

# Executive Summary

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## BACKGROUND

In February 2003 Governor Jennifer Granholm, supported by Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema and Speaker of the House Rick Johnson, signed Executive Order No. 2003-4 and announced the formation of the bipartisan Michigan Land Use Leadership Council, co-chaired by former Governor William Milliken and former Attorney General Frank Kelley. The Executive Order charged the council with studying and identifying trends, causes, and consequences of urban sprawl and providing recommendations to the governor and the legislature designed to minimize the negative effects of current and projected land use patterns on Michigan's environment and economy. The deadline given to the council for its final report was August 15, 2003.

The governor invited the political leadership of the Michigan House of Representatives and Senate to join her in selecting those appointed to the council to assure that the council would represent a broad spectrum of stakeholders concerned about government policies affecting future land use in Michigan. Twenty-six voting members were appointed to the council, and the directors of the departments of Agriculture; Consumer and Industry Services; Environmental Quality; Natural Resources; History, Arts, and Libraries; and Transportation served as nonvoting members. The council met formally eight days over a six-month period to consider the issues and discuss recommendations consistent with the charges in the Executive Order. Subgroups of the council engaged in numerous e-mail exchanges, phone conferences, and discussion groups between formal meetings.

## COUNCIL ACTIONS

The chapters presenting the vision and goals and recommendations (chapters 3–7) were developed and formally adopted by the council. The remainder of the report was prepared by staff and, while reviewed and commented upon by council members, was not formally approved by the council.

### ***Vision and Goals***

The council determined that it was important to articulate a vision and land use goals for Michigan and to recognize the legal framework and the key assumptions underlying its adopted vision and goals. To guide their deliberations, the council established three fundamental goals: economic prosperity, stewardship of the environment and cultural and natural resources, and equitable distribution of benefits to all residents. It emphasized that these three goals are interdependent and require government leadership in guiding public and private land use decisions and policies that reflect the importance of balancing the goals in achieving sustainability. The report lists ten smart growth tenets used to develop many of the council's recommendations. The council highlighted and discussed two major components of the state's legal framework—*private property rights* and the concept of *home rule*—and acknowledged their importance in its deliberations. Finally, in the chapter on vision and goals the council lists key assumptions and constraints, including the budgetary implications of its recommendations.

## ***Principles and Recommendations***

Based upon the background materials reviewed, the survey results, and public comment, the council organized issues into four broad categories within which they developed guiding principles and recommended actions to address specific issues. These four categories are reflected in the chapters of the final report and include: Urban Revitalization; Land Resource–Based Industries; Planning and Development Regulation; and, Infrastructure and Community Services. The vision and goals adopted by the council guided the development of the specific recommendations.

The council initially used work groups based upon the four categories to sort through and refine the various recommendations received from council members, interests groups, and the public. Once the work groups completed their work, the recommendations were reviewed by the full council and a set of draft recommendations was prepared for final consideration at the council’s last meeting. Between the completion of the work groups’ draft recommendations and final consideration, every attempt was made to accommodate council member concerns to achieve the broadest possible support. At the last meeting of the council, each of the draft recommendations was reviewed by the full council. In some instances, recommendations initially adopted by a majority of council members were revisited and the language modified to encourage the broadest possible support.

Despite these collaborative efforts and the spirit of compromise exhibited by the council throughout its deliberations, a few contentious issues could not be resolved to everyone’s satisfaction. Following the last meeting, each council member was given the opportunity to reserve his or her support or object to specific recommendations adopted by a majority of the council. Reservations or objections of individual council members on specific recommendations are noted following each recommendation.

A summary or paraphrasing of the specific recommendations could undermine the carefully constructed language crafted and adopted by the council and contained in the final report. In general terms the council recommendations address broad thematic areas that focus on ways in which government policies and decisions, in cooperation with the private sector, can provide leadership on and a balanced approach to issues of common concern. Consistent with the council’s stated vision and goals, the recommendations focus on incentives and assistance rather than mandates to encourage private sector cooperation in addressing identified concerns. Similarly, the recommendations of the council provide new tools, alternative planning approaches, technical assistance, and resources for local government to reduce sprawl and encourage intergovernmental and interagency cooperation in planning for infrastructure and services that serve large geographic areas.

The report notes the importance of including universities, foundations, and other institutions in the mix of public and private entities that can contribute to accomplishing the recommended actions. The primary issues addressed by the council in the report include:

- Preserving agricultural land, forestland, wildlife habitat, and scenic resources that form the basis of Michigan’s land resource–based industries by enhancing

- existing programs and creating new incentives for private land owners to maintain these valuable undeveloped open spaces
- Supporting efforts to make Michigan cities more livable by expediting the reuse of abandoned properties, controlling blight, encouraging private investment, encouraging mixed-use development, improving transportation options, supporting a full range of housing options, and attracting and retaining residents who can contribute to the viability of our urban core areas
  - Making better use of existing public infrastructure by encouraging public and private investment in already developed areas
  - Providing new tools to local government to encourage better land use decisions that allow more compact, mixed-use development
  - Creating incentives to encourage interagency and intergovernmental cooperation in addressing land use issues and public investments of more than local concern
  - Encouraging private investment in already developed areas by removing governmental barriers and creating incentives
  - Streamlining state and local government financial assistance and regulatory programs that support land use practices consistent with the vision and goals contained in Chapter 3 of the report
  - Seeking government partnerships with for-profit and nonprofit sectors to create a range of affordable housing options
  - Identifying “commerce centers” where infrastructure is already serving relatively dense populations to guide the future investment of state resources to support private investment and development

Many recommendations do not require new public expenditures but represent new policy direction. Some recommendations, however, require new public dollars. The council did not thoroughly examine the cost of many of its recommendations or establish priorities among them. While the council believes that the recommendations, if implemented, will provide long-term savings to the state through more efficient use of public expenditures and reduced public costs associated with the consequences of sprawl, it encourages the legislature and governor to carefully consider the recommended program costs in relation to state budget priorities and constraints. In particular, a number of recommendations suggest state bonding as an appropriate approach to support certain public capital investments. The council recognizes the need to clearly identify the specific purposes and the allocation of funds for any bonding proposals placed on the ballot. The council also recognizes that some of its recommendations can be implemented in the short term and others will require considerable time because of the complexity of the issues and interests involved and/or the fiscal resources required.

## **BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

The council spent most of its first three months collecting and digesting information about land use issues and how Michigan land use trends and government responses to those trends compared with those in other states. The council used a variety of means to accumulate background information needed to understand what land use issues were most important to Michigan’s future and how government responses to those issues

should be framed to sustain economic prosperity, environmental integrity, and social equity for present and future generations of Michigan residents. The council used the following approaches to build a common knowledge base as a foundation for its final recommendations to the governor and the legislature:

- Solicitation of public comment through a series of six public meetings held throughout the state, public comment opportunities at the end of the first five formal council meetings, on-line comments through the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council Web site ([www.michiganlanduse.org](http://www.michiganlanduse.org)), and submission of written comments.
- Presentations to the full council by leading national and Michigan experts on specific land use topics identified as critical
- White papers and special reports prepared by council staff, universities, research organizations, and state agencies on various land use issues
- Copies and summaries of previous land use reports prepared by various organizations in Michigan
- Results of a survey distributed to individual council members and to 205 Michigan organizations that asked respondents to identify the most important land use issues facing Michigan and to suggest state policy and legislative responses.

Summaries or, where practical, the full text of the public hearings, reports, and survey results were also made available to the public on the council Web site.