and local governments—a critical practice in smart growth planning (ICMA 2002, 45). The CDT strongly encourages federal and state officials with jurisdiction over public lands and parks to participate in community-led presentations, interactions with the team, and follow-up efforts. Communities have been very responsive in this regard.

## **Conclusion**

Smart growth planning strategies recognize that development success and sustainability depend on community-centered and community-led efforts. Outside expertise and assistance can assist and facilitate smart growth, but should not be relied on to provide leadership and direction. Higher education is particularly well positioned to facilitate smart growth and planning. The West Virginia Community Design Team has made important contributions to residents of small rural communities who are searching for ideas, resources, and plans to positively control the path and destiny of development. This experience, the focus of this chapter, can be summarized with a few observations.

First, a Community Design Team visit is more than a forty-eight-hour collaboration between university and community. As a result of a CDT effort, a relationship is forged between the community and team members. There can be a considerable lead-up time, starting with the application process and continuing through the screening process. Developing a planning relationship requires candidness and open communication. Some communities will require more team interaction than others, due to the complexity of issues involved (Loveridge and Plein 2000, 16–17). The final reports

prepared after each visit have become important planning and discussion documents for each community. The follow-up visits allow communities to recognize accomplishments and renew contacts with university personnel and others.

Second, it is important to align expectations between communities and the CDT. Stakeholders should not expect to be led to success by the design team, nor should they expect the team to be responsible for follow-through. This should be established early in the process so that disappointment does not result. In addition, the community and the team must reach an understanding regarding the geographic scope and focus of the visit. The team is assembled ideally to reflect the composition of the issues identified by the community in the planning process. Geographic scope takes into account the area that will be the primary focus of the visit. In the CDT experience, this has ranged from a downtown business district to a twenty-five-mile corridor linking a series of coal camp towns. It is also important to align the expectations of team members with the task at hand. There are few off-the-shelf solutions to community problems or needs. Team members are reminded to keep a sense of perspective toward what is feasible and appropriate for the community.

Third, it is key to acknowledge and address community conflict in the smart growth activities associated with planning and development. From difficult experiences, the CDT has learned the importance of identifying and airing differences of opinion—healthy debate and discourse are key. A willingness to help should not lead to a failure to assess and perceive community conflict, which may not necessarily veto a visit or void its contributions. All too often, opposing sides agree to the ends but not necessarily to the means of achieving objectives. Part of the work of a community design team is to encourage various stakeholders to understand the positions of others and to recognize common ground and complementary viewpoints and desires.

Fourth, since the beginning of the CDT there has been an effort to learn from experience, both positive and negative, to improve the process. Self-assessment is key to improving community design programming and can be carried out through a variety of means (Mehrhoff 1999, 117–19). Evaluation is built in to the follow-up visits that are conducted in each of the CDT communities months after the team visit. In addition, research and analysis have reviewed dimensions of the approach (Stead 1998; Shannon 2003; Loveridge and Plein 2000; Loveridge 2002; and Plein 2003). An active steering committee allows for continued review and assessment. A statewide conference held in June 2003 brought together representatives from CDT communities to assess program effectiveness and to offer recommendations for improvement. The West Virginia CDT plans to hold similar meetings in the future.



Fifth, the West Virginia CDT has become a platform and inspiration to build other university outreach efforts. It helped in efforts to envision and secure foundation funding to pursue a university-wide service learning initiative (Loveridge 2002, 338). Starting in late 1999 the CDT partnered with the WVU School of Medicine's Recruitable Communities project to assist rural communities in attracting health care professionals to medically underserved areas of the state (Shannon 2003, 348). In 2001 the university launched an effort aimed at promoting a forest heritage area by linking small communities with ties to timbering and proximity to forested lands. The CDT program has figured prominently in this effort, allowing communities to explore how they fit into a shared region. The CDT has also helped in disaster response: after floods ravaged the southern part of the state in 2001 and 2002, a special initiative was launched utilizing design teams in assisting communities in two watersheds to develop plans and priorities for postflood recovery.

Circumstances related to the pressures of growth and sprawl helped give rise to smart growth approaches to community and economic development. Because of this, we can understand how urban and suburban areas have moved first toward these approaches. They have the need and the institutional capacity to engage in such activity (ICMA 2002, 73–76). We also understand how rural areas subjected to rapid change brought about through suburban encroachment or second home development have looked toward smart growth to help guide the future (Wells 2002, 9–12). The West Virginia CDT experience reveals how smart growth approaches, predicated as they are on proactive and community-based efforts in development, have a place in rural communities where the need for, rather than the pressures of, growth is prevalent. The experience shows how universities can play a vital role in providing the institutional capacity needed to help orient citizens toward smart growth strategies for community and economic development.

### Note

1. Comments made by a round-table participant on the West Virginia Community Design Team Program at the 9th Annual Fall Continuing Education Conference, West Virginia University Division of Social Work, Flatwoods, WV, October 5, 2002. Examples of CDT community reports can be found online at [www.wvu.edu/~exten/](http://www.wvu.edu/~exten/); click on "Communities," then "Community Design Team."

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