Smart Growth on the Edge
Rural & Exurban Growth

- New Towns in Rural Areas
- Conservation Subdivisions
- Your Town’s Treasures
In the past decade, developers and the market have embraced a new and better model of growth that has come to be called Smart Growth — development that is more compact and walkable; provides greater variety of housing types, community designs and transportation options for consumers; makes more efficient use of land resources; and results in less paving of the countryside. Successful Smart Growth is evident in the strong market for new housing in older, central areas of cities; in creation of new downtowns in older suburbs; in transit-oriented development at rail stations; and in higher-density housing development, such as condominiums. Smart Growth practitioners have popularized new planning tools, including visioning exercises and charrettes (intense multi-day community planning workshops), computer visualization of new development, and replacing old zoning and measurement codes with form-based codes concerned with the structure and character of buildings and neighborhoods.

Thus far, these Smart Growth successes have been primarily focused on close-in urban and suburban locations. Smart Growth
concepts have been most enthusiastically embraced by older cities, towns and neighborhoods that need redevelopment and first-ring suburbs that find increasing land values are driving higher density and a wider variety of land uses. This smart development represents a small percentage of actual development. Nationally, the primary development trend is conversion of rural land at the far fringe of metropolitan areas into low-density development and growth near small cities in non-metropolitan areas. Overall, the density of development nationwide is decreasing. Early indications are that three-dollar-per-gallon gasoline appears to have little effect on this trend.

In this issue of On Common Ground, we focus on the places where most new growth in America is occurring — the far suburbs, the exurban areas beyond the edge of major metropolitan areas, and the smaller non-metropolitan cities. What role can Smart Growth approaches play in these regions to maintain the scenic beauty, the sense of openness, and the relaxed environment attractive to the public? How can land be preserved to prevent poorly planned communities and unappealing landscapes that many people are fleeing? How can new communities be designed so they have a character that is valued now and in the future? What design techniques, regulatory mechanisms and market responses can create smarter growth in these far-flung areas?

Ultimately, how can the infrastructure and public service needs of the new population be met without ruining the integrity of the landscape that attracted them in the first place?

Our reporters have covered the countryside to give you a detailed look at the current state of exurban and rural development and how Smart Growth approaches can improve our increasingly dispersed communities.

For more information on NAR and Smart Growth, go to www.realtor.org/smartgrowth.
6  Keeping it Rural
   by David Goldberg

12  Conservation Subdivisions
    Good for the land, good for the pocketbook.
    by Steve Wright

18  Editors Choice
    Nature Friendly Communities:
    Habitat Protection and Land Use Planning.

22  Micropolitans: The Best of Both Worlds
    by Heidi Johnson-Wright

28  We are Ready!
    Developing neighborhoods apply Smart Growth principles to prepare
    for future transit needs.
    by Christine Jordan Sexton

32  The Future of Farms in America
    by Brad Broberg

38  Ready, Set...Growth
    Rural counties prepare for development.
    by Jason Miller

44  Hidden Treasures in Your Town
    Maintaining your small town’s economic viability with smart planning.
    by John Van Gieson

50  New Towns in Rural Areas
    Saving rural space with Smart Growth.
    by Brad Broberg

54  Solving the Problem of Sprawl
    10 Principles for Smart Growth on the suburban fringe.

58  Steering Growth
    State Government Attempts.
    by Doug Porter

64  Smart Growth in the States

On Common Ground thanks the following contributors and organizations for photographs, illustrations and artist renderings reprinted in this issue: Kurt Andrae, LandChoices Advisory Group; Kent Baer; Doug Barnes, Kennecott Land; Penny L. Becker, Sheridan WY Travel and Tourism; Donald R. Bell, Town of Cary, North Carolina; Martha Cato, Valley, Alabama; Council of Convention and Visitors Bureaus; Dick Garvey, Rose Grayson, Chicago Associates Planning and Architecture; Jessica M. Icenjour, Greater Mount Airy Chamber of Commerce; Kellogg Foundation; Jana Kettering, Kennecott Land Company; Kate Kimmel, 1000 Friends of Oregon; Lisa Kohner, Scott County Public Affairs; Lisa Langstaff, Montgomery County, Maryland Ag. Reserve; Julie Leddiere, 4 Towns Citizens Action Team, Inc.; Heather Machin, KB Homes; Lisa MacKerron, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin; Nof Manwicks, LandChoices; Lisa Maul, Whiteaker Homes; Jason Miller; Tracy Parker; Ed Rosenberger, Kennecott Land; Christy Sabtia; Allison E. Schlaglsmith (McGirr), The Lancaster Chamber of Commerce & Industry; Joanne Schrammus, Wisconsin Department of Administration; Evan Scott, Ashland Economic Development; Doug Self, City of Driggs, Idaho; Jack Shoubridge Three Rivers Park District; Brian Williams; Margie Wilson, Skagitians to Preserve Farmland; John Zawitosky, Montgomery County, MD
Keeping it Rural
Smart Growth's Biggest Challenge?
By David Goldberg
Since returning from Vietnam in 1972, Jim McConnell has worked with his two brothers doing what three generations did before them: farming the region west of Cleveland, Ohio that McConnell counts as some of the most productive agricultural land on the planet. But as Cleveland and other Ohio cities “empty out”, he says, rural Ohio is being carved into house lots large and small. Where once there was a clear division between town and country, subdivisions and mini-estates are bleeding into the countryside. Farmers like McConnell, whose Hickory Grove Farm raises corn, soybeans, wheat and dairy heifers on both their own and leased land, wonder how long they can keep at it.

“Cleveland has sprawled out to where it has pretty much obliterated the farmland in Medina County,” McConnell laments, “and now we already see it starting to happen in our county,” Lorain County, west of Cleveland.

“You can easily get to the point where it’s just not worth it from the farmer’s standpoint to put up with all the issues that come with working around homes and development,” he adds. “There are certain times of the year when we have to work late at night, making a lot of noise and kicking up a lot of dust, and someone who moves out from the city might not understand that. The smells that come off livestock operations, people from the country just take it as part of living out here, but the new people don’t necessarily see it that way. You have more traffic and difficulty moving large farm equipment. You have a field you’ve been leasing a long time, and then the owner sells off the frontage and you have inaccessible land, or five property owners to deal with. At some point, these problems become almost untenable.”

Ohio, of course, is not the only area of the country grappling with the rapid disappearance of unbroken tracts of farm, forest and range lands. The nation’s recent long run of low fuel costs and high in-town real estate prices, coupled with a mushrooming second-home market, have combined to propel housing development deeper into territory once regarded as anything but urban. As a result, more and more communities are experimenting with various techniques for preserving agricultural and natural areas.

To date, their success has been spotty, given the sheer force of the trend, says Dave Theobald, research scientist with the Natural Resource Ecology Lab at Colorado State University, who studies what he calls rural sprawl. “What always struck me is that people were talking about urban sprawl all the time, but they were ignoring rural sprawl,” he says. Theobald defines rural sprawl simply as “very low-density growth beyond the urban areas.” House lots in these exurban areas range from two to 20 acres on average. As one measure of the impact, he notes that five million residents of Census-identified rural areas spend an hour or more commuting to work. Nationwide, in 2000, there were roughly 76,000 square miles in urban and suburban residential housing density, Theobald has calculated. “There were seven times that amount density of one house per two to 40 acres,” he says. “By 2020, the higher-density urban and suburban land area is expected to expand by 4.2 percent, but exurban land use will grow at more than double that rate.”

State and local governments are increasingly concerned, because rural sprawl not only takes productive farmland out of commission, but places exurban residents in need of services that they must fund out of thin air. “There’s a varying amount of money in these towns,” says Sandra McIver, a land-use economist who helps Midwestern towns calculate the costs of services for
new development. “These rural places have to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to improve roads, schools, water and sewer capacity, to extend police and fire coverage, but there’s a total anti-tax attitude. So what do they do? Go after more development, particularly commercial that will bring in more tax revenue.”

Though this is not a new phenomenon, the pace and ubiquity of change has reached such a pitch that efforts to combat rural sprawl are probably receiving more attention than ever before. This comes at the same time that a reactivated “property rights” movement is working to counter some of the land protections put in place in the first wave of such moves 30-plus years ago in states such as Oregon and Maryland. As a result, states and localities are being challenged to come up with new approaches and techniques that are both fair and effective.

Traditionally, there have been a handful of tools available to protect open space and guide development in rural areas. After a quick overview, we’ll explore some examples to learn what is working, and what isn’t. The first option, of course, is outright purchase of open space, either by government or nonprofit entity. Though increasingly popular with voters, the shortcomings are immediately apparent: Because funds are limited, they can only hope to secure the most vulnerable sites. The most common tool is large-lot zoning, in which local governments set large minimum lot sizes of five, 10, 20 or more acres. Public or nonprofit entities also can purchase development rights. This involves paying a farmer or other landowner for any rights he might have to develop his land, with the proviso that the owner keeps the land more or less in its current state. A related concept is the transfer of development rights. Here, a developer buys the development rights from an area designated for agricultural or open space and applies those rights to an area targeted for development, in exchange for being allowed to build at higher densities. Localities also can allow for conservation subdivisions, in which houses are clustered together in a small footprint, rather than scattered among large lots of equal size, so as to leave a high percentage of the tract undeveloped. Lastly, there are a variety of ways to construct multi-jurisdictional plans in which adjoining towns, counties or other jurisdictions agree to limit development in some areas while steering growth to designated zones; this often involves some sort of tax-base sharing.

Maryland experiments with big lots, buying development rights

Over the last few decades, localities in Maryland, as well as the state itself, have been among the pioneers in many of these approaches. Parris Glendening, who was Maryland’s governor from 1995 to 2003, has studied them all, having made rural preservation a centerpiece of his administration. “Preservation of the agricultural economy and the revitalization of existing communities are two answers to the same equation,” Glendening says. “When farms are flourishing, they are less likely to be developed. And unless you can stop the bleeding into the countryside, existing cities and towns will suffer and decline.”

The early experiments with stopping rural sprawl often seemed aimed primarily at preserving a pictur-
esque landscape rather than sustaining agriculture and wildlife, he said. "Counties in southern Maryland relied on large-lot zoning for a long time, and for a while it seemed to work. I'm personally not an advocate of large-lot zoning, though. The challenge is you often end up with low-density sprawl. St. Mary’s County, for example, started with minimum five-acre lots, and ended up with subdivisions on septic tanks. You can raise the minimum, but with 10 or 15 homes on 100 acres you still use far more agricultural land, and the costs for services are high." Glendening also echoed McConnell’s concerns about the detrimental effects for farmers of the encroachment of former city folk.

Large-lot zoning also relies entirely on maintaining a regulation in perpetuity. But the first law of regulations, or course, is that they change. Inevitably, landowners exert pressure to allow more development as the growth marches toward them, figuring they deserve to make the same sort of killing that a farmer down the road made by selling his land. As we’ll see in the Oregon example below, the pressure can be extremely intense. "I have a lot of sympathy for farmers who see this as their retirement or children’s college, who don’t know that they can pass on to another generation for farming, and that’s why I think a system that pays landowners for development rights makes great sense," Glendening said.

Maryland has relied extensively on purchase of development rights, or PDR, in efforts to preserve the rapidly developing Eastern Shore. A long-time getaway destination and haven for second homes, the mostly rural Eastern Shore now is growing homes for commuters to Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, despite treks of up to two hours each way. Using state funds from the Rural Legacy program created under Glendening, along with other public and private sources, about a quarter of 1.2 million acres of the Eastern Shore has been taken off the development table through PDR, with an ambitious goal to reach 50 percent by 2010. The plan is working, Glendening and others say, because effective preservation groups are coordinating with motivated local governments; the conserved land is located in designated agricultural and environmental preservation corridors, rather than in scattered locations; and because regional planning efforts are directing growth to designated areas. "In five or six years people will look back and see that an enormous amount of land has been preserved," Glendening said. But every success brings new challenges. "Now developers are using the existence of preserved land as a selling point, and that is drawing development to the fringes of what you are trying to preserve, and that was not the intention at all. That comes down to local officials enforcing their plans and holding fast on their zoning."
Protecting agriculture through joint planning in Ohio

Creating an enforceable plan that succeeds in curbing rural sprawl almost always involves cooperation among multiple jurisdictions. Recognizing this fact, Jim McConnell and others in their Ohio township of Pittsfield have created a joint economic development agreement with the neighboring city of Oberlin. (Ohio counties are divided into townships, rural jurisdictions lacking the capacity to provide water, sewer and other urban services that cities provide.) Cities and townships often fight one another for development or over annexations, but Oberlin and Pittsfield have agreed to support one another in a plan that designates about 20 percent of the township’s area, just outside Oberlin, as appropriate for development. The township has agreed not to oppose annexations in the development zone and to discourage development in its large farm zones in return for a share of the city’s tax receipts. Under the 50-year agreement, the township will receive an 18-percent share on all withholding from commercial payrolls and 2.35 mills of property tax on commercial and industrial areas. At the same time, the township engaged citizens in writing a land-use plan that will guide land use throughout the township in Smart-Growth fashion.

“Unlike a lot of other parts of rural Ohio, I think agriculture will continue to be viable into the future here,” McConnell says. “The primary thing we’re trying to guard against is rural sprawl. We hope that we will slow it down, and when something is built it will be done so it works better and looks better than if we’d done no planning at all. What would happen if we’re hit by a wave of hot development? I wouldn’t bet against the development. You can’t stop it, but maybe you can shape it and direct it.”

Transferring development rights on a grand scale in Georgia

The transfer of development rights, in which developers essentially buy density from one place and build it in another, is brilliant in the abstract, but very difficult to implement. One key reason is that while “sending” areas might be eager to receive money for doing nothing to their land, it is harder to find enthusiastic neighborhoods willing to receive greater density. The best hope might be to allow for the transfer statewide, Glendening suggests, with purchased development rights eligible for use in any city or town.

Another approach is the unique one being taken by the nonprofit Chattahoochee Hill Country Alliance, in rural Georgia, 35 miles south of Atlanta. There, one large land holder — Steve Nygren, a founder of the Peasant Restaurant chain — has pulled together the owners of 65,000 acres to master plan their development. The area in south Fulton County is unusual, in that it remains largely undeveloped even as counties on all sides of have fallen into Atlanta’s ever-waxing orbit. One reason south Fulton was skipped is that the northern half of the county, which contains much of the city of Atlanta and its toniest suburbs, has higher taxes and stricter development regulations than its later-developing neighbors.

Realizing that south Fulton’s development was inevitable, given its relative proximity to Atlanta, and that many landowners would look to prosper, Nygren and other key property holders developed a grand plan that would accommodate 100,000 new residents while conserving half or more of the district’s rolling pastures, horse farms, creeks and granite outcroppings. It would do this by concentrating development primarily in three compact, walkable villages, tied together by a greenway and trail system. The scheme,
which in 2002 was adopted into the county’s comprehensive land-use plan and is regulated by an overlay zone, depends largely on transfer of development rights. Anyone hoping to build homes or commercial buildings in the villages would need to buy density from designated conservation zones; at the moment most of the area is zoned at one house per acre under Fulton’s “agricultural/residential” zoning. Selling landowners are expected to fetch 40 to 60 percent of market value, while retaining the right to live on, farm, sell or otherwise use the land, provided they don’t develop it.

“The plan gives most of us at least something of what we want,” says Nygren. “Those who bought property hoping to develop it still can make a return, while those of us who bought or inherited the land hoping it would stay the way it was get an area that is substantially preserved over what we would get with conventional sprawl.” Nygren himself is developing on a small part of his holdings, a 70-acre hamlet dubbed Serenbe that will have 224 houses, townhomes and live-work units within walking distance of a few neighborhood shops, surrounded by 157 acres set aside for an organic farm, livestock grazing and forests. Some homes already are complete and a bake shop opened in early September. (For more information, please see http://www.chatthillcountry.org/)

Oregon looks to put it all together

No state has protected more of its rural heritage than Oregon. Nearly all of the rural landscape, 25 million acres, is covered by zoning that excludes all uses but farming or forestry, meaning it is off-limits for development of almost any kind. In Oregon, every incorporated town or city is required to establish an urban-growth boundary in coordination with the surrounding county that includes the existing urban area and enough vacant land for 20 years growth. Outside the boundary, all open land suitable for agricultural use is required to be zoned for farm or forest use only, and dwellings are restricted to use by farmers and agricultural and forestry operations.

The system, created in the early 1970s, has worked to help sustain an economically successful farm industry in Oregon, known for its Hood River pears, Columbia basin cherries, Yamhill Valley wines, grass seed and nursery stock. Farm gate receipts have quadrupled over the last three decades.

Despite that success, the system is threatened by statewide ballot measure 37, passed last November, which says in essence that those landowners who saw development prohibited on their property when the planning laws were passed are entitled either to compensation or development rights. Now, Oregonians must decide first, whether they want to preserve the rural landscape, and second, whether to create a system of transferable development credits or other compensatory program, says Bob Stacey, executive director of 1000 Friends of Oregon, a non-profit that advocates for the goals of the land protection program.

The effort to preserve a viable rural landscape in the face of development requires abundant creativity, motivation and savvy.

“For 30 years Oregonians thought we had the answer to rural sprawl,” Stacey says. “We probably will have to do what others have done and make use of conservation easements and transferable development rights. The one thing that we do have that other states don’t is a planning and zoning system that reinforces such a program.”

Conclusion

As the stories above make clear, the effort to preserve a viable rural landscape in the face of development requires abundant creativity, motivation and savvy. States and localities are grappling with these issues today as never before, with the result that many are struggling toward creative solutions that might — just might — work to ensure that our children and grandchildren know what working and unspoiled landscapes look like.

David A. Goldberg is the communications director for Smart Growth America, a nationwide coalition based in Washington, D.C., that advocates for land-use policy reform. In 2002, Mr. Goldberg was awarded a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University where he studied urban policy.
Kathy Dennis loves walking, even in the depth of the harsh Great Lakes winter, from her house to her detached garage. She loves her subdivision’s natural trails, its close-knit diverse community, its bird walks, its series of preserved dunes, meadows, woods, pastures and ponds.

Dennis grew up a city girl in Milwaukee. Her husband, Karl, grew up on Chicago’s very urban South Side and the couple loved vertical city living in a Chicago condominium on Lake Michigan. The odds that the recently retired couple would leave the intensity of the city for a rural development 60 miles from the Windy City would seem long.

But the Dennises live in Tryon Farms, a master-planned Conservation Subdivision that has committed to preserving 120 of its 150 acres as pristine, ecologically diverse rural land. Conservation Subdivisions seek to preserve farmland and open space — instead of leveling, sectioning off, completely bisecting with roads and otherwise converting hills, wetlands, woods and other natural areas into a built-out conventional subdivision.

“It’s the little things; you really know your neighbors,” Kathy Dennis said of Tryon, located very near Lake Michigan in Michigan City, Indiana. “We have nearly 60 households and we know everyone’s name. So many people in condos or conventional subdivisions come home, shut the door and never go out except for work and shopping. Here, you meet your neighbors, you have social gatherings, you use the hiking trails together.”

The Dennis family first bought a little 600-square-foot cabin in Tryon as a weekend getaway. After a few years of falling in love with the conserved land and the fabulous architecture that blends contemporary design with structures that are in complete harmony with the natural surroundings, they purchased a 2,000-square-foot permanent home.

“My husband was a very urban person, thought he’d never live in the country. He came out here because of me and fell in love with it,” Kathy Dennis said. “We traveled internationally, we could have picked any spot we wanted to in the world, but we painted and settled here because this felt like home.”

Tryon Farms is the brainchild of another Chicago couple, Eve Noonan and her husband Ed of Chicago Associates Planners & Architects. They had long enjoyed a second home on the beach in Michigan City.

When they decided to purchase the nearby Tryon Family farmstead, a picturesque piece of Indiana dairy farmland held by the same family from back to the Civil War, the Noonans focused on preserving more than 70 percent of the land.

They knew the site, with its restored prairie and 150-year-old beech trees, would be attractive as a second home to Chicagoland city dwellers. But with the South Shore passenger rail — one of the nation’s oldest interurban lines — just five minutes away, they knew their rural development would still feature transit connectivity to the big city.
GOOD FOR THE LAND, GOOD FOR THE POCKETBOOK

By Steve Wright
“If we hadn’t developed this way, the property would have been all commercial — totally flattened. With a Conservation Subdivision, we were able to preserve a 40-foot dune. Our dream was to build something like this.”

Homes in Tryon, clustered in little pockets of land, range in price from the high $100,000s to the mid $400,000s. The 120-acre preserve is held by a nonprofit foundation that uses the old barn and residential farm animals to present educational workshops. The nonprofit guarantees the 120 acres will never be developed and it saves homeowners from paying taxes on what would have been valued as a 120-acre common area.

“We build in stages, starting in front of the parcel and working our way back, organically controlled by the land. This means we don’t have big up-front prices and don’t have to sell houses quick, quick, quick in order to get out from under the financing,” Eve Noonan said of the advantages of Conservation Subdivisions to developers’ bottom lines.

“We’ve also discovered our square-foot price, because we build so incredibly well, sells much higher per square foot than conventional or traditional building.”

Noonan said the biggest hurdle for a would-be Conservation Subdivision developer is an outdated, conventional set of city or county regulations that stipulate minimum lot sizes, minimum road widths and utility requirements that could prevent the goal of preserving land while clustering houses.

“By doing these clustered settlements, we don’t have to do the infrastructure for the whole 170 acres, which saves money,” Eve Noonan said. We had to get special permission to build our roads more narrow than code allowed. With narrow roads, drivers slow down, kids feel safe riding bikes and the fire trucks can always turn around using part of the farmland off the paved surface. We also had to fight the city to be allowed to do Constructed Wastewater Wetlands sewage treatment on site, instead of running miles of city sanitary lines.”

Suburban Detroit resident Kirt Manacke is so convinced that Conservation Subdivisions are the antidote to America’s unwavering consumption of rural land for suburban sprawl, that he created LandChoices. The nonprofit organization strives to inform stakeholders about land protection options “that are sensible and beneficial for both land developers and landowners.”

Manacke asserts that in addition to protecting rural lands for crop production, livestock grazing or just beautiful green space, Conservation Subdivisions have a track record of success for landowners, developers, townships and homebuyers.
“Contrary to popular belief, conservationists and developers make a very profitable team, reducing costs while increasing the desirability and market value of new developments. Few landowners, citizens and planning commissioners realize such options exist,” said Manacke, echoing the words of his press release about his on-line clearing house of conservation information.

Randall Arendt, a member of LandChoices’ Advisory Group, is one of the nation’s foremost authorities on Conservation Subdivision design — one might even call him the father of the movement to bring development to a plot of land while perpetually preserving at least half of its rural/agricultural nature.

“One developer in Texas who hired me to redesign his 60-acre subdivision told me that his site grading costs plummeted from $300,000 to $50,000 as a result of my re-design,” Arendt said via e-mail interview while overseas. “In Tennessee, my re-design saved one developer approximately $212,000 in street construction costs, while at the same time introducing significantly more quality open space into the layout. Another design is credited by an Indiana developer as having added $20,000 to $25,000 of value to each of his 40 lots.”

Arendt, a landscape planner, site designer and author of more than 20 smart land use publications, has worked for clients in 21 states — from Florida to Texas to the South and the Midwest, where Conservation Design has become a very popular way of accommodating housing growth while conserving rolling farm land and crucial wetlands.

In North Carolina’s prized and growing Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill research triangle area, the town of Cary has earned awards for its controlled growth including Conservation Subdivisions.

“We adopted an ordinance that requires that Conservation Subdivisions be done in the area that touches our watershed,” said town of Cary Senior Planner Don Belk. “This involves about 1,500 acres in our western planning jurisdiction where there are very poor soils in a very rural area, but municipal utilities are now available so it also is the hottest development area in the region.”

Previously, the 1,500 acres were zoned for minimum one-acre lots. Now, the area is allowed to have up to 2.5 units per acre, but only if housing is clustered and a significant amount of preserved open space is created as part of the development.

“We have a representative of Toll Brothers — one of the biggest homebuilding companies in the nation — who is actually going to the landowners and encouraging them to dedicate the conservation land up front, before they sell,” Belk said. “They take advantage of the state’s conservation tax credit program for a big tax break, then they get the proceeds from the sale of the remaining developable land.”

Many successful developers are converts to Conservation Subdivisions. Waukesha, Wisconsin-based Siepmann Realty Corporation

Conservationists and developers make a very profitable team, reducing costs while increasing the desirability and market value of new developments.
has been creating communities that conserve land for more than 40 of its 62 years in business. When a visitor clicks on Siepmann’s internet homepage, a spinning counter comes to rest on the figure 1,566 — the number of acres of open space preserved in the developer’s conservation communities.

Sugar Creek Preserve, in southeastern Wisconsin, is a Conservation Subdivision of 52 homesites situated on 260 pristine acres in Walworth County’s Sugar Creek Valley. Its creators are development consultant Siepmann Realty, landowner Keefe Real Estate, developer Red Wing Land Company and land planner Greener Prospects — Arendt’s company.

More than 170 acres are permanently preserved open space marked by restored prairie, hardwood forests, a stream, a lake and 4.5 miles of walking trails. Lot sizes are large, starting at just more than one acre selling for $110,000 and ranging up to four acres, priced at $300,000.

“REALTORS® selling Conservation Subdivision homesites must sell the community and environment first, the specific lot second. It is important to frame the lot purchase differently than a regular lot and block subdivision. At Sugar Creek Preserve we tell buyers that they aren’t buying one acre lots, they are buying a 176 acre lot, of which they have one acre to build on,” said Rob Keefe of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin-based Keefe Real Estate.

However, Conservation Subdivisions do pose challenges. They don’t work everywhere. Dense urban areas or regions boxed in by oceans, mountains or other extreme boundaries — such as Florida’s Everglades — simply do not have the large tracts of land required. And, while Conservation Subdivisions offer prices in the mid-range, rarely are they good sites for affordable housing because they are located far from urban job centers and their amenities. Their relatively low densities compared to the central city densities make it difficult to offer low-cost housing that requires many units on land acquired as cheaply as possible.

Keefe said there are even challenges to luring people that are already in the market for developments that conserve large tracts of land. “Conservation Subdivisions can be difficult to sell in the early stages. Prairie restorations look terrible for the first two years while the grasses are being established,” he said. “The construction traffic and excavation work takes away from the peaceful natural setting. Like any new subdivision it’s hard to

Homeowners will benefit by buying a site surrounded by preserved land.
Some Benefits of Conservation Design
(adapted from the writings of Randall Arendt)

1. Greater flexibility in lot sizes allows developers to create more compact lots. Conservation Design can be used on lots that are serviced by municipal water/sewer, where lots are typically reduced from 20,000 square feet to 12,000 square feet. Compact lots are a benefit to empty-nesters who wish to minimize their routine outdoor maintenance work (mowing lawns, raking leaves, etc.). It also enables developers to take far greater advantage of special places on the property (such as knolls offering views of ponds, meadows, etc.) by siting a larger number of narrower lots there than would ordinarily be possible.

2. The ability to divide and sell parts of the protected open space as “conservancy lots” enables developers to tap into the higher-end country-property market, boosting profit margin and also adding value to all lots in their vicinity.

3. Reduced site grading costs are another “hidden incentive.” This enables large tree preservation, which retains the value that such trees add to the neighborhood.

4. Reduced street costs are sometimes another benefit, via wider street layouts permitting shorter streets.

5. Greater attractiveness, provided by the open space, is another benefit having direct economic value. Conservation lots sell for a higher price compared to house lots without open space, such as those in conventional subdivisions.

6. Faster absorption rates are another economic advantage created when significant amounts of open space are preserved. Conservation lots sell out faster when placed on the market.

Conservation Subdivisions

Internet Resources

Tryon Farm: www.tryonfarm.com
LandChoices: www.landchoices.com
Randall Arendt: www.greenerprospects.com
Town of Cary: www.townofcary.org
Siepmann Realty: www.siepmannrealty.com
Sugar Creek Preserve: www.sugarcreekpreserve.com
Keefe Real Estate: www.keeferealestate.com
Red Wing Land Company: www.redwingland.com

Financial incentives are always a plus. Tryon developer Eve Noonan said resales are strong in her Michigan City, Indiana Conservation Subdivision; homeowners will benefit by buying a site surrounded by preserved land. Not only will homeowners benefit in the long run, but developers benefit by saving site grading and infrastructure costs. “I think in lots of ways, we have found out financially that this kind of development can be very, very successful,” she said. “That is good news not just for everybody’s pocketbooks but also good news for Mother Nature.”

Wright frequently writes about Smart Growth and sustainable communities. He and his wife live in a restored historic home in the heart of Miami’s Little Havana. Contact him at: stevewright64@yahoo.com.

Architectural renderings depict the town of Cary, North Carolina filling in with development while preserving open space.
Among real estate professionals, it’s no secret that the scenic beauty and natural features of an area make for desirable neighborhoods and enduring home values.

A new book, Nature-Friendly Communities: Habitat Protection and Land Use Planning by Christopher Duerksen and Cara Snyder, examines these connections more deeply, linking environmental initiatives to heightened property values and long-term economic growth.

Published by Island Press, a nonprofit publishing house with strong conservation credentials, Duerksen and Snyder’s book focuses as much on solid econometric modeling and fiscal analyses as it does on “feel good” environmental projects.

The result? A thoroughly-researched and well-written narrative that features compelling data, helpful examples and carefully compiled case studies on communities that have made environmental protection and economic development a single goal.

Duerksen and Snyder offer an important contribution to the growing body of research about how people perceive their quality of life. And, they offer new insight into why intangibles such as “recreational opportunities” figure as much into high quality-of-life ratings as more definable public benefits such as police and fire protection.

Moreover, by focusing on achievable goals at the local level, the authors create a sense of urgency that underscores...
the need for individual action. While a single rain garden or shoreline buffer project won’t eliminate run-off problems for a watershed that spans multiple governmental jurisdictions, small-scale successes may encourage more ambitious projects.

Real estate professionals, developers and land-use planners would do well to take heed of one of the book’s central themes. Even as it builds on evidence that protecting the environment can save governments money and increase private property values, the book points out a stark new reality. Unlike the last century, when over-fishing, over-hunting and unbridled exploitation of timber and mineral resources were the primary forces in declining environmental quality, today there is a new culprit.

According to Duerksen and Snyder, this underlying culprit is the destruction and degradation of habitat, often connected to “the conversion of vast stretches of land to housing, commercial development and transportation projects.” Currently, 36 states suffer from extreme or high levels of damage to native ecosystems with prairies, oak savannas and sagebrush steppe areas in dramatic decline. Meanwhile, the book reports, surveys by the National Audubon Society document significant population reductions for almost 30 percent of North American bird species.

Yet, the book praises recent trends that offer hope for the future, including: public-private partnerships to fund land acquisitions and the purchase of development rights; growing awareness of the need for tighter zoning and subdivision controls with some novel approaches such as rural clustering; increased use of incentives for infill development and green space protection; and efforts to integrate affordable housing strategies as part of broader planning efforts.

A major portion of the book centers on compelling case studies that provide helpful examples of community-based strategies to achieve growth while protecting the very elements that ensure a high quality of life. The examples cited involve highly successful public-sector initiatives and focus on government efforts across the nation. These projects cover regional initiatives, and the book appropriately points to the need for workable regulatory and administrative frameworks to stimulate activity.

The emphasis on these public-private initiatives provides an opportunity to explore a community’s responsibility to make recreational opportunities and access to natural areas available.

SHOWCASE COMMUNITIES

Among the communities highlighted in the book Nature-Friendly Communities are:

- Austin, Texas
- Baltimore County, Md.
- Bath Township, Ohio
- Charlotte Harbor, Fla.
- Chicago Wilderness
- Dane County, Wis.
- DeKalb County, Ga.
- Eugene, Ore.
- Farmington Valley, Conn.
- Fort Collins, Colo.
- King County, Wash.
- Larimer County, Colo.
- Loudon County, Va.
- Pima County, Ariz.
- Pittsford, N.Y.
- Placer County, Calif.
- Powell County, Mont.
- Sanibel, Fla.
- Teton County, Wyo.
- Traverse Bay Area, Mich.
- Van Cisez Region, Minn.
income residents are heavy users of local parks; U.S. citizens with household incomes of less than $20,000 derive significant benefits in terms of physical exercise, family well-being and stress reduction thanks to these “free” recreational opportunities.

While the 20 communities highlighted in the book all have tailored their strategies to address local circumstances, several have undertaken projects aimed at specific problems such as improving water quality.

Examples include:
- **Austin, Texas**, is cited as “a model nature-friendly community” because of an impressive set of government and non-governmental programs designed to protect natural resources, open space and wildlife habitat. Over the years, the community has worked steadily to purchase tens of thousands of acres to protect sensitive aquifer recharge areas. In addition, the community has created a Watershed Protection and Development Review Department to monitor and protect local watersheds while also providing comprehensive development review services.

U.S. citizens derive significant benefits in terms of physical exercise, family well-being and stress reduction thanks to “free” recreational opportunities.

- **Bath Township, Ohio**, is noted for an extensive update of its zoning code that features a Riparian Overlay District designed to protect rivers, streams and other waterways throughout the region. Most of the town obtains drinking water from wells that are recharged with surface water from the watershed. The area also is home to the clean headwaters of rivers and streams that are critical to the rejuvenation of Lake Erie. The Riparian Overlay District imposes additional development standards beyond those of the local zoning districts. Among the requirements are setbacks of 300 feet or more on each side of streams draining an area greater than 300 square miles and setbacks of 50 feet for some federally-protected wetlands.

Other communities are noted for their land-use planning and habitat protection. For example:

- **Baltimore County, Md.**, is credited for having one of the most ambitious environmental protection programs in the country with state-
gies for land-use regulation, acquisition projects, an urban-rural demarcation line and infill development initiatives.

- **Dane County, Wis.**, is mentioned for its efforts to stop sprawl and promote infill projects. Through an “outside game” strategy, the county uses regulatory, acquisition and zoning tools to limit inefficient development and protect numerous water resources. Its “inside game” strategy involves work with cities and towns to support redevelopment and infill projects while promoting affordable housing development.

Finally, some communities with unique ecosystems and significant populations of endangered plants and animals are recognized for their efforts in the book. For example:

- **Pima County, Ariz.**, gets credit in the book for a Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan that focuses on biodiversity. A 2004 bond election has given the project a substantial boost, with $112 million allocated for habitat acquisition.

- **Sanibel, Fla.**, also gains high praise for programs to protect sensitive areas ranging from freshwater wetlands to mangrove swamps. The Sanibel plan designates six distinct ecological zones that allow for differing levels of development to help protect the native and migrant wildlife such as birds, fish, manatees, alligators and occasional crocodiles.

In the end, Christopher Duerksen and Cara Snyder provide extensive research and important, successful examples that REALTORS®, developers, planners and builders alike will find insightful, and necessary, for land-use planning that will protect the future of our country’s ecosystem.

---

**ENVIRONMENT, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LINKED**

In the book, authors Christopher Duerksen and Cara Snyder point to numerous studies showing that natural resource preservation can help retain jobs, attract new employers and contribute to strong property values. Among the findings they cite:

- Together, recreation, parks and open space serve as the top quality-of-life factor preferred by small companies, which tend to create jobs at a higher rate than other businesses.

- Promoting tourism is an important economic development strategy and a 2001 study indicates annual national expenditures of $40 billion associated with wildlife watching alone.

- A study for the state of South Carolina indicated taxpayer savings of $2.7 billion in capital infrastructure over 20 years by encouraging higher-density development.

- Several studies have shown that preserving undeveloped land can save communities money, because the cost of providing public services to new residential developments is not always recouped through higher tax revenues. In Lancaster County, Penn., the negation fiscal impact of providing town services was $40 per household for urban infill projects and $147 for scattered subdivisions.

- Proximity to natural areas boosts property values. In Portland, Ore., a park of any kind within 1,500 feet of a home increased the home’s sale price by $2,200.
A peaceful view of mountains from the office where big city business deals are made. Acres of development-ready infrastructure unfettered by urban bureaucracy and red tape. Savvy business proprietors plying their trades Monday through Friday, then fly fishing and hiking on the weekends in their own backyards.

What may sound like nonsensical contradictions or a novelist’s flight of fancy are realities in communities all across the country. Such communities — called micropolitans — exist throughout the United States and are attracting the attention of developers and residents alike, particularly those who want big city conveniences and a small town feel.

But just exactly what is a micropolitan and why are they factoring into America’s growth trends? The U.S. Office of Management and Budget in June 2003 introduced the following definition: “at least one urban cluster of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 in population.”

To put this in real terms, a true expert is essential and Robert Lang fits the bill. Lang is the director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech as well as an associate professor in Urban Affairs and Planning. He has researched and written about micropolitans (or micros) extensively.

“Micros sit on the fringe of metropolitan areas, but not in the metro area. And it’s the size of the micro’s core — the principal city or cities — that matters. A micropolitan can be comprised of one or more counties, but they are their own distinct places,” he said.

With their small cores but sometimes expansive boundaries, micros are more rural and less intense than cities but more civilized and less rustic than traditional rural areas. They frequently come with the promise of cheap land and lower construction costs, plus fewer bureaucratic hoops to jump through than urban centers.

One in 10 Americans lives in a micropolitan. One out of five U.S. counties is a micro. Micropolitans grew by nearly eight percent in the 1990s.
Lang is careful to differentiate micros from exurbs, a concept with which they are sometimes confused. “Exurbs are a subset of the suburbs, and are still part of the metropolitan community and economy. Exurbs are located on the furthest ring of a metropolitan area. Micros sit outside of the metropolitan areas,” he explained.

People living in exurbs tend to commute back and forth to the core city, while micropolitan residents can and often do live, work and play within the boundaries of the micro, without venturing into the nearest metropolitan area. That is what makes them attractive as growth areas.

While micros lack a large central city of over 50,000 residents, they often contain central cities akin to modest-sized towns, according to census analysis of 567 micros in the continental U.S. published by Lang and co-author Dawn Dhavale. Yet some of the country’s largest micros are more than just overgrown towns; they are better characterized as a new decentralized or countrified city.

“Micropolitans are as diverse as cities, as different as Detroit and Los Angeles,” Lang said. “Some are poor, some affluent. Some are politically conservative, some liberal. Some are racially homogenous, some very ethnically diverse.”

Mt. Airy, N.C. sounds like a fictional town from the golden age of television: an honest-to-goodness downtown with a Main Street, proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway, a still-thriving, drive-in movie theater and other quaint touches such as a building bedecked with an authentic antique Coca-Cola sign.

Indeed, Mt. Airy was the boyhood home of actor and small town America icon Andy Griffith. The town’s tourism Web site address is VisitMayberry.com. But to dismiss this city as a sleepy little backwater would be a serious mistake.

“Mount Airy has long been the economic hub for the county,” said Mt. Airy City Manager Don Brookshire. “In the past this meant that it was both a retailing and manufacturing center that brought workers in who would shop in our area. Beginning in the late 1990s, the city began to feel the impact of the global economy with the loss of several thousand textile and furniture manufacturing related jobs. At the same time, the community was seeing the decline in the major agricultural crop of the region, tobacco,” said Brookshire.

But Mt. Airy, located 85 miles from Charlotte with a micropolitan area population of 71,000, found a way to adapt. Now the downtown is focused less on retail and more on tourism. It’s capitalized on being the hometown of not only Griffith, but also Eng and Chang — the world’s most...
famous Siamese Twins — and country singer Donna Fargo. Located in the Blue Ridge foothills, the town is attracting hikers and bikers looking to explore the surrounding natural beauty.

“We have a diversified local mix of business and industry that offers both the old and the new. The serene and bucolic downtown is separated by about a mile from a thriving street that is bounded by numerous chain and franchise establishments that offer all that can be found in most cities of a larger size,” said Brookshire.

REALTOR® and developer Burke Robertson grew up in Mt. Airy. He left for a while, living in more urban areas, but came back to the city because he saw the potential here, which he terms “limitless.”

“Because of technology — fax machines, the Internet — you can live anywhere. I know a New York City mortgage broker who lives here. Another guy publishes three trade magazines that are printed in Philadelphia and his graphics guy lives in Vermont,” said Robertson.

“The downside of technology is that it makes things impersonal,” he said.

Robertson believes that the area will continue to grow as a mature community, drawing fifty-somethings who are still vital and active but are looking down the road to retirement. The city appeals to people who are moving an existing business or are looking to make a career change.

“Micros must avoid mistakes such as strip center development and contributing to traffic congestion. And you need a central core, a people place,” he said.

Brookshire echoes similar sentiments. He believes that the challenges for micros include “the competing desires to develop the community further and add to the tax base versus the desire to retain the elements that make the community special; the need to enhance services to the population on a limited tax base and the recognition that there continues to be a shortage of high-paying, high-quality jobs for our residents.”

In contrast with Mt. Airy, Sheridan, Wyo. is a micropolitan located a long distance from a major metropolitan area. Salt Lake City, Utah sits nearly 400 miles away. But that’s not stopping city dwellers from the East, California and Colorado from moving to this mountain community of just over 26,000 people.

“We don’t have enough houses to sell to interested buyers,” said Sheridan REALTOR® Vickie Farrington, who handles primarily residential sales.

“Prices are going up, but it’s still much cheaper than the big cities,” she said.

“People want to escape the big city. This is a quiet community with little crime. People leave their keys in their cars. They don’t lock their houses. And it’s inexpensive to live here,” said Farrington.

Halfway between the Ohio big cities of Cleveland and Columbus, Ashland celebrates its small town roots. The Johnny Appleseed Heritage Center and Outdoor Drama is in the works as a tribute to the folkloric fig-
Micropolitans are playing a leading role in their geographic area.

Business partnerships, i.e. seminars, business counseling, etc. and much more regional partnering with other small towns,” he said.

Paul A. Sears, dean of Ashland University’s College of Business and Economics, believes that the success of micros can be a two-edged sword.

“The biggest challenge that I see for micropolitan communities is getting used to the idea that they are playing a leading role in their geographic area. I think the citizens of these communities are so used to thinking about larger metropolitan areas as playing the key roles that they simply are not yet comfortable with the idea that they are key players in the economic landscape of their region,” said Sears.

John C. Hovsepian, president of Ohio Tool Works Corporation, a manufacturer of heavy industrial honing equipment, tooling and abrasive related products, located in Ashland, cites “people in the community desire growth and expansion but within the established guidelines and standards which have been in place for many years.”

Hovsepian also feels a “lack of flexibility in work force thinking” is a challenge to be overcome in the small town atmosphere of micro communities.

Mt. Airy City Manager Don Brookshire neatly summed up the essence of the “micro mystique” that draws businesses and residents alike.

“A small town atmosphere where you can walk down the street and be recognized is important….It’s about the quality of life in a community such as ours.”

Johnson-Wright frequently writes about Smart Growth and sustainable communities. She and her husband live in a restored historic home in the heart of Miami’s Little Havana. Contact her at hjohnsonwright@yahoo.com.
With non-urban areas across the country gaining population at remarkable rates, it might lead one to ask if the urban revival phenomenon is for real. Are people really returning to the larger cities?

According to Robert Lang, director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech, the revival “was much more real in the 1990s than it is now.”

“The 1990s were the best decade for American cities since the 1940s. The 1970s were the worst. (The numbers) will never look as good as the ‘90s,” he said.

Even so, Lang questions how census statistics are interpreted. He posits the possibility of undercounting, that the government should be looking at household occupancy rather than sheer numbers.

“Cities have been losing families and gaining educated singles. Cities are getting richer. The trend in the hot coastal cities and hot Midwestern cities is that the cities are losing the poor and gaining the rich,” Lang said.

Carol Coletta, host and producer of the nationally-syndicated public radio show Smart City and president of CEOs for Cities, agrees.

“Visit the center of most any big city in America, and you’ll find new residential construction underway. Much of this development would have been unimaginable just a dozen years ago. In fact, throughout the 1990s, the Census Bureau continued to insist that cities were in decline. But the presence of construction cranes told a different story. So did the 2000 Census. People were moving back into city centers for the first time in decades, and that trend has only accelerated in the first half of this decade,” said Coletta.

Coletta believes that both trends show no signs of slowing.

“Talented people tend to attract other talented people. So once development achieves critical mass, the trend becomes self-reinforcing,” said Coletta.

“Is the urban revival for real?” Absolutely. The only question that matters for any city is ‘How do we get our share of the talented people who are driving this urban revival?’”
When it comes to appealing to homeowners, the charms of exurban development are obvious: Larger lots give residents more of a country feel, removing them from the hustle and bustle of city life and giving them more space to move about.

Despite the emphasis that has been placed on returning to America’s cities, planning experts maintain that most future growth will occur in America’s greenfields. Indeed, renowned New Urbanist architect Andres Duany predicts that as much as 95 percent of future development will occur in exurbia, according to an Urban Land Institute report.

Exurban development has come under fire, however, from critics who contend that the developments violate principles of Smart Growth, will lead to more traffic congestion, more pollution, and more single-occupied vehicles needing to travel extra miles on already congested highways.

Some growth management planners, however, say there are ways to combat this negative image by designing exurbs that are appealing to home-
Developing neighborhoods apply Smart Growth principles to prepare for future transit needs.

By Christine Jordan Sexton

owners, by featuring amenities that make it more pleasant to stay in the neighborhood and provide increasing transit options for when you leave. These neighborhoods also are embraced by regional planners because they are built with Smart Growth principles in mind.

It’s an idea called “transit ready” and it was coined several years back by Harrison B. Rue, the executive director of the Virginia-based Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission & Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Rue, a former REALTOR® and developer, says “transit ready” concepts are simple, inexpensive to implement and, for the most part, reflect New Urbanist principles. Mixed-use, high-density communities that boast town centers are transit ready neighborhoods. Other features include setback sidewalks and bus stops in an urban layout that features plenty of street interconnection.

While transit oriented neighborhoods are built to complement existing mass transit options available to residents, transit ready developments focus on the long-term needs of the community. They can be small villages built in fringe exurban areas that eventually mature into neighborhoods that one day can absorb future mass transit options, whether it’s bus lines or light rail.

A prime example of a transit ready development is Daybreak, in South Jordan, Utah, a small city of 40,000 that is about a 15-minute Interstate drive away from Salt Lake City. Daybreak is advertised as “close enough to the city world” but closer to the country world, “the world of hiking and biking trails and wide open spaces.”

A former greenfield at the base of the Oquirrh Mountains on the southern end of
Salt Lake, Daybreak is a 4,200-acre residential, retail and office community being developed by Kennecott Land, a sister company to Kennecott Utah Copper. When built out to completion over the next 15 years, the community will include more than 13,000 energy-efficient homes, 1,250 acres of water-wise parks and open space, a large recreational lake, active town and village centers, schools, churches and transportation alternatives.

There is no mass transit serving the town today, but the community was built with future transit needs in mind. Indeed, the addition of light rail service and expanded roadway access were included in the master plan and Kennecott Land teamed up with four neighboring cities to form a community partnership that hopes to accelerate the plans to expand the Utah Transit Authority light rail line through the Mid-Jordan area. There are also discussions with the Utah Department of Transportation to plan a new major highway, the Mountain View Corridor, to provide access to Daybreak’s planned commercial center.

It’s that type of coordination that Rue says is essential to constructing transit ready developments. “In the perfect world, the developer is working with the planning department and the transit agency,” he said.

Daybreak was planned by the Berkeley-based Calthorpe and Associates, which has made its name focusing on New Urbanism, urban villages, transit oriented development and regional cities.

While Calthorpe associate Joe DiStefano said Daybreak will be enhanced by future transportation improvements, he stressed that the real assets that Daybreak offers its residents, and nearby neighbors, is its smart land-use plan.

“The place will function well with or without transit,” said DiStefano, who said the community was planned with New Urbanism principles in mind so people can walk their children to school or walk to the store or walk to work or a nearby park.

They still may need to drive their cars to other parts of Utah today but the fact they can walk to a park, instead of drive, or walk their children to school or walk to the store is a big improvement.

The community was planned so people can walk their children to school or walk to the store or walk to work or a nearby park.
school, instead of putting them on a bus, means less congestion on roads, DiStefano said.

“Good land use and good urban design is always a benefit,” said DiStefano, who said despite criticism to the contrary New Urbanism can exist in formerly undeveloped greenfields. Southwood in Tallahassee, Florida is another example of a former exurban greenfield that may ultimately transform the long-term future of the entire region. For years developers had been building further and further northward in Leon County, edging closer to plantations and nature preserves that straddle the Georgia-Florida line. There are major developments as much as 10 miles from the urban core of the small southern city.

Yet Southwood, which sits on 3,200 acres that once was part of a massive pine tree farm, actually is only five miles southeast of downtown Tallahassee and the Florida Capitol and is only minutes away from every major employer in the region.

While mass transit isn’t an option for residents now, Rue said the community’s connectivity makes it transit ready and that it adheres to his principles of transit ready. Even before a single home was built, the St. Joe Company, owner of the land, convinced state government to build an office complex adjacent to the development, meaning that people can work just next to where they live.

“Overall, it’s a very nice plan,” Rue said in an e-mail after reviewing a map of Southwood. “It looks darned good: Good interconnections, looks like good walk-ability details, decent amount of destinations.”

While Rue gave Southwood high marks for its transit-friendly layout, Capital Regional Transportation Planning Agency Interim Executive Director, Jack Kostrzewa, described Southwood as a remote island that, he said, has contributed to area traffic problems. Placing the Florida State University magnet school, called Florida High, on Southwood’s campus meant increased drive times for area residents with children in the program. He also was critical of a decision to place a shopping center across from Southwood on the opposite side of a busy three-lane highway instead of inside the community.

“It looks to me more and more that it’s a retirement community,” said Kostrzewa.

Rue and DiStefano maintain, however, that well-designed greenfields will sidestep the mistakes in developing so many of America’s suburbs. Those past mistakes they said include lining neighborhoods with meandering cul de sacs instead of having connected arterial roads that help traffic flow. Another typical mistake is designing streets without shaded sidewalks.

Developing green, open areas, the two men say, doesn’t contradict the New Urbanism principles they defend as sound. Additionally, DiStefano says that it’s inevitable that the areas be developed.

“It’s not a concession,” he said. Instead he called it a recognition that “There’s no way we can accommodate 100 percent of our future growth in existing areas.”

Christine Jordan Sexton is a Tallahassee-based freelance reporter who has done correspondent work for the Associated Press, the New York Times, Florida Medical Business and a variety of trade magazines, including Florida Lawyer and National Underwriter.
the future of Farms

By Brad Broberg
As long as people need food, there will be farms. The question facing more and more regions of the country is where.

With growth and development invading rural America, fields and pastures are disappearing. And not just any fields and pastures. The farms most threatened by growth — those nearest urban edges — are also some of the richest and most productive.

“What we’re most concerned about is development on prime farmland,” said Jill Schwartz, director of marketing at American Farmlands Trust. “There is a lot more prime farmland being developed now than in the past. Every state in the country is experiencing it in some way.”

Why it’s happening, what it means and how communities are responding are important questions. As key pieces in the Smart Growth puzzle, the answers reveal the complexity — and importance — of trying to balance two highly conflicting demands on rural lands.

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving productive farmland. An AFT report entitled “Farming on the Edge: Sprawling Development Threatens America’s Best Farmland” contains a bumper crop of statistics that illustrate the pressure growth is placing on agriculture.

Although due for an update — the report is based on figures from 1992-97 — there is no reason to think the trends the report identifies have waned, said Schwartz. During the five-year period covered by the report, more than 6 million acres of agricultural land — an area the size of Maryland — were lost to developed use. What’s more the rate of loss — 1.2 million acres per year — was 51 percent higher than from 1982-1992.

There’s worse news, though. Prime land vanished 30 percent faster than non-prime land. As the loss of the best farmland shifts more production to marginal land, the quality of crops suffer, more chemicals must be used and the food must be transported greater distances, said Schwartz. In addition, the farmland most threatened by development is often situated in one-of-a-kind microclimates capable of growing particular fruits and vegetables that don’t grow as well anywhere else, she said.

Sadly, most of the development pressure is falling on small family farms — an American icon increas-
ingly under siege. There is, however, growing concern for what’s at stake — crops, jobs, open space and a way of life — when farmlands disappear.

“We’re seeing a great trend toward awareness,” said Schwartz.

Across the country, a number of public and private entities are saving farmlands through direct acquisition, purchase or transfer of development rights, new economic development strategies and Smart Growth — with the greatest successes coming when the various approaches are combined.

Take Lancaster County, for example. About 90 minutes west of Philadelphia, the county has managed to accommodate a substantial population — 500,000 — without compromising its $1 billion a year agriculture industry. While the county contains more than 330,000 acres of farmland, only 49,000 acres is formally preserved through purchase of the land and/or development rights. The rest is protected by the county’s Smart Growth policies. “Preserving farmland is not enough,” explained Richard Doenges, director of the Agricultural Preserve Board, which oversees the county’s purchase-of-development rights program.

“Preserving farmland is not enough…You have to have good land-use planning. That’s why we’ve been effective here.”

In 1993, Lancaster adopted a growth management plan that set out to steer 80 percent of future growth into urban growth areas rather than allowing it to sprawl. After coming close to hitting its goal — 76 percent of the county’s growth subsequently occurred in the targeted areas — the county is now revising its goal to 85 percent.

Lancaster County is not stopping there. The county has established a Blue Ribbon Commission to promote policies and strategies that will keep its farms economically viable — and less prone to be sold for development — in the years ahead.

Sandwiched between Baltimore and Washington, D.C., Montgomery County, Md., also is taking a comprehensive approach with zoning as the foundation. After first trying — and failing — in the 1970s to preserve farmland by establishing minimum lot sizes of five acres in agricultural zones, it raised the minimum lot size to 25 acres in 1981.

The down side of down zoning is the loss of potential value farmers experience. One way local governments can compensate farmers is to offer to buy development rights — that is pay a farmer the difference between the land’s agricultural value and its developable value in exchange for prohibiting the land from ever being developed for non-farm use. Montgomery County is employing a variation of that strategy that involves the transfer of development rights (TDR).

“It’s a little bit different [than buying development rights] because the private sector pays for the transferred rights,” said John Zawitosky, director of planning and promotions for the agricultural services division of the county’s economic development department.

The program enables farmers to sell the right to develop portions of their property to developers. The developers can then use those rights to develop property elsewhere — typically in a designated growth area — at higher densities than otherwise would be permitted.

In some ways, it was only a matter of time before the needs of growth and agriculture would begin to collide and the country would find so much of its...
food supply — 86 percent of fruits and vegetables and 63 percent of dairy products, according to the AFT — square in the path of development.

Historically, the country’s most fertile areas were settled first, giving rise to towns and cities that, in the days before modern food preservation and transportation, needed to be within a wagon ride of their food supply. As the towns and cities grew, they gradually ate up the closest farmland.

The issue today, though, is not growth per se. It’s the gluttonous nature of contemporary growth — insatiable in its appetite for open space — that raises red flags. According to “Farming on the Edge,” the acreage per person for new housing almost doubled over the 20-year period leading up to the report. “In the 1990s, almost half of residential development occurred on 10 to 22 acres [per lot] — that’s what’s causing the problem,” said Schwartz. “So many people want a big piece of land. They’re not interested in urban infill.”

There’s a term for this type of development — exurbs. Neither fully suburban nor fully rural, exurbs mix low-density housing with active farms on the far fringes of urban centers. “Exurbs... is the fastest-growing development type,” said Jill Clark, program manager of the Exurban Change Program at Ohio State University, which is analyzing the impact of exurbs on that state.

As appealing as exurban life is to many city dwellers — more bang for their home-buying buck, less congestion, a better environment to raise a family — there’s a price to pay for that style of development. When the economic climate in a county shifts from farming to development, longtime agricultural industries that have driven local economies for as long as 200 years often begin to wither.

It all starts when development pressure makes farms worth more as potential subdivisions or Wal-Marts than they are as corn fields or dairy pastures. “Land evolves to its highest and best use,” said Randy Hertz, owner of Hertz Farm Management/Hertz Real Estate Services in Nevada, Iowa, and incoming president of the REALTORS® Land Institute. “Unfortunately, land that is highly suitable to farming — level, well-...
drained — is the most suitable for development. Builders love it.”

As a result, farmers are getting “very, very tempting offers” to sell, said Schwartz. Typically the farm is their nest egg. And since fewer and fewer children of farmers want to take over the farm, selling the farm for development becomes the best way for farmers to provide for their retirement and/or pass along an inheritance to their children. Even so, there’s more behind the transformation of farmland than soaring property values. After all, just because farmers can sell their land for a windfall doesn’t mean they must. In fact, most farmers probably would prefer not to sell their land for development, said Wendy Wieland, agricultural businesses development specialist with the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance in upstate Michigan. “If farming is profitable, people will continue to do it,” she said.

Wieland works with farmers to become more entrepreneurial and derive added value from their land and labor. Strategies include creating regional brand identities, assuming more responsibility for processing their products and switching from growing low-priced commodity crops such as grains to higher-priced specialty crops such as organic produce. “The most sustainable farmland preservation tool is to make farming more profitable,” she said. “It’s hard work, but it’s a tremendously satisfying way of life.”

That’s why the Hoffman family hangs on. Together, the Hoffmans — Joe Sr., sons Joe Jr. and Paul and nephew Bill McMaster — farm a combined 350 acres in Bear Creek Township in upstate Michigan. Joe Jr. and Paul represent the fifth-generation of the family to work the soil there. Unlike so many of the township’s other farmers, the Hoffmans have resisted the pressure of development. “It’s the love of the land and the history of the land — that’s what keeps the few farmers left in the township going,” said Joe Jr., whose great-great-grandfather settled there in 1877.

Long popular as a summer playground for the wealthy, scenic Bear Creek Township ultimately became an equally popular place for people to build homes. “Sometime in the 1960s and 1970s is
when the development push really started,” said Hoffman. “If we had started (trying to save farm-
land) 20 years ago, we’d be a lot better off.”

Today, Bear Creek provides a case study of the forces that make balancing the needs of agricul-
ture with the demands of development so challenging. Much hinges on zoning. In Bear Creek
Township, farmland can be carved into one- and two-acre lots — perfect for sprawling development
but the antithesis of Smart Growth.

Another huge issue — not just in Bear Creek
Township but across the country — is the advancing age of most farmers. As they retire, their chil-
dren frequently are not interested in taking over and other farmers cannot afford to pay the price
that a developer would. “In the last 10 years, there were a lot of 60- and 70-year-old farmers here with
no one to take over the farms so they were sold and developed,” said Hoffman.

Once the cycle of farmland conversion gains steam, it can be tough to stop. When farms start
disappearing, so does the infrastructure to support them — livestock auctions, feed stores, tractor
dealers — which forces the farmers left behind to travel greater distances for important services.

What’s more, the development-inflated price of farmland — not to mention the dwindling supply
— prevents family farmers from expanding and gaining the economies of scale necessary to cope
with increasing global competition.

Development does, however, offer a few silver
linings. “Certainly development has a dramatic impact on farming and rural communities,” said Hertz, “but some things are good.”

The good things can include jobs for farmers who want — or need — to work off the farm.
Hoffman, for example, works in quality control for a nearby electronics company. In addition, devel-
opment provides farmers with an opportunity to directly market their crops to a nearby population.
Hoffman’s cousin, McMaster, does a brisk business selling his produce on his farm at Bill’s Farm
Market.

One of the keys to balancing development and agriculture in rural America is Smart Growth, said
Bob Fleck, owner of Caldwell Banker Fleck Agency REALTORS® in Danville, Pa., and a mem-
ber of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REAL-
TORS® Smart Growth Advisory Group.

“What I’d like to see is a little more density,” he said. “We need to get away from these one-acre lots
and 10-acre lots. What I hope is the cities and small towns...can persuade people to move there.”

About an hour north of Seattle in Skagit County, Wa., a push is underway to do just that, plus
generate revenue for the county’s farmland preservation program. If approved by local gov-
ernments, the initiative would allow developers to pay to exceed normal density limits in downtown
Burlington, one of the county’s biggest cities. That revenue would then flow to the county’s pur-
chase-of-development rights program, where it would be used to protect farmland outside
Burlington that the city might otherwise annex to accommodate growth.

“There will be property owners who won’t be interested in selling their development rights, but
there will also be property owners who will be,” said Bob Rose, executive director of Skagitonians
to Preserve Farmland, a nonprofit organization that is pushing the initiative. “The hope is that
instead of the city expanding outward, there will be a greenbelt of farmland.”

As our cities continue to expand, the future of the farm is critical, and we must find a balance
between development and the protection of our agriculture.

Brad Broberg is a Seattle-based freelance writer special-
izing in business and development issues. His work
appears regularly in the Puget Sound Business Journal
and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.
In most metropolitan areas in the U.S., population growth pushes outward into suburban cities. This growth has leapfrogged along since the end of World War II, gobbling up land at an astonishing rate. Despite the efforts of Smart Growth advocates and the New Urbanism, the predominant development pattern is still the conventional suburban model, which typically uses land in a haphazard, even wasteful fashion while segregating uses, effectively forcing homeowners to use their cars for even brief errands. Now, with first-, second-, and third-ring suburbs starting to burst at their poorly planned seams, a “next-ring suburb” is threatened: rural counties with small, traditional towns.

Residents of many of these rural areas have seen their population and development rates spike in recent years. Horrified at the potential for skyrocketing real estate values, congestion, and lack of services, and their often dense, traditionally planned communities degenerating into a suburban wasteland of big boxes and cookie-cutter subdivisions, residents are sometimes reacting with knee-jerk swiftness.

In West Virginia’s Berkeley and Jefferson Counties—both within a two-hour drive of Washington, D.C.—populations have increased by 30 and 20 percent, respectively, since 1990. Seeing this writing on the wall, residents of Scrabble in Berkeley County earlier this year pooled their money and bought a 300-acre farm for $3.6 million, effectively shielding it from a crowd of developers clamoring to call it their next subdivision.

Other efforts to shield land from development include the National Park Trust’s late-1990s purchase of School House Ridge, a historic Civil War battlefield in Harpers Ferry, W.Va., which was then transferred to the National Park Service.

Maury County, Tenn., grew by only seven percent during the 1980s. But between 1990 and 2000,
Rural Counties Prepare for Development

By Jason Miller
spurred by the opening of a Saturn manufacturing plant in Spring Hill, the population jumped by 31 percent. In the late '90s, residents of Columbia and Mount Pleasant, Tenn., formed historic districts to protect old homes and traditional downtowns, and set up a land trust to preserve open space.

The population of Douglas County, Nev., has leaped 56 percent since 1990. Opponents of the growth — old-timers and newcomers alike — approved a November 2002 ballot initiative that limited the number of new houses to 280 per year, which is half the current rate. Three months later, a county judge overturned that initiative.

And in Troup County, Ga., which lies outside the 20-county Atlanta metro area, the resident count is starting to rise in similar fashion.

None of these reports should come as a surprise, says Troup County planner Rick Morris. “You can go anywhere in the nation and basically draw a circle within an hour, hour and a half of a city, and you see growth,” he says. The rise in populations of rural counties are inevitable because of the way Americans have traditionally grown: from the central city outward. Today’s reality is that more than 60 percent of the 100 fastest-growing suburban counties were not part of metro areas 30 years ago.

The rural counties that are reacting to surges with effective yet patchwork strategies, such as Scrabble’s scramble to buy up land piecemeal, sometimes have little other recourse. But the counties and municipalities that are pursuing a Smart Growth approach appear at present to have the brightest future — the most hope for creating and/or maintaining a built environment that supports the way they want to live.

A comprehensive land-use plan is arguably Smart Growth’s most useful tool for counties and the municipalities within them. Essentially a blueprint for development, a comprehensive plan or “comp plan” describes how a region wants to develop over the coming decades — typically for the next 30 years. Most comp plans include at least the following components:

Demographic studies: How will the population change? How will the critical demographics of residents under age 18 and those over age 55 change?

Land use: Where will residential, commercial, industrial, retail, etc. be located, and are they compatible?

Transportation: All transportation modes should be planned, in order to function most efficiently and safely.

Parks, recreation, open spaces: Is the quantity and quality sufficient? Are they spaced properly or in a crazy-quilt fashion? Are natural resources being preserved?

A comp plan is fluid — to a point. Each munici-
A comprehensive land-use plan is arguably Smart Growth’s most useful tool for counties and the municipalities within them.

In the U.S., every community develops its comp plan to reflect the shared values and goals of its residents. Some prefer aggressive growth; others favor preservation of existing open space, such as farmland. And in most areas, farmland is exactly what’s in danger of disappearing.

Educating municipalities

Due west of Chicago, Kane County, Ill., is still mostly rural, peppered with farms and communities that were established before Chicago existed. Yet even with its slower pace, Kane is one of the most progressive counties in the nation. “During the past 30 years, Kane County has taken comprehensive planning very seriously, even though, as in the rest of Illinois, it doesn’t have real power over the communities within it,” says Kai Tarum, director of planning with Kane County.

Using a combination of in-person visits with municipalities and county board chairs, plus partnerships and workshops — the most recent workshop in March 2005 was co-sponsored by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® — Kane County officials take a “soft sell” approach, encouraging each municipality to create its own comprehensive land-use plan in concert with the one developed by the Kane County Regional Planning Commission, which upholds the 10 principles of Smart Growth:

1. Mix land uses;
2. Take advantage of compact building design;
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices;
4. Create walkable neighborhoods;
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place;
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas;
7. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities;
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices;
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective; and
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Dubbed the 2030 Land Resource Management Plan and adopted by the Kane County Board in October 2005, this particular comp plan doesn’t just attempt to fulfill platitudes like “improving the quality of life for all residents.” says Tarum. “We’re trying to incorporate Smart Growth principles, to create a series of what we call ‘priority places’; i.e., locations where safe, healthy and livable communities are being planned. We’re trying
to introduce these ideas to an edge county, and some of these ideas are really hard to swallow for a lot of people. They’ve come out here to have their acreage, but we can’t afford to keep growing that way. For example, some land-use decisions create a burden on the county to expand the road system, and we don’t have the money to do that.”

Kane County’s smaller rural towns are under pressure for development, says Christy Sabdo, an executive planner with Kane County. “We’re up against municipalities that want to grow by double or even triple, in order to accommodate wastewater treatment plants to remedy the older, failing septic systems. We’re trying to work with these towns to retain their farmland and keep the growth under control so they don’t expand all at once — to grow incrementally, even make the plans smaller. We’re looking for density and walkable, daily conveniences. We’re looking for public transportation. We’re looking for town centers.”

Working as a coordinator for its townships’ comprehensive plans, Kane County’s planning commission aligns its efforts with each municipality, trying to compromise and accommodate as much of the townships’ desires with its own goals and objectives.

Is a comprehensive land-use plan necessary? “That’s like asking why grass has to be green,” says Tarum. “It’s crucial. Every municipality has a comp plan, and that’s a good thing. Expansion from Chicago has almost gone around us, but now it’s coming at us from all sides.”

“Based on 2004 estimates, Kane County will almost double by 2030,” says Sabdo. “So it’s up to us and the municipalities to manage that growth.”

REALTOR® Christine Klein grew up in rural Kane County and has witnessed tremendous growth over the past several years. “Most of the western side is filled with smaller communities that are annexing the surrounding farmland into their villages, then developing it into residential housing — nothing but residential,” says Klein. This reality affects her work in two ways, says Klein. “First, it’s increasing the housing inventory. That growth can be a positive thing, as long as we can keep up with the growth by offering services, schools, and police and fire protection. And because the houses that are getting developed are in the upper price ranges, that can have a positive effect on the existing communities as well, by raising the tax base and home values, and attracting commercial interests to the area.”

But Klein admits that value can have a downside, too. “The developers face lots of fees, such as impact and roadway fees, and transition fees. This can be a burden for new buyers, because the builders don’t absorb those costs, they just pass them on to the buyers. This drives up the average price in the area, which in turn drives up the value of the existing homes. So whether it’s a new home or an existing home, the houses become almost unaffordable to most people.”

Striking a balance Southwest of Minneapolis, Minn., Scott County holds the title of the state’s fastest-growing county and the 12th fastest-growing county in the U.S.
having boomed by 58 percent in the 1990s and currently adding 6,000 residents per year. Unlike Kane County, Scott County has land-use authority, which gives it control over growth management, including planning and zoning functions, in its 11 townships and 8 cities, and in its rural areas (this is unique; only one other county in Minnesota, Carver County, has this level of authority). But Scott County doesn’t try to wield a big stick in its relations with its municipalities, says Tom Kreykes, AICP, principal planner. “Each city does its own comprehensive plan, and we’re trying to create a comp plan that works for Scott County, but also meshes with our municipalities and the guidelines from the Metropolitan Council” — the government planning entity that regulates the seven-county metro area surrounding the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis. “We try to integrate the cities’ representation as much as possible,” says Kreykes. “We want to know what their plans are for areas beyond their boundaries, so that we can anticipate land use. We know annexation is going to occur; we simply want to establish orderly annexation agreements, we want general knowledge on what land areas are expected to become urban rather than rural — so there are no surprises. We have no control over market forces, but we try to put policies into place in a way to guide growth in an efficient and appropriate way.”

For Kreykes, the biggest driver behind a comprehensive plan is the notion of balance: balancing the needs of the stakeholders in the community. And that can be the biggest challenge, he says. Perhaps development of our rural lands wouldn’t be an issue if the predominant development pattern in the U.S. followed the tenets of Smart Growth and the design guidelines of the New Urbanism. But this is usually nothing more than wishful thinking. “Practically anywhere you go in the country, there will be those who are pro-growth and want development, and there will be those who want to preserve open space. But you can’t please everybody. You need to strike a balance with regard to the needs of your community. Putting together a good comp plan requires lots of research, but it also requires public input. You need to try to get people thinking from a community standpoint rather than a special interest perspective, then gather their feedback for the county as a whole. Because if you can’t garner public support, then the finest comp plan in the world isn’t going to go anywhere.”

Jason Miller is a freelance writer, editor and publishing consultant based in Auburn, Washington.
Hidden Treasures in your town

By John Van Gieson
Driggs, Idaho, and Elkhorn City, Kentucky, are similar in size, roughly 1,200 residents. Each is blessed by a scenic location. Driggs sits in the middle of Idaho’s Teton Valley, a short drive over the Teton Mountain range from the luxurious resorts at Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Elkhorn City sits on the west bank of the Russell Fork of the Big Sandy River in a beautiful gorge cutting through the Appalachians where Kentucky borders on Virginia.

The similarities end, however, when it comes to planning for a future that will preserve each town’s unique characteristics and provide economic opportunities for its residents. In that sense, Driggs and Elkhorn City are positioned at the polar extremes of the growth and planning issues affecting rural America.

Driggs is booming, attracting a mix of retirees, affluent second-home owners and resort workers looking for affordable housing — which is scarce to non-existent in Jackson Hole. If all the residences either proposed by developers or permissible under the current zoning code were built, the Teton County population would jump from about 6,000 to more than 40,000, said Kathy Rinaldi, operations director of Valley Advocates for Responsible Growth.

Elkhorn City has been sliding down a long backwards slope, losing nearly 3,500 residents over several decades as hard times in the coal and railroad industries battered the Eastern Kentucky economy.

“Our economy was for years, and still is to some extent, coal-based, and the coal industry just doesn’t have jobs,” said Timothy Belcher, a local attorney who was instrumental in founding the Elkhorn City Area Heritage Council.

Fortunately for Driggs, Elkhorn City and countless other small towns in rural areas across the country, visionary planners, architects, academics and just plain local folks are working on visionary solutions to rural planning and growth issues. The Your Town program, which was started by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and is now run by the National Endowment for the Arts, holds numerous design workshops that bring concerned citizens and civic leaders together to discuss solutions to problems affecting their communities. Both Driggs and Elkhorn City hosted Your Town charrettes.

“A lot of rural planning today is concentrated on two things: revitalizing decaying or deteriorating downtowns, and introducing new businesses on main street,” said Shelley Mastran, a historic preservation consultant from Reston, Va., who worked for the National Trust. “The other side of the picture is trying to save small towns from being engulfed in sprawl. As metropolitan areas sprawl further and further out a lot of small towns just get sucked up and destroyed.”

Kennedy Smith, a co-founder of the Community Land Use and Economics Group in Arlington, Va., is a former director of the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s National Main Street Center. She is considered a leading expert on downtown revitalization.

“They believe they have one problem and in reality they often have several different problems,” Smith said.

One of the keys to revitalizing the town center in small towns is to prevent commercial development on the skirts from sucking the life out of downtown businesses, Smith said. The construction of big box stores on the outskirts has doomed the downtown in many a small town. Revitalization planners must either devise strategies to discourage sprawl or develop spe-
cialized downtowns that offer different attractions than the huge chain stores.

A planning for the future approach that is working in many areas is “heritage tourism” — capitalizing on the small town community history or natural resources as a draw for visitors whose spending will stimulate local businesses. With Your Town’s assistance, Elkhorn City is developing a river trail, promoting canoeing and kayaking on the river and hiking in the mountains, planning a Pioneer Village, developing an arts trail designed in part by a prominent Japanese artist, and emphasizing the area’s role in Kentucky history.

“We’re using art to effect social change and revitalization,” Belcher said. As for history, “Daniel Boone’s first step in Kentucky was actually in Elkhorn City,” he said.

Also focusing on heritage tourism is the Mississippi Hills Heritage Area Alliance covering all or part of 30 counties in Northeast Mississippi. The area gave the nation an eclectic group of artists including Elvis Presley, Howlin’ Wolf, Tammy Wynette, Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner and John Grisham. It was also the site of important Civil War battles where Union troops under General Ulysses S. Grant defeated Confederate forces.

“People care about their history, and they care about their heritage,” said Kent Bain, coordinator of the Mississippi Hills Heritage Area Alliance. “If you can make them recognize what’s important about the heritage of their community, then they want to preserve it. If you come in and say let’s do some planning, then they want to run you out of town.”

The Alliance operates out of space provided by REALTOR® Judy Glenn in her Corinth, Mississippi, office. Glenn is a former member of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® Board of Directors and currently serves on the Strategic Planning Committee. She was part of a group of Corinth leaders who decided more than 20 years ago that their town was deteriorating and needed to be revitalized.

“At that time we had problems,” Glenn said. “On a block where there were five buildings probably two of them were occupied and three were vacant.”

Now Corinth, population 15,000, has a vibrant downtown featuring regular free concerts at Courthouse Square, a marketplace written up in Southern Living magazine, a thriving community of artists and artisans, and a children’s music con-
The National Park Service has constructed a new $9.5 million interpretive center at the Civil War battlefield park. “There are places to eat now and live and work and play and interact downtown,” Glenn said. “We don’t have a Starbucks, but you can still get a cup of coffee in a downtown drug store that’s been in business since the 1800s for 50 cents.”

And Corinthians like to remind visitors that it is the home of the “slug burger,” a local delicacy made of beef and breading deep fried to a golden brown.

Small town revitalization and attraction frequently involves capitalizing on the advantages that local folks know they have. In Valley, Alabama, however, a plan to develop a new downtown in a community that had lost numerous jobs when four textile mills closed focused on turning a local eyesore into an asset.

The Your Town Alabama program, a statewide revitalization program copied from but independent of the NEA’s national ‘Your Town’ program, was created in 1998 to provide assistance to struggling towns throughout Alabama. “There are a lot of the little towns in Alabama that hit their economic heyday in the 1950s and 1960s,” said Paul Kennedy, a U.S. Department of Agriculture natural resources manager on loan to the organization that runs Your Town Alabama. “Some downtown streets are 80 percent vacant. The kids when they graduate from high school run out of town as fast as they can. I wanted to do something to help them.”

When Your Town Alabama held its first work-
shop in 1998, Valley City Clerk Martha Cato attended as a substitute for another official who couldn’t go. The experience changed her life.

“We went to Your Town, and we found that planning was an answer for us,” Cato said. “We totally give Your Town credit for putting us on the right path.”

Valley was created 25 years ago by combining four communities along the banks of the Chattahoochee River that had fallen on hard times when their textile mills closed.

Planners who worked with Valley suggested the town, population 9,000, purchase the 500,000-square foot Langdale Mill, built in 1866, and convert it into the centerpiece of a new downtown.

“Had we not gone through the Your Town process, we wouldn’t have ever known how important that mill was to us,” Valley Mayor Arnold Leak said in an interview with the Community Arts Network.

The town paid $300,000 for the mill and is planning to convert it into a hotel and convention center, restaurants, a regional farmers’ market and condominiums. The project is going so well, that city leaders are now considering the purchase of a second mill.

Valley and Elkhorn City may be small towns, but their advocates think big.

There is no one right answer when it comes to revitalizing and preserving small towns and attracting new residents to the towns.
Cato said Valley is developing a recreational trail along the river, is considering textile and railroad museums, and she is talking to officials in other states about developing an historic textile corridor along Interstate 85 from Alabama to Greenville, South Carolina.

Belcher dreams of a passenger train transporting tourists over scenic mountain railways between Kentucky and South Carolina.

Even Driggs, where the overarching issue is controlling growth, is taking advantage of its resources to promote the town to visitors. Self said the Teton River, just east of town, is known for its fine cutthroat trout fishing and birders come from far away to view the trumpeter swans and sand hill cranes along the river.

In fact, say revitalization advocates, there is no one right answer when it comes to revitalizing and preserving small towns and attracting new residents to the towns.

“I would say that people who are looking to revitalize or preserve their areas shouldn’t be looking for a silver bullet,” Glenn said. “They should look for a variety of things that can be put together as an incentive for all.”

John Van Gieson is a freelance writer based in Tallahassee, Florida. He owns and runs Van Gieson Media Relations, Inc.

---

**Special Recognition**

**SMART PLANNING IN THE SMALL TOWN**

The NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® (NAR) Smart Growth Program and the city of Ash Grove, Missouri, were honored with an Excellence in Planning Award from the Missouri Chapter of the American Planning Association in September 2005 during its Annual Conference in Kansas City. The award for “Outstanding Community Initiative” was in recognition of Ash Grove’s Smart Growth Initiative.

In Spring 2004, Ash Grove, through its Mayor, REALTOR® Brenda Ellsworth, and the Greater Springfield Board of REALTORS®, requested assistance from NAR’s Smart Growth Program to initiate a program to plan for the city’s future. Ash Grove, with a population of approximately 1,500, is 20 miles from rapidly-growing Springfield and is expected to see significant growth in the near future. According to Mayor Ellsworth, she began the planning initiative because of the community’s desire to “maintain our character and sense of community in the face of growth. Most small-town leaders do not have the needed knowledge to make that happen and do not have the funds to hire the person that does.” Ash Grove was selected as the first city in the U.S. to receive this extensive level of assistance from the NAR Smart Growth Program. With funding from NAR and additional support from the Greater Springfield Board of REALTORS®, A. Nelessen Associates, a nationally recognized planning and design firm from Belle Mead, New Jersey, was selected to conduct visioning and planning workshops over a four-day period in Ash Grove.

More than 120 Ash Grove residents, business owners and other stakeholders attended the workshops. Participants completed visual preference surveys and questionnaires on land-use policies, and worked in teams to create maps representing their recommendations for growth. Planners from A. Nelessen Associates were assisted by volunteer planners from NAR, the city of Springfield, and the planning faculty, staff and students from Missouri State University, who worked to turn the citizens’ recommendations into a preliminary development plan for Ash Grove which was presented to the public on November 20.

“The partnership between Ash Grove, NAR, the local REALTOR® board, and the university was so important to the success of this planning effort,” said Joe Molinaro, Manager of NAR’s Smart Growth Program. “And the fact that so many citizens participated is a testament to Mayor Ellsworth’s leadership.”

Soon after the planning event, citizen working groups were formed to further pursue many of the ideas developed in the preliminary plan, and the city is currently working to incorporate the outcomes of the process into a comprehensive plan and updated land-development regulations. The preliminary plan also provided the impetus and support for the city’s application for funding from the Missouri Department of Transportation to install sidewalks and plant trees along major roads in the city, and these funds were recently awarded.
new towns in rural areas

saving rural space with Smart Growth

By Brad Broberg
When growth comes to rural counties, it can splatter the landscape with sprawl.
Yet it doesn’t have to be that way.

A pair of new communities — one in Missouri and the other in Florida — are among the latest examples of rural development that accommodates growth without chewing up open space.

“I think people are ready for another choice compared to a typical rural subdivision,” said Greg Whittaker, president of Whittaker Homes. “Those people out there looking for big lots, I don’t think they realize, in my opinion, the damage they’re doing to the environment.”

New T own, a 5,700-unit community Whittaker Homes is building on 740 acres outside St. Louis, Mo., is anything but a typical rural subdivision. The same goes for New River, a 4,800-unit community outside Tampa being developed on 1,800 acres by KB Home.

Surrounded by farmland, both tread much more lightly on the land than the conventional approach to rural development in which supersized lots — anywhere from one to 10 acres per residence — dominate.

Higher density is not, however, the only thing that sets New River and New Town apart. Plans call for each to evolve over the next decade into self-contained towns containing parks, schools, churches, stores and offices. “We’re not just bringing the rooftops, but everything to support the rooftops,” said Marshall Gray, president of KB Home’s Tampa division.

New Town is the first development of its kind for Whittaker Homes, one of Missouri’s leading home builders, but it won’t be the last. “We’re looking for more lots right now,” said Whittaker. “I truly believe this is the way people will be building in the future.”

Gray agrees. KB Home is one of the nation’s biggest home builders. Currently, about 25 percent of the company’s developments fit the mold of New River. However, over the next five to 10 years, two-thirds of the company’s developments will follow that blueprint, said Gray. “It’s really all about Smart Growth,” he said.

New Town incorporates many of the principles of New Urbanism. Conceived in response to sprawl, the New Urbanism movement promotes development that includes traditional town centers, distinct yet compact neighborhoods, a variety of housing choices — everything from detached single-family homes to apartments — and narrow streets that tame traffic while encouraging walking and biking. “Cars come last in our development,” said Whittaker.

That’s just fine with New Town residents Dee and James Devereux. “We love the concept that you can walk anywhere,” said Dee. “Where we lived, you had to take a car wherever you went.”

The Devereuxs moved to a single-family home in New Town from a large house on a half-acre in a nearby subdivision. “We’re both in our 60s and the yard was a lot of work,” said Dee. “We have a small yard now and we like the size of it.”

They also appreciate the turn-back-the-clock lifestyle — evening conversations on their front porch with neighbors, free movies in the outdoor amphitheater and trips to the grocery store by bike. “What I’m hearing from other people is they love the concept just like we do,” said Dee.

Once considered novel, New Urbanism has gained greater acceptance with each new community as people see more and more examples of successful projects, said Gray. “People share best practices all across the country,” he said. “When you can talk to builders and developers and interview homeowners and business owners, it’s all a positive.”
New Town in St. Charles, Missouri

We love the concept that you can walk anywhere.

While often associated with urban infill, transit-oriented development and/or suburban redevelopment, New Urbanism also makes sense in rural settings, where it allows people to live in the country without eliminating the environment they came for in the first place.

The prototype for New Urban development is Seaside, Fla., which inspired Whittaker to build New Town. "I’d been going there for 14 or 15 years," he said. "That’s where the thought came from. You park your car and you don’t have to get back into it for a week. We thought about doing something similar for years. We were just waiting for the right time and place to move forward."

Designed by the same firm — Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. — that designed Seaside, New Town has by most accounts progressed faster than any other traditional neighborhood development (TND) to date. The first residents moved in last spring barely more than two years after initial design began — a testament to New Town’s thoughtful planning. "Most projects have issues in terms of people worried about traffic and schools," said Whittaker. "That didn’t happen with this project."

Paralleling New Town’s speedy progress has been its popularity with homebuyers. "The amount of interest in this project has been unbelievable," said Whittaker, noting that more than 6,000 people signed up for a mailing list that provides the latest information on the community’s progress. "We’ve pushed up the opening of later phases because of the demand."

Despite the popularity of places like New Town, New Urban communities are still the exception. Consequently, authorities often must be convinced to relax various land-use regulations to allow the higher densities and mixed uses that are a New Urban community’s bread and butter. "Everything
we’re doing in New Town breaks all the normal rules,” said Whittaker. As an example, he cited New Town’s live/work units in which a business is located on the first floor with a residence above.

While not an example of New Urbanism per se — the housing style is more reflective of suburban subdivisions than urban neighborhoods — New River also breaks some molds. “It’s not rows of housing, but pockets of housing surrounded by large open space areas,” said Gray. New River also will feature a 200-acre town center with 180,000 square feet of office space, 500,000 square feet of commercial space, schools, government offices and a 207-acre park.

Gray said developers must be “smart negotiators” and “educate elected officials” in order to remove potential barriers to their projects. For instance, a city or county may tie the amount of residential development it allows to a certain amount of commercial development that must occur at the same time. The problem is that if businesses open before enough homes are completed, they may not survive, said Gray. New River solved that dilemma by winning approval to build its commercial components in stages that will guarantee enough people are living in the community to support the businesses before they are built, he said.

Meanwhile, at New Town, transportation is a challenge. Whittaker is working hard to bring transit — another building block of New Urbanism — to his community. “We’re trying to put a trolley from New Town to Main Street in the town of St. Charles,” he said. “That would be a dream.”

But even with a multitude of challenges in the two towns, the outcome far outweighs the time-consuming negotiating process, difficult zoning regulations and design obstacles. In the end, it is a valued community, which these examples clearly show.

America is a nation with an unquenchable thirst for developing land. And the majority of that growth is in the ever-expanding suburbs. Planners, researchers, developers and even the staunchest conservationists concede that there is no way to stem the demand for suburban and exurban growth. So the bottom line is— if it is a foregone conclusion that growth in the U.S. will continue to occur farther and farther from central cities — what can be done to make sure that growth is smart, not sprawl?

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) has published Ten Principles for Smart Growth on the Suburban Fringe to outline clear, attainable methods for solving the sprawl riddle while building the best urbanism possible.

Michael Pawlukiewicz, ULI’s Director of Environment & Policy Education, directed the team that compiled the report that opens with the staggering fact that “across the country, land is being developed faster than ever before: more than two million acres of open space is converted each year.”

“We know there will be a lot of growth in the U.S. According to the Census Bureau, we’ll grow by 50 million people in the next 20 years,” Pawlukiewicz said. “Even though we would like those people to live in cities or close-in suburbs, the fact is most of the population growth will continue in the farther suburbs.”

Pawlukiewicz also noted that even though people will continue moving to the fringe, this nation can build with better development patterns to avoid the problems that sprawl development of the past 50 years has given us. Sprawl has created traffic jams, degraded the environment and misused land.

“We have to move toward compact nodes of development,” he said. “As we identify appropriate sites for these development nodes we must also make sure we identity and protect land for recreation, agriculture and habitat conservation. We have to make sure that development and the protection of natural areas and resource areas go hand in hand.”

Pawlukiewicz said transit-oriented development can be a powerful tool for Smart Growth — but communities must be sure to coordinate transportation investments with planning for smarter land use. He also stressed the importance of promoting compact, walkable and mixed-use communities where everyone has transportation choices including walking, public transportation and driving.

Robert Lang, director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech and part of the research team for the Ten Principles publication, said suburbia needs to focus on Smart Growth principles such as building compact multifamily subdivisions that conserve land.

When preserving green space, it must be integrated into an overall plan. Much of suburbia’s green...
Solving the problem of sprawl

10 Principles for Smart Growth on the Suburban Fringe

areas are chopped up in pieces and don’t really add up to a habitat,” he said. “Typical exurbs is comprised of multi-
family homes adjacent to retail and separated by a pedestrian-
unfriendly fence or large lot single family homes built check-
a-block.”

Lang said a conventional subdivision built without using Smart
Growth principles typically has very limited connectivity that abuts
retail and is often separated by a wall. He noted the irony that a res-
ident in a subdivision house closest to retail actually has the farthest
trip because he must wind through the subdivision to reach way out
and over to it.

“Without Smart Growth principles, the cycle is cheap — develop-
ers come in and build check-a-block and conservation principles are
not used. It’s not an enduring form,” he said.

Pawlukiewicz said local land-use policy must have a vision for an
appropriate and sustainable future and then organize policies, codes
and regulations to make it easy and profitable for the private sector
to implement that vision.

“Everybody blames developers for sprawl and while they are not
without fault, most of what they develop is in keeping with public
zoning codes and land-use regulations,” Pawlukiewicz said. “In most
suburbs, sprawl is easy and profitable to build. Local governments
are mostly responsible for regulating land use. Their policies make it
difficult to build mixed-use communities or use better urban design
practices like putting buildings close to the street or to narrow the
streets to make them safer for pedestrians. The codes and regulations
must be changed so that it is easy and profitable to do the right thing,
the smart thing. The sprawl that we see in the U.S. is, in fact, the
implementation of public policy.”
Principles for Smart Growth on the Suburban Fringe

Create a Shared Vision for the Future... and Stick to It

A successful visioning process is rooted in a community's landowners, developers, elected officials, environmental groups, citizen activist groups and local business. Temptations will emerge that run counter to the vision in the form of appealing short-term economic development opportunities. If a way cannot be found to make the proposal enhance the vision, it should be rejected.

Identify and Sustain Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure is a network of habitat, parks, greenways, conservation easements and working lands sustaining native species, natural ecological processes, plus air and water resources. Between 1982 and 1997, the amount of urbanized land in the U.S. increased by 47 percent while the nation's population grew by only 17 percent. Considering those numbers, it becomes obvious that green infrastructure is a community's natural life-support system and must be strategically planned and managed as carefully as built infrastructure.

Remember that the Right Design in the Wrong Place Is Not Smart Growth

Traditional design — with its back alleys, front porches and spaces where kids play and neighbors congregate — is critical, but not the only component of Smart Growth. Design must be integrated with local climate, land conditions, transportation facilities and economically viable development that preserves open space and natural resources, infrastructure that serves existing and new residents, compact development such as new town centers, and other factors that take a holistic approach to stamping out sprawl.

Protect Environmental Systems and Conserve Resources

Take advantage of building orientation, prevailing winds and tree cover for cooling. Manage the effect of the sun's rays for enhancing or limiting heating. Conserve water by using conservation-designed appliances and plumbing fixtures, harvested gray water, recycled water and natural (non-piped) drainage systems and pervious paving to recharge aquifers.

Provide Diverse Housing Types and Opportunities

Direct growth to walkable mixed-use subdivisions that offer more diverse housing types such as rental and ownership of single-family houses with yards, townhouses and multi-family apartment buildings to meet the varied lifestyles of people living in the suburbs.
Build Centers of Concentrated Mixed Uses

Sustainable urbanized fringe development has a convenient mix that meets people’s daily needs: homes, schools, stores, services and amenities. A concentration of mixed uses on the fringe provides a critical mass and a sense of place that gives communities a strong identity and a heart. Mixed-use projects create a destination with housing, employment, retail and public services. Successful communities include a full range of uses and activities: office, retail, entertainment, hotels, housing and civic institutions.

Use Multiple Connections to Enhance Mobility and Circulation

Traffic congestion is a big problem in conventional suburbs because clusters of residential subdivisions with only one entry and one exit concentrate the traffic onto and off arterial roads, which quickly become clogged because of the lack of connectivity and alternative routes. To avoid becoming a placeless collection of disaggregated subdivisions, a network made up of vehicular, pedestrian, cycling, park and open-space connections must be planned. Communities should create a template for a street grid with a hierarchy of connected streets to guide development and promote connectivity.

Deliver Sustainable Transportation Choices

Smart Growth communities provide a range of transportation choices, but to be sustainable, these alternatives must be built in rather than added later to a car-based culture. Staged development of real estate and transportation facilities ensures that a range of options will be available to travelers — walking, cycling, transit, carpooling, telecommuting and driving — and that each will be adequately supported.

Preserve the Community’s Character

America’s commercial landscape, largely due to the proliferation of chain stores and franchises, has deteriorated from the unique to uniform, from stylized to standardized. National franchises and chain stores can change their standard building designs to fit local character, but only do so in communities savvy enough to reject off the shelf architecture and demand customized, site-specific design that addresses local historic preservation, site planning and vernacular architectural concerns.

Make It Easy to Do the Right Thing

One major barrier to better development on the fringe is local regulation. Most local zoning and subdivision regulations make it easier and faster to build conventional low-density, auto-dependent developments than undertake Smart Growth on the suburban fringe. Developers build sprawling projects because they are easier and cheaper to construct. Local officials should make local regulations more flexible to encourage mixed uses, narrower streets, compact development and other smart practices.
The states of Washington, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania have a common interest in encouraging their local governments to guide community growth and change. But they are taking different paths to that objective. Washington has been administering a full-scale growth management law since 1990 that requires most local governments to plan and implement specific development strategies to conform to state objectives. Wisconsin adopted similar provisions just six years ago, but with the critical difference that the state allows local governments great latitude to determine the policies and regulations they will employ. Pennsylvania, taking a different tack, has focused on a series of programmatic approaches for conserving open space and revitalizing existing urban areas, all pointed to improving the state’s economic development. This status report describes how the three states’ actions to date are influencing the forms and functions of community development.

States Opt Into the Planning Game

For much of the 20th century, states rarely interfered with local governments’ involvement in comprehensive planning and zoning. That all changed in the 1970s in what some experts called “a quiet revolution in land-use control.” Mounting dissatisfaction about rampant, poorly coordinated growth prompted many states to instruct local governments to prepare comprehensive plans and implementing regulations according to state requirements. Oregon’s pathbreaking legislation in 1973 established the model, requiring local governments to adopt comprehensive plans consistent with state objectives, to be reviewed by state agencies, and providing an appeals process to resolve issues emanating from applications of the new law. Florida followed suit with similar requirements in 1975 that were strengthened in 1985, then came state legislation promoting better local planning in New Jersey, Maine, Vermont, Rhode Island, Georgia and Washington.

Meanwhile, other states focused on offering monetary or programmatic incentives to guide key aspects of community development. For example, Vermont’s Act 250 in 1970 required state permits for large-scale developments. Maryland’s 1997 “Smart Growth” act required local governments to identify priority areas for state infrastructure funding. Tennessee’s 1998 legislation mandated interjurisdictional collaboration to define future growth and annexation areas. As of 2005, dozens of states have intervened in local policymaking to influence the course of local community development. The examples of Washington, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania demonstrate the variety of approaches they are using.

Washington’s “Omnibus” Growth Management Act

Washington adopted its Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990 and strengthened it in 1991, during a period of growth in which the state gained over a million new residents and employment had risen by 574,000 jobs in a decade. Scrambling to manage unprecedented development, the state crafted a growth management program for urban or urbanizing counties that required them to adopt county-wide planning policies as a framework for mandated county and city comprehensive plans and implementing development regulations, all consistent with 13 state goals. Counties also were required to designate urban growth areas in consultation with municipalities and both levels of local government were instructed to designate critical areas, agricultural lands, forest lands, and mineral resource lands and adopt regulations to protect them from urban development. All plans and regulations are subject to comment by the state land use agency and guided by decisions of three appeals boards. The American Planning Association called the GMA “one of the most comprehensive and modern planning statutes in the country.”

After 15 years of experiences in implementing the GMA, Washington has established some thoughtfulness and predictability for development and conservation in most parts of the state. However, the Act’s sweeping requirements have generated concerns about the sheer amount of time and effort required to respond to its provisions, the frustrations of balancing the GMA’s ambitious but competing goals, and the difficulties of modifying past patterns of development to conform to new expectations for clustering development and protecting natural resources and critical areas. One increasingly insistent issue is steep rise in home prices. Local plans are supposed to guarantee a 20-year supply of buildable land, but building industry un-
STEERING GROWTH

STATE GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS

By Douglas R. Porter
Washington has established some thoughtfulness and predictability for development and conservation in most parts of the state.

Wisconsin Tests the Water of State Smart Growth

Wisconsin’s Comprehensive Planning Law, which took effect in 2000, was hatched through a collaborative process involving representatives of local governments, builders, REALTORS® and conservation and planning interests. They reached consensus that the state’s 1,922 local jurisdictions sorely needed more and better planning but the group resisted state intrusion into local decision making. According to Tom Larson, representing the Wisconsin REALTORS® Association, the framers of the law viewed Oregon’s and Washington’s rather elaborate growth management programs as overly restrictive. They preferred to leave decisions about the use of specific techniques such as urban growth boundaries or concurrency up to local officials. Instead, they wrote the law to spur local governments to plan, to provide a more predictable context for development,


2 This section is drawn from a paper by Douglas Porter, Evaluation of Local Implementation of the Washington State Growth Management Act, 2004, which can be found on the NAR Smart Growth Web site: http://www.realtor.org/smartgrowth.
The legislature provided planning grants to assist local governments and will continue grant funding at $2 million annually for the next two years. The hope was, and is, that the amount and quality of communication within and between jurisdictions will lead to more informed decisions that will result in Smart Growth.

The law defines nine elements in a comprehensive plan, from housing and transportation to intergovernmental cooperation and implementation. It also requires, by January 1, 2010, consistency of all community land-use programs and actions with the community’s comprehensive plan. A popular provision requires public participation at every stage of the planning process, including notice to adjoining jurisdictions, regional agencies and certain other organizations and jurisdictions. According to Lisa McKinnon of 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, this provision has raised the level of public interest and involvement in planning.

As might be expected, the goals and qualities of the 369 plans submitted by mid-2005 to the state by counties, cities, towns and townships vary tremendously. Some focus on protecting open space, others on stimulating job growth, and some clearly are intended to mute growth. Says Larson of the REALTORS® association: “This is a messy process, involving people with many kinds of interests.” McKinnon adds, “If the process is locally controlled, they get what they want.” But Joanne Schumann, the program’s grant administrator, says that reasonable, well-rounded plans are also being created, many in places that had never before prepared a plan. “At least they are learning about planning,” she says. Nevertheless, naysayers are circling around looking for reasons to repeal the law, requiring Governor Jim Doyle in July 2005 to veto legislation that would have abolished it.

Pennsylvania: Going for the Green

Pennsylvania has taken a different path toward improving the quality of local governments’ planning and regulatory efforts. In 1997, Governor Tom Ridge initiated a series of state programs to preserve open space and farmland and stimulate community revitalization, which subsequent governors have continued and expanded. The programs have found favor with the Pennsylvania Builders Association.

Even after the massive downsizing of its manufacturing base from the mid-20th century onward, the Commonwealth’s economy ranks as the 16th largest in the world. Still, a recent Brookings Institution analysis (Back to Prosperity: A
The state has required counties to prepare plans, authorized counties and municipalities to designate growth areas and encouraged use of transferable development rights.

*Competitive Agenda for Renewal of Pennsylvania* concludes that the state is shedding young and skilled workers, experiencing a net population out-migration, and losing the fiscal stamina to maintain civic infrastructure, and the Commonwealth continues to convert rural to urban land, mostly in outer suburbs where 72 percent of the state’s housing production occurred in the past decade. The report concludes: “Slow growth is still bringing fast sprawl.”

Planning for growth and change by the state’s 2,667 local governments has always been a chancy process. The state law authorizing local comprehensive plans provides that local regulatory actions need not be consistent with local plans — a provision, comments Richard Bickel, of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, that: “effectively favors zoning laws over plans as the authoritative force in guiding growth.” Attempts during the 1990s to strengthen municipal comprehensive planning came to naught.

Determined to regain forward momentum in the Commonwealth’s economy, Governor Ridge issued an executive order in 1999 declaring that “sustaining the economic and social vitality of Pennsylvania’s communities must be a priority of state government.” In the past six years, Governors Ridge, Mark Schweiker and Edward Rendell have won legislative authorizations of $1.8 billion in funding over 12 years for programs packaged under the terms “Growing Greener” “Growing Smarter” and “Growing Greener II” (the last signed into law in July 2005 after voter approval). Programs funded by the initiatives included
restoration of streams and wetlands, reclamation of abandoned mine lands, plugging of inactive oil and gas wells, farmland protection, state park and local recreational improvements, wastewater and drinking water improvements, increased cleanup of the state’s 12,000 vacant and contaminated industrial sites, and revitalization of “Main Street” downtowns and adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Funding for bond issues to support these programs came from state landfill dumping fees, and the state reached out for matching funding from local governments, associations, schools and colleges, clubs and environmental groups. Kurt Kraus, Press Secretary for the Department of Environmental Protection, credits the infusions of open space funding with major enhancements of watersheds throughout the Commonwealth and significant increases in open space preservation in some growing counties such as Bucks, Chester and Montgomery. In addition, according to Kenneth Klothen, Deputy Secretary for the Department of Economic Development, the department has been charged with improving coordination among more than a dozen state agencies to achieve consistency of project applications with local comprehensive plans and to assemble interagency support for state funding to revitalize core communities.

Also, the state has required counties to prepare plans (most have), authorized counties and municipalities to designate growth areas and encouraged use of transferable development rights to conserve open space and farmland. Municipalities have been granted powers to adopt multi-local plans that promote more rational land-use patterns across municipal boundaries — and also provide a means of avoiding developers’ “curative amendments” that can force unwanted housing development.

The positive leadership and guidance provided by these states demonstrates the potential power and range of approaches that states can employ to influence the quality of local community development.

Douglas Porter, president of the Growth Management Institute in Chevy Chace, Maryland, regularly monitors and writes about state growth management programs.

The National Endowment of the Arts, in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, created The Governor’s Institute in mid-2005 to assist top state leaders in establishing state policies to profoundly affect growth patterns, community design and environmental quality. Working with governors, their cabinet members and their staffs, the Institute hopes to encourage state leaders to pursue planning and design approaches that improve the livability of cities, suburbs and rural areas. The Institute will conduct workshops and provide advice on technical issues and policy options that will achieve this goal. Modeled in part after the successful Mayors’ Institute on City Design, the workshops will bring governors and other key state officials together with planning and design experts to identify and evaluate strategies that respond to specific development challenges confronting the states represented in the discussions.

Three former governors with a long history of promoting Smart Growth — Christie Whitman of New Jersey (also former EPA Administrator), Parris Glendening of Maryland and Angus King of Maine will lead the effort. The Institute will be jointly administered by the Smart Growth Leadership Institute and the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education at the University of Maryland. (More information can be found at www.govinstitute.org.)
In July, the San Francisco Metropolitan Transportation Commission, responsible for planning and funding the region’s transportation, adopted a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) policy that ties a community’s transit funds to higher-density zoning around new transit stations and provides bonuses for including affordable housing in developments near transit centers. The goal of the policy, according to a commission planner, “is to get more people on transit and reduce subsidies.” Stuart Cohen, director of the advocacy group Transportation and Land Use Coalition stated, “When transit lines are surrounded by a sea of parking lots of big box stores, people wonder why transit is empty. Housing is key to making transit work.”

Denver is in the process of rewriting its zoning code, something it has not done in nearly 50 years. The rewrite was prompted by “Blueprint Denver,” the updated comprehensive plan adopted in 2002. The goal of the rewrite is to protect the character of existing neighborhoods by encouraging higher-density and mixed uses along certain corridors, but keeping density and scale smaller approaching established single-family residential areas. Higher-density projects would be encouraged to locate near mass transit (and thereby increase transit ridership). The city is creating a “Main Street” zone that would encourage mixed-use projects incorporating residential, retail and commercial components. The new code will be a form-based code, characterized by a reliance on diagrams that portray a desired result, rather than more familiar wordy (and often confusing) prescriptive codes.

This year, the Connecticut Legislature passed a bill providing additional funding for the state’s ongoing efforts to preserve farmland. The bill, Senate Bill 410, An Act Concerning Farmland Preservation, Land Protection, Affordable Housing and Historic Preservation, dedicates $6.5 million for each of the four programs named in the bill’s title.
Senate Bill 112, signed by Governor Ruth Ann Minner (D), streamlines the process of developing brownfield sites by providing authority to establish durable and enforceable environmental covenants that run with the land. The bill also provides for a process to amend or eliminate the environmental covenant if the conditions that gave rise to its need no longer exist. The establishment of such covenants provides a measure of confidence in the sustainability of brownfield cleanups and enables property transactions to occur more easily. In this way, the bill will help return previously contaminated properties to the stream of commerce and allow owners and prospective purchasers of brownfield properties to pursue risk-based cleanups.

The Collier County Commission has granted final approval to the massive Ave Maria University and Township development. When completed, the development will include a 6,000 student Roman Catholic university, 11,000 homes, a population of 24,000 people and supporting public facilities and commercial and retail development. The major concern over the development is its environmental impact.

The Oldham County Economic Development Authority is planning an Economic Development Campus on 1,069 acres located south of Interstate 71 and west of KY 53. The proposal includes a mix of offices, retail, housing, parks, trails and plazas. At the outset, a zone change is required to change the existing low-density residential and conservation zoning to Planned Unit Development. Oldham County and LaGrange County would each sell $10 million in revenue bonds to finance the first phase of the project which would include an office and business park. Revenue from property sales would cover the bonds. The entire project may take as much as 20 years to complete.
The "Village Center Plan" proposed by Florida-based LNR Property Corp. for redevelopment of the sprawling 1,450-acre South Weymouth Naval Air Station cleared all three local approval hurdles in separate town meeting and town council votes in the towns of Abington, Rockland and Weymouth. Although the zoning approvals are a huge step forward, there are still many permits, both state and local, to be obtained before the 2,800-unit mixed-use development based largely on New Urbanist principles can begin construction.

Once mostly rural and recently a fast-growing Twin Cities bedroom community, Ramsey is ready for more newcomers with its Smart Growth vision, embodied in the 350-acre pedestrian-friendly Town Center project under construction. The project is located on one of the Metropolitan Council’s designated “opportunity sites” and is the winner of the 2005 American Institute of Architects (AIA) Award for Regional and Urban Design.

Some 100 architects, planners, transportation specialists, and other professionals from across the U.S. met in Mississippi October 11-18 to help lead a massive planning effort aimed at rebuilding at least nine of that state’s stricken coastal communities, including Gulfport, Biloxi and Pascagoula. The firms involved are working for a fraction of their usual fees and will team up with local architects and planners, said Miami architect-planner Andres Duany, who is coordinating the program on behalf of the Congress for the New Urbanism. "Everything is optional. Nothing will be imposed. They will create the tools that people can adopt or not as they choose," he stressed after his earlier meetings with Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour (R) and area officials.
Municipal leaders in north Mecklenburg are now planning for the North Corridor commuter rail, anticipated for 2010. Leaders are talking about where the train will stop in their communities and what kinds of development will surround the stops. The municipalities of Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Charlotte and Matthews have adopted a set of guidelines called the Transit Station Area Joint Development Principles and Policy. These guidelines create multi- and mixed-use station areas intended to support development favorable to transit.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in July announced that Cheyenne is one of five communities selected to participate in its Smart Growth Program, designed to provide cities technical assistance. Cheyenne was selected in part because its recently completed comprehensive planning efforts, Vision 2020 and Plan Cheyenne, incorporated Smart Growth concepts. For example, Plan Cheyenne calls for "pocket neighborhoods" that combine varied housing types, pedestrian access, parks, and retail and employment. Developing a code to encourage such development is where EPA’s expertise will come in.

The New York State Association of REALTORS® (NYSAR) honored the town of Warwick, which is located 55 miles northwest of New York City in Orange County, with the first-ever NYSAR Award for Smart Growth Excellence in recognition of the town’s successful efforts to incorporate the principles of Smart Growth into its comprehensive plan. The town of Warwick aggressively implemented Smart Growth concepts into their comprehensive plan, which established a farmland protection program and put into place innovative zoning techniques. Warwick’s plan is designed to: preserve the town’s rural character and as many operating farms as possible; to direct growth toward already vibrant settled villages and hamlets; and to provide significant and unique natural areas that are important for both ecological reasons and for wildlife habitat. The Smart Growth initiatives eliminate the encroachment of residential housing on to productive farmlands by creating incentives to have development transferred to and around already settled villages or hamlets.

“Our comprehensive plan is a win for everyone from our residents to developers and the future members of our community,” said town of Warwick Supervisor Michael P. Sweeton. “It allows us to preserve what Warwick’s 30,000 residents love about their community — its rural character and our agricultural heritage — while allowing development now and in the future. This plan was a community-wide effort.”

The new zoning ordinance encourages cluster developments, walkable neighborhoods, affordable homes and open space preservation. Since the adoption of the code, all proposed subdivisions have been clustered, preserving an average of 60 percent of the site as open space, and lot values have since increased by as much as 50 to 75 percent. Affordable housing aspects of the code require developers to provide at least 10 percent of a new subdivision as affordable housing. It also encourages development that imposes less impact on the community by allowing private and narrower roads with less curbing, thereby reducing runoff and calming traffic.

The plan was a collaborative effort by the entire community, which has remained active, aware and involved throughout the process, said Albert E. Caccese, director of conservation and government relations for Audubon New York. “This thought-ful and innovative program will encourage communities around the state to consider Smart Growth principles as they plan for the future. It recognizes that Smart Growth isn’t just a quality of life amenity that is good for the environment, but is also a boon to business and the economy.”