

Case Studies of Land Use and Planning Successes

INTRODUCTION

This report was prepared for the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council to demonstrate the many land use and planning successes local communities in Michigan have already achieved. It includes examples of intergovernmental planning projects, county-level planning projects, and local projects. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of studies; cases were chosen to present a sampling of information that is diverse in terms of both project type and location.

COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Principal Shopping District Program

City of Birmingham

In 1991, an Ad Hoc Committee was formed to investigate the decline of Birmingham's downtown area. The committee recommended the establishment of the Birmingham Principal Shopping District and its Board, which would help to revitalize the downtown through taxes levied on the businesses in the district. The revenues would be used for a promotional campaign for the shopping area. According to the 1995 Michigan Trend Future report, the district was receiving about \$450,000 in revenues that were used for promotional materials for the shopping district, holding cultural events, and paying for advertising and staff support (MSPO 1995).

Neighborhood Access Controls

City of Troy

Older subdivisions in Troy were divided based on a grid street system that allowed too much outside access to the neighborhoods, resulting in "high volumes of through traffic, traffic speeds, pedestrian safety problems, and crime" (MSPO 1995, 13). Sussex Park, a 40-acre subdivision, was established in the 1920s and suffered from some of these problems even though homes were built on only about 12 of the 290 lots. A developer worked with the city to reconfigure the streets and lots by vacating and opening streets and splitting and combining lots as needed. A special assessment district was created to distribute the street and utility costs of the project to the current and future residents. With the new layout, the subdivision has attracted many new residents and the assessed value of the pre-existing homes has increased significantly (MSPO 1995).

CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

The Nature Conservancy: Toward a New Conservation Vision for the Great Lakes Region: A Second Iteration

In 2000, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) produced an updated document containing what it views as the critical areas for preserving biodiversity for the Great Lakes region (The

Nature Conservancy Great Lakes Program 2000). TNC first identified what should be conserved, or what types of species and how many of them should be protected. TNC considered areas with special uses like migratory bird stopovers. After setting goals for biodiversity, TNC then convened scientists and natural resource managers to evaluate the goals and mapped locations to further refine targets. This initiative is expected to be a work in progress and will continually be updated. The report identifies 135 aquatic and terrestrial sites within Michigan that display significant biodiversity.

Southeast Michigan GreenWays Initiative

Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan

The goal of the GreenWays Initiative is to change the way that people view the landscape in the seven counties typically described as southeastern Michigan: Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties. The foundation for the initiative is a 1998 report, *Vision for Southeast Michigan Greenways*, which describes and maps a system of green infrastructure for the area. The goal of the initiative is to generate \$25 million in five years for the implementation of this green infrastructure system. The initiative already has raised \$21 million toward its target. It is important to note that everyone involved in the initiative understands that these funds won't change the physical landscape appreciably, but will leverage other state and federal funds toward the same goal.

The process began with the compilation of data for the 1998 vision report and contacting people to gather information. This activity spurred interest in a region-wide vision for green infrastructure both from stakeholders and from potential funding sources. This activity was also important because it produced a region-wide map of the vision, giving it a tangible shape accessible to all. Two groups were formed to discuss the outcome of the document and map: a stakeholder group and an advisory group made up primarily of funders. After a series of meetings, the stakeholder group agreed upon five actions necessary to make this dream a reality:

- Securing funding
- Creating a forum for jurisdictional outreach
- Communicating that this effort is more than just parks, that it encompasses the region's quality of life
- Staffing the effort
- Incorporating review by an independent party who could view regional efforts as a whole

The advisory group filtered the needs of this stakeholder group, formulated the structure that everyone agreed upon, and ultimately guided the initiative to where it is today. The final structure and program that could meet all five criteria and satisfy both stakeholders and the advisory group is housed at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan.

Throughout this process, four keys to success were quickly discovered. First, there was a physical representation (the report and map) of what could be done that everyone agreed to and that wasn't viewed as a prescriptive plan. Second, an institution that could reach

across all jurisdictions and social boundaries to partners who felt comfortable working with it was critical. Third, a major driving funder was involved to help leverage other funds. Lastly, someone who could move within different sectors easily, comfortably, and with trust needed to take responsibility for the effort.

The Tollgate Drainage District Sewer Separation Project **Ingham County Drain Commission**

In 1997, Lansing Township petitioned the Ingham County Drain Commissioner to find an alternative method of relieving storm water and flooding in a watershed of 234 acres with more than 550 residential homes, more than 10 commercial properties, over 1,000 apartment units, and 4 governmental agencies. The Tollgate Drainage District Sewer Separation Project became the solution, separating a combined sewer system and creating a 20-acre wetland detention basin for storm water (Lindemann 2001). The wetland serves as a wildlife refuge and a community learning center.

The project faced many challenges during all phases, including timing and coordination of schedules for this massive effort, holding public meetings involving reluctant stakeholders, managing intergovernmental agency conflict resolution, and refuting general misinformation. Not only did the system need to manage storm water quality and quantity, it also had to accommodate golfing and low-impact recreation and serve as wildlife habitat. Finally, financial backing had to be established.

Traditional methods to alleviate storm water problems for this area would have cost \$23–\$30 million, but this approach cost roughly \$6 million—saving at least \$17 million. For the storm water fix, Lansing Township paid 15 percent, the City of Lansing paid 6 percent, and the Ingham County Road Commission paid 30 percent. The remainder of the cost, roughly half, was assessed to property owners within the drainage district. The average cost to a homeowner was \$3,000 over a 20-year period, an annual cost of \$150. The City of Lansing paid the \$3 million bill for the sanitary water remedy and financed the rebuilding of the golf course through a revenue bond.

Other challenges came with the implementation of a public outreach program to educate the residents and use the wetland as a teaching resource. Information sessions were held, partnerships were made with local and regional environmental groups in order to reach a broader audience, and partnerships were made with local teachers and university professors to write a curriculum for students. Brown bag lunch sessions and tours facilitate education of service groups.

The new drainage system on the front half of the Groesbeck Municipal Golf Course is designed to store, manage, move, and clean storm water from a neighboring subdivision in a natural manner. One of the three ponds used for irrigation on the golf course is tied into the wetland system. Pond water nutrient levels are tested before irrigation and factored into the overall fertilizer application budget. This practice reduces nutrient loading into the ponds and decreases golf course maintenance costs. The golf course holding ponds are essential to keep the fairways from flooding in times of high rain, which in effect keeps the course open longer and attracts more golfers.

CORRIDOR STUDIES

New Designs for Growth

Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce

New Designs for Growth is a committee of the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce. New Designs for Growth has just completed a corridor study of M-72 near Traverse City in order to improve land use planning in four Grand Traverse Bay-area townships. It is a unique approach to accomplishing some of the same planning objectives included in green infrastructure projects by focusing on a roadway corridor. The study's objectives are threefold: a land plan, public education, and planning models.

Each municipality along the corridor participated in crafting a long-range vision of land use and development patterns. Key focus areas included: farmland and open space preservation, transportation, scenic viewsheds, and watershed protection. The local units of government will be able to use the end product in their own planning endeavors (New Designs for Growth 2002).

U.S. 31 Corridor Study

Little Traverse Conservancy and Grand Traverse Land Conservancy

The U.S. 31 Corridor Study is in its third year of five-year programming. The goal of the study is to provide balance in how this particular corridor, which runs from Petoskey to Acme, is developing and to establish growth in open space and parks simultaneously with that of development. While the Little Traverse Conservancy works in Emmet and Charlevoix Counties, its partner, the Grand Traverse Land Conservancy, guides the project in Antrim and Grand Traverse Counties. More than \$2.6 million in land acquisition and conservation easements has come from state and local governments and charitable organizations to help maintain this scenic corridor that is so vital to the area. Five miles of frontage along the U.S. 31 corridor have been preserved for agriculture, forestry, and scenic viewsheds.

The process began with an inventory of scenic resources that may be valuable to the area, quickly followed by the development of a map of key target parcels. From there, partnering has been the main focus: seeking relationships with key stakeholders who can accomplish a common goal through independent and collective activities. The process is described as flexible and opportunistic, similar to most land transactions. Having an array of partners to call upon if an opportunity presents itself to make the goal achievable has been the foundation of this program.

MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL AND REGIONAL PLANNING

Marquette-Lake Superior Sprawl Initiative (MLSSI)

Central Lake Superior Watershed Partnership

The MLSSI began in 2001 and was aimed toward improving the land use decision-making process for all local stakeholders, including township, city, and county planning officials. It will provide regional benefits as a demonstration project for other

communities in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. An aerial survey was conducted of the city and townships to identify priority and at-risk areas. Interviews with representatives of the township, city, county, and local organizations were conducted to find out what is working in land use planning, what are some examples of poor land use, what the future holds, and how the public can become more involved in these decisions. This group also conducted stream monitoring to provide data that documents impacts from poor land use planning decisions. Some townships, the city, and the county have developed planning documents as a result of these activities and the level of public awareness was noticeably raised. The Central Lake Superior Watershed Partnership is currently continuing this work, in cooperation with the National Wildlife Federation and the Central Lake Superior Land Conservancy to: 1) improve regional land use policy, 2) further stakeholder land use education and 3) promote permanent land protection options.

The Metropolitan Development Blueprint Report **Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC)**

In 1990, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and several local government leaders formed the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC), an alliance of governmental units in the Grand Rapids area that plan for the growth and development, improvement of the quality of life, and coordination of governmental services in their communities.

In 1994, the GVMC approved the *Metropolitan Development Blueprint Report*, a region-wide master plan that calls for a different strategy for preserving open space, using water and sewer services to direct development, and establishing compact business centers and neighborhoods served by mass transit. The report took 18 months of collaborative work by citizens, planners, and consultants to develop a community-wide consensus for managing future economic growth, while preserving and enhancing the social, physical, and natural environment. Redirecting growth and development in compact centers of economic activity and livable communities framed by a network of greenways and open lands is the preferred future outlined in the report.

Steps are currently being taken to implement the recommendations of the report, including seeking area governmental unit support, developing funding for implementation, organizing a greenways network process, forming a land-use advisory committee, and appointing a Blueprint Commission to:

- Complete an inventory of natural assets
- Define a metropolitan network of open lands/green spaces
- Design a transit system based on concepts in the report
- Define current regional employment centers/locate probable future centers
- Review water/sewer utility services and the way they serve land use patterns
- Form a committee of public and private professionals to devise ways to encourage compact/livable communities
- Create/encourage subregional planning alliances to address specific issues (GVMC 1994)

Muskegon Area-wide Plan

West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission

In 1996, a group of local governments, businesses, planning offices and consulting firms, law firms, and environmental and conservation organizations formed the Land Use Task Force. The Land Use Task Force was one of several committees established under the Muskegon Economic Growth Alliance Environmental Coordinating Council to work on environmental issues that affect the quality of life in Muskegon County.

The Land Use Task Force believes that a comprehensive discussion of land use issues by all stakeholders will result in improved land use decisions that will meet the goal of sustained economic development while protecting Muskegon County's natural resources and quality of life. It is this belief that led to the formation of the Muskegon Area-wide Plan (MAP) project (West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission, 2002).

The MAP project is designed to educate, advance, promote, and facilitate the identification of a vision and goals for managing land use and future growth within Muskegon County. The project is facilitated by a 40-member steering committee representing local government, businesses, community organizations, and the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission. The MAP project seeks to build consensus, make strategic plans, promote intergovernmental cooperation, and provide information on a broad range of topics related to the regional quality of life. The end result will be a land use plan guiding growth in Muskegon County.

Regional Growth: Choices for Our Future

Tri-County Regional Planning Commission

The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC) is working to develop a shared vision of regional growth in Clinton, Eaton, and Ingham Counties, which surround the Lansing metropolitan area (Michigan Tri-County Regional Planning Commission 2002). The purpose of this endeavor is to:

- Develop a shared regional vision of land use and future development patterns
- Establish an action plan to address urban sprawl, which will guide public and private investment decisions for the next two decades

The mission of the project is to actively engage the citizens of the region to examine the implications of regional land use and other growth trends on the region's future and to formulate consensus on a shared vision of regional growth in order to assure improved future regional quality of life and economic competitiveness for area citizens and businesses. The project's goals are to

- collect and objectively evaluate regional land use and other growth trend information (project managers assembled all local government master or land use plans, layered, and analyzed them);
- actively engage local governments, citizens, and stakeholder groups in examining implications of these trends on the region's future (in addition to stakeholder

- meetings, technical team meetings, and steering committee meetings, there was a series of town hall meetings to reach out to the communities for citizen input);
- identify and evaluate alternatives to these trends, as appropriate (these were presented to the public for review);
 - formulate consensus on a shared regional vision about a preferred alternative;
 - develop tools, techniques, and action strategies to implement the shared vision and preferred alternative (initial review of the project reveals two or three areas of common ground—including a nonmotorized trail system); and
 - establish a regional process for monitoring and evaluating success at implementing these strategies.

Some of the strategies will require implementation by all 78 individual local governments, while others may require implementation or action from government agencies, the private sector, utilities, school districts, transit agencies, or other community organizations. A review of similar efforts nationwide by TCRPC revealed two key determinants of success: consensus and identification of specific responsibilities (who is to do what, how, and by when).

Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project **Wayne County Department of Environment**

Local communities in the Rouge River watershed banded together, at the urging of the court, to respond to and resolve storm water problems in the Rouge River. The effort extended to include a unique partnership of local agencies and communities, state agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and citizens. The Rouge Project is focused on managing wet-weather pollution to restore the water quality of the Rouge River. This cooperative watershed management effort began in 1992 and is supported by multi-year federal grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and local communities.

While the Rouge Project began the restoration of the Rouge River by focusing on a primary pollutant source—combined sewer overflows (CSOs)—it quickly expanded in recognition of the fact that CSO control alone would not provide sufficient water quality improvement because other nonpoint source pollutants (i.e., storm water runoff, illicit connections, failing septic systems, stream bank erosion) would continue to degrade the river.

The entire Rouge River watershed was broken into seven more manageable subwatersheds. Each subwatershed had to produce a subwatershed pollution prevention initiative (SWPPI) and each community in the program produced a public education program. The Rouge Project management strategy required comprehensive sampling, various water quality and water quantity modeling tools, data management, and GIS. According to the project's website, "the seven subwatershed plans nearing completion have identified alternative steps needed to address remaining problems associated with storm water, combined and sanitary sewers overflows, failing septic systems, and nonpoint sources. Communities and agencies have already taken actions to address concerns from excessive runoff caused by new development and are planning projects to correct existing flow problems in already developed areas impacting habitat and riparian

properties in the watershed. Specific measures have been identified that will help determine whether or not the actions underway and planned will achieve the short-term goals. It is fully expected that achieving the long-term goals for full restoration of the Rouge River will require a series of iterative steps over several years” (Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project 2001).

Smart Growth Initiatives

Ottawa County Planning and Grants Department/Blendon Township

Working with the Ottawa County Planning Commission, the Ottawa County Planning and Grants Department made presentations to every local unit of government in its jurisdiction to explain planning tools available to further smart growth and offer its assistance in their endeavors.

Blendon Township was one locality interested in smart growth initiatives and involved in a master planning process at the time of the Ottawa County Planning and Grants Department’s presentation. As a result of their partnering, Blendon Township was able to implement several smart growth initiatives. Blendon Township’s first step was to adopt a master plan. A key component of this was the inclusion and adoption of a smart growth zoning ordinance that included four innovative planning devices: a transfer of development rights (TDR) program, designated agricultural districts to protect farmland from development, transportation overlay districts, and open-space cluster-development density bonuses. By adopting this plan, Blendon Township became the first locality in the state to adopt a formal TDR program.

PURCHASE/TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

Agricultural Land Preservation Plan

Peninsula Township

After experiencing remarkable growth in the township and seeing considerable amounts of farmland sold for residential development, Peninsula Township officials decided there was a need to increase efforts to preserve their agricultural land. Using air photos, the township identified agriculture priority areas and this and other data were put into a GIS database to determine parcels that would be targeted for preservation. A Citizens Committee was formed to seek public opinion and volunteers campaigned for an increased millage to support an agricultural land preservation plan. The plan development was partially funded by grants and included a purchase of development rights (PDR) program. Participating farmers could sell the development rights to their property, ensuring the land would be permanently protected under a conservation easement. Plans were made to supply receiving zones for the transferred development rights with additional public utility capacity and create residential design standards for these communities (MSPO 1995).

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Study Project

Alpine Township

In 2000, Alpine Township received a grant to study the feasibility of a TDR program in

the township. A group of active citizens including farmers, environmentalists, academicians, business leaders, and others interested in land use issues was convened to form the Citizen Action Committee. Using GIS, the committee explored where TDR might occur within the township and after six months of review, recommended that it would be a viable option for the community. It was also learned that there is a tolerance for such a program within the township. In 2001, Alpine Township received a second grant to further test a TDR program for implementation. This study explored what the impacts in its urban areas might be and also tested ratios for transferring. It found that there are 420 sites available to participate in a TDR program in the township.

While much background work has been completed, the township has adopted no formal TDR policy. Once other priority issues are undertaken, it is hoped that the township can pick up where it left off with respect to a TDR program.

URBAN SERVICE AND GROWTH BOUNDARY

City of Midland

The Midland Urban Growth Area Policy was developed in 1969 and created an urban growth boundary around the city limits that limited how far the city's utility services could be extended. This policy created problems between the city and affected townships inside the boundary and private sector community leaders sought a way to improve these relationships. Urban cooperation agreements were signed by the city and four townships to resolve the previous disagreements. Each agreement revised the urban growth boundary to provide for utility extensions and annexations as needed, as well as revenue sharing (MSPO 1995).

Grand Rapids Urban Service Boundary

According to the *Great Lakes Bulletin*, "The city of Grand Rapids, which serves about half the families and businesses in the metropolitan region, began in 1997 to negotiate new water and sewer contracts with the 14 communities that are its customers. Together they drew an actual line on the map and decided how far to extend water and sewer lines to provide enough service for growth over the next generation without encouraging sprawl. So far five communities have agreed to the 'urban service boundary,' the first of its kind in the Midwest and one of the few in the nation. The others are expected to sign on as their old contracts expire" (MLUI 1999).

Urban Growth Staging Plan

Dewitt Charter Township

Due to the significant growth Dewitt Township is experiencing, there has been an increased demand for development and utility expansions. Seeking to direct development into areas able to support it, the township created the Urban Growth Staging Plan as a part of the Township Comprehensive Plan. This plan is designed "to promote the efficient use of existing public services and to avoid unnecessary, premature and costly utility extensions" (MSPO 1995, 29). To do this, an urban growth boundary was established along with development priority areas. There are five development stages in this plan: existing/committed urban areas, primary stage urban growth area, secondary stage urban

growth area, rural transition area, and agricultural preservation area. The concept of this plan is to develop outward incrementally; the plan also incorporates a buffer (rural transition area) between developed and agriculture areas (MSPO 1995).

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