Hudson's Choice

The classic Western Reserve town takes unprecedented steps to slow its growth

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The first Scenic Byway comes to Northeast Ohio

The Grand: Our wild river

The politics of sprawl: Forging regional coalitions

A watershed organization for the Chagrin River

Bioregional calendar and more...

Good words

The loss of a forest or a farm is justified only if it is replaced by a village. To replace them with a subdivision or a shopping center is not an even trade.

—Andres Duany

If what you sell is privacy and exclusivity, then every new house is a degradation of the amenity. However, if what you sell is community, then every new house is an enhancement of the asset.

—Vince Graham
What we need

In the introduction to our new reader on urban sprawl, "Moving to Corn Fields," we propose the following goal for the region: Change development patterns in Northeast Ohio to revitalize existing urban areas and preserve the countryside, thus creating a region which is more environmentally sustainable, economically healthier and less stratified by class and race.

Then we list five steps for our regional future:

• Bioregional consciousness. Create regional consciousness—personal identity with the region instead of perceiving cities, a willingness to act for the long-term future of the entire region.

• Costs of sprawl. Promote understanding of the impacts of current development patterns.

Who wins? Who loses?

• Keeping score. Develop the capacity to track in an organized way all the decisions which now promote sprawling development patterns. Publicize who's what is responsible.

• Inspirational alternatives. Show how alternative development patterns can create a healthier region for most people. Create visible models.

• Creating change. Organize winning coalitions and campaigns for a region whose decisions reflect the views of the people.

Our scenic byway

One of Northeast Ohio's most inspiring examples of regional cooperation is the effort to create the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor. The corridor links Cleveland and Akron, urban and rural, parks and industry, the past and the future. Following the old canal for 87 miles from Cleveland's laketract to the historic canal town of Zane, the corridor is the spine of our region.

While the canal itself no longer moves cargo and people, the corridor is becoming increasingly popular as an alternative transportation route. The Towpath Trail in the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (CVNRA) attracts thousands of bicyclists and hikers, and it is being extended north and south. The Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad may one day carry visitors between downtown Cleveland, Akron and Canton.

And now a new transportation link is being proposed for the corridor—the Ohio & Erie Canal Scenic Byway. It would designate special routes on existing roads so motorists can experience beauty of the corridor. The aim would be to provide multiple driving (the 3 million visitors to the CVNRA each year are already clogging the area's rural roads), but to make it easier for people to get to the corridor and to protect the scenic character of the landscapes in the area.

"This will be the asphalt ribbon of the corridor," says Tim Donovan, director of Ohio Canal Corridor, one of the organizations spearheading the effort.

For the past two years a task force of representatives from Cuyahoga, Summit, Stark and Tuscarawas counties have been promoting the byway idea and have been working with the Ohio Department of Transportation to develop new criteria for a State Scenic Byway Program. Ohio lacks a strong program and has been missing out on federal funds allocated for scenic byways.

A recent state grant to the Summit County Engineer will permit completion of a byway management plan, which will identify the roads to be included in the byway, inventory significant resources along the byway, determine who will oversee enhancements to the roadways and scenic resources, and establish guidelines for marketing, interpretation and signage. When the plan is completed this summer, it's hoped that the Ohio & Erie Canal Scenic Byway will be approved as the first scenic byway in the state.

Benefits of scenic byways

Scenic byways are roads through corridors which possess significant scenic, historic, natural, cultural, archeological or recreational qualities. The designation of scenic byways has become an increasingly effective tool because byway efforts can successfully balance economic growth with environmental concerns.

This new approach provides us with the potential to shape how our communities and countryside look, while also encouraging economic development. Scenic byways:

• Promote interest in the cultural resources and natural beauty of an area.

• Interpret the intrinsic qualities of an area resulting in an increased appreciation for and commitment to their protection.

• Attract visitors who bring additional income and economic activity to the area.

• Provide an opportunity for growth management in a corridor by encouraging appropriate development.

• Protect the corridor with a low stress route.

• Can often guide visitors to sites not on principle highways, thereby offering a means of drawing tourists to all regions of a state.

• Contribute to regional greenways, heritage areas and trail development efforts.

• Preserve important community-valued characteristics.

• Create ties within and between communities due to sharing of a common vision.

—Scenic America
The Grand
Northeast Ohio’s only wild and scenic river

We’ve been hard on rivers in Northeast Ohio. We’ve dammed them, channelized them, and polluted them. But one river has survived in amazingly good shape—the Grand.

Protected by its distance from urban areas, the Grand River watershed is home to the greatest biological diversity in the region. Its free-flowing, clear water permits the survival of exceptional communities of fish and other aquatic organisms. And its forested floodplains and wetlands shelter more than 65 rare plants.

The Grand’s unusually pristine quality has earned it a “Wild and Scenic” designation from the state. (The only other wild river in Ohio is Little Beaver Creek in Columbiana County.) The wild portion of the Grand—the rugged, forest corridor—extends about 23 miles from the Harpersfield covered bridge near SR 534 to the Norfolk and Western railroad bridge just south of Painesville. The scenic portion, which winds through the flat bed of an ancient glacial lake, extends about 33 miles from SR 322 to the Harpersfield bridge.

Last year, Ohio EPA scientists conducted an intensive study of the river, its water quality and health of its aquatic life. Overall, the river continues to get excellent grades, says Ohio EPA’s Steve Tuckerman, who is now finishing up the agency’s report. In contrast to many of the other reports he’s written, says the one on the Grand “is pleasantly boring.”

Helping to maintain the river’s water quality is the well-operated Painesville wastewater treatment plant, he added. “It’s a model facility...They have great efficiency.”

In terms of point sources of pollution, two immediate concerns facing the river are a proposed expansion of the Chardon wastewater treatment plant and the Diamond Shamrock hazardous waste lagoons near Painesville. Increased discharge from the wastewater plant could degrade Big Creek, a major tributary of the Grand. And there is concern that the old waste lagoons are leaking chromium and other pollutants.

Probably the biggest long-term threat to the river is suburban sprawl spreading over Lake, Geauga and western Ashtabula counties. Fortunately, a number of organizations are working to protect the river’s corridor.

Lake Metroparks has protected over 3,500 acres along the Grand and its tributaries and has developed a larger open space plan. A recent federal transportation grant will allow the metroparks to protect another 1,000 acres of forested hillsides—the impressive “viewshed” from I-90 bridges—from future purchases of land and scenic easements.

Meanwhile, the Geauga Park District protects about 1,895 acres of land along the Big Creek and Swine Creek tributaries and seeks to purchase additional properties along vital headwater streams.

The Grand River is also home to a good example of watershed-wide cooperation—a coalition of public agencies, private organizations, businesses and individuals known as the Grand River Partnership. The partnership has created a land trust and has raised funds to purchase easements so land along the river remains undeveloped. It also has hired a river restoration planner to help educate landowners about river protection and provide incentives for cleaning up private dumps near the river. Another goal is to reach out to farmers, loggers and developers with information about minimizing erosion. For more information about the Grand River Partnership, call Rob Cornett at the Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District, 216-530-2730.

Major threats
The Grand River has generally excellent water quality and aquatic communities, but there are some environmental threats. Ohio EPA is watching:

- Diamond Shamrock, waste lagoons near Painesville may be degrading water quality in their vicinity. Negotiations are continuing over who will pay for a cleanup.
- Superfund hazardous waste sites at the New Lymes Landfill and the Old Mill site in Rock Creek, both undergoing cleanup actions.
- Jefferson wastewater treatment plant has experienced overflows and sewage sludge contaminating Cemetery Creek tributary. A recent plant upgrade should improve conditions.
- Orwell wastewater treatment plant has had operating and maintenance problems leading to high ammonia releases, odors and low dissolved oxygen in a tributary to the Grand. The situation is now improving.
- Increasing residential development in the basin—population has increased nearly seven percent between 1980 and 1990. A new bridge on Vrooman Road could spur development in areas south of the river.
- Inversion of exotic species, such as canary grass and parthenium, the tall reed grass which has taken over Mentor Marsh.
- A real threat is U.S. Rep. James Traficant of Youngstown, who claims of channelizing and damming the river to build a large canal from the Ohio River to Lake Erie. That would be an ecological disaster for the region.

Grand River facts
- Original name: the Geauga, after the Native American word for “acacoma.”
- Length of mainstream: 98.5 miles from Parkman to Fairport Harbor.
- Area of drainage basin: 712 square miles in Lake, Geauga, Ashtabula, Trumbull and Portage counties.
- Wildlife: 80-90 bird species, 76 fish species, 49 mammal species, 18 reptile species, 10 amphibian species. Also more than 65 rare plants at the watershed. River otters recently reintroduced to the watershed by the state.

Natural areas: Headlands Dunes, Mentor Marsh, Pallister Swamp, Grand River Trestles, Morgan Swamp, Grand River Wildlife Area, and other ecologically significant swamps and wetlands.

- Plant responsible for luxuriant meadows along the river’s edge: Emory’s sedge.
- Rock forming cliffs of the Grand River gorge: Chagrin shale from the Devonian Period.
- Prehistoric settlements: Earthlodge excavations at Hoback Ridge Park in Madison Township and Indian Point Park in Leroy Township.

- Cleveland Museum of Natural History, NOACA

Map prepared by NOACA

Grand River Basin

Public Metropark & County Park

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Hudson's choice

Northeast Ohio is not growing very much, but don't tell that to Hudson, this New England-style village in the heart of the Western Reserve has been booming. The population of the village and surrounding township has been growing at a rate of 3.5 percent a year—more than tripling from about 5,000 in 1960 to 22,000 today. And this rapid growth—created in part by the redistribution of population from declining urban areas in the region—is overwhelming the distinctive small-town atmosphere which attracted residents in early stages of development. At the same time, traffic is backing up around the village green. The schools are over crowded. City services are strained to the breaking point. Thus, another historic town is being engulfed by the monotonous suburban sprawl spreading between Cleveland and Akron.

Capping growth

But now after leading the region in growth, Hudson is trying to lead in growth management strategies. It is proposing to the become the first city in Ohio to cap its growth at 30,000, limiting the number of building permits issued each year. Next, builders may be able to build only about 100 residential units in Hudson, about one-third of the present level.

The city also plans to reduce the amount of land zoned for housing by 6 percent annually and peak at 30,000 in 25 years. A new strategy

A small town overwhelmed: Hudson's Main Street is also SR 91, a rapidly growing corridor through the suburbs east of Cleveland.

Now we're in the early stages of recognizing that there are costs to development. It's an interesting time in the history of Ohio.

Picked apart by development

Hudson once was insulated from sprawl. It was just far enough from Cleveland and Akron to make commuting difficult. But the Ohio Turnpike came through in the '60s, bringing with it a big GM Truck plant. And each came easy access to SR 8, I-71 and I-480. As a result, developers began carving up the township with subdivisions. Land use controls were weak and building was easy.

"It will give us time to make decisions," says City Manager James Smith. When Smith left his home town of Sandusky in 1973, Ohio had the rust-belt mentality that any development was good. When he recently returned to Ohio after living cities in New England, he saw a "new way of thinking. The population density was increasing, but the quality of life was not. The city was becoming crowded and congested.

"Now we're in the early stages of recognizing that there are costs to development," he says.

"It's an interesting time in the history of Ohio."

Defending growth management

Hudson officials and their consultants anticipate that these growth management policies won't be enacted without a fight. Property owners and developers will likely challenge the ordinance in court, claiming interference with property rights. The city officials want to squelch Hudson's initiative before other communities get the same idea.

But Hudson officials believe they have a sound legal basis for growth management. They have carefully tied their plan not just to the preservation of small towns character or environmental beauty, but to hard economics—the community's fiscal ability to pay for expanding infrastructure and services. As part of their planning, they have done "fiscal impact analyses" of the costs of additional infrastructure and services, given different rates of growth. If current growth trends continue, the city will lose $350 million in 15 years. But if growth is moderated as planned, costs will increase at a moderate rate—25 percent over 25 years.

A new strategy

A number of Hudson's new residents had lived in parts of the country where "growth management" was viewed as a sensible part of planning. They wondered why Hudson couldn't come together as a community and determine its future. And so in 1992 the people of Hudson embarked on a four-step process of development:

- Merger. First, they voted to merge the village and the township in 1993. This gave the community greater control over the design and location of development and added new revenue by expanding the same tax base.
- Comprehensive plan. Second, they adopted a new comprehensive plan which mapped out land uses, set design standards to protect the character of the community, and created a growth management strategy to control the amount, quality, location and timing of future residential development. The growth management policy limits the pace of population growth to 1.5 percent a year by limiting the number of residential permits. It also requires concurrency—that adequate infrastructure be in place prior to or concurrent with new development to avoid overstretching existing public services.
- Time-out. Third, they started planning in place by adopting a formal Growth Management Development Control Ordinance with an Interim Development Control Ordinance adopted in July 1995.

Facing big investments to increase water supply and wastewater treatment capacity. It must pay at least $7 million to connect sanitary sewers to an interceptor of the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District because of pollution problems in Brandywine Creek. Traffic on key roads is increasing seven percent a year, and road maintenance already is one of the biggest items in the budget. The city needs more police and a new police station. And it will cost the school district about $11,000 to provide facilities for each additional student.

The problem for Hudson—and for many growing communities—is that its growth is so using unplanned. It is uncoordinated and far more residential development, which creates more demands for services than

Four elements of growth management

There are four basic elements of development that a growth management strategy must address: location, amount, rate/timing, and quality of development. The manner in which a community addresses each of these elements plays an important role in defining how a community's appearance and development patterns occur. A strategy that recognizes the function of each of these elements and coordinates them into a cohesive regulatory system is more likely to be able to address all of the needs of a growing community like Hudson. The role that each of the four elements plays in a growth management strategy is described below:

Location. Where should development take place? It could be targeted to already-developed areas where infrastructure is available or land adjacent to build-up areas? Should it be preserved or protected against sprawl? And could it occur within defined boundaries?

Amount. Traditional zoning addressed how density any particular parcel may be developed. Growth management systems go beyond this, setting population targets for a community and establishing open space development policies for preservation of rural and scenic areas.

Rate/timing. Communities are beginning to set goals for the pace at which growth should occur. A growing number of communities have adopted systems that allow development to occur at or below the rate at which it would otherwise, often restricting development to occur within defined boundaries.

Quality. Many communities have realized that their growth plans do not address the location, amount, and timing of growth may not be enough to guarantee that they will retain their distinctive character. Also, such restrictions do not ensure that development will be sensitive to environmental and cultural resources. An increasing number of communities are enacting regulations to promote quality development whose environmental impact is mitigated to the maximum extent possible.
Steering development in Hudson

Hudson's comprehensive plan includes the following land use concepts, which are marked on the map at left:

1. Suburban residential neighborhood.
2. Rural residential conservation area.
3. Outer village residential neighborhood.
4. Village residential neighborhood.
5. Village commercial core.
6. Western Hudson gateway (office/disp. tech).
7. Outer village commercial corridor.
8. Industrial/office park development area.
9. Darrowville commercial corridor.

Growth management goals

To establish a residential development management and allocation system to control the rate of residential development to ensure that:

- Growth is orderly and that municipal infrastructure and public services are available concurrently with such development and to prevent further deterioration of public facility and infrastructure service levels.
- The fiscal impact of such development does not exceed revenue available from such development and other sources to pay the cost of infrastructure and services which it necessitates.
- The community character of the city as a desirable place to live and conduct business is not eroded and that property values are protected throughout the city.
- The density of population in the city is managed carefully to prevent overcrowding and congestion.
- Existing developments are completed and land adjacent to existing subdivisions is developed on a preferential basis to reduce infrastructure extension costs.

How Hudson's proposed system will work

The residential growth management system will limit the number of residential units that can be constructed in the city in any given year. It will supplement the city's existing zoning, subdivision, and architectural review processes; it will not replace them. Before a zoning certificate can be issued for residential development, the applicant will have to apply for and receive a residential development allotment from the city. These allotments will be limited each year as discussed below to moderate the rate of population growth in Hudson and lessen related impacts on municipal services and infrastructure as well as the community's character.

In June of each year the City Council—with the advice of the City Manager and Municipal Planning Commission—will establish the maximum number of residential development allotments that can be issued in the following allocation year (July 1 through June 30). This allocation will be based on a study conducted by the City Manager that examines, among other things, the amount of residential development during the prior 12 months, the capacity of the city's services and infrastructure to handle new growth, projects underway to upgrade municipal facilities, and similar measures. For 1996-97, the City Manager has recommended an annual allocation of 100 units, which is roughly equivalent to a 1.5 percent population growth rate (assuming 3 people/unit).

Once the annual allocation is set, citizens and developers who wish to construct a residential unit must apply for an allotment before they can get a zoning certificate and build. Eighty percent of the annual allocation will be set aside for "priority" residential developments as defined below. These will be distributed on a prorata basis.

For example, if there are 100 allotments available, but applications for 200 by owners of existing approved subdivisions, then each applicant will get one-half of what they applied for subject to the proviso that all applicants will get at least one allotment. This guarantee of one allotment will ensure that individual lot owners are treated equitably and are not at a disadvantage in competing with large developers applying for multiple allotments. The remaining 20 percent of allotments will be available to new development projects, also on a prorata basis.

A prorata system was chosen as the method by which to distribute allotments because it is straightforward and efficient. It will require less time of the staff, Municipal Planning Commission, and City Council than more complicated approaches such as competition based on a range of substantive standards. It will also be more easily understood by home builders and less costly to comply with. (In the unusual circumstance that there are more applicants than available allotments so that each applicant cannot receive at least one allotment, then allotments will be granted by lottery.)

While the residential growth limit in place, the city will develop and implement plans to build infrastructure and provide services that will accommodate the community's vision of itself as set forth in the recently adopted comprehensive plan. During this period, it will also revamping in land development codes, including the zoning ordinance, to improve the quality of development in the city and ensure that the community's unique character is maintained.

—Chlaron Associates/PEG Consultants

Planning in one city

The above plan makes perfect sense for Hudson. It's a heartening example of citizens coming together to shape their destiny. But that's one, tragic problem with this scenario: Hudson's plan largely ignores neighboring communities and the surrounding region. It's Hudson's plan for succeeding alone—for ensuring its own tax base, environmental quality and community tax revenue to pay for them, than industrial or commercial development, which more than pays its way. Indeed, the ratio of residential to nonresidential property tax revenues has shifted from 40/60 to 80/20 in the past two decades. Hudson's goal is to maintain a 60/40 split between residential and nonresidential, which means capping residential growth and reserving more land for other types of development. Therefore, residential growth management is justified to protect the future fiscal health and well-being of the city.
Sprawl politics
Building regional coalitions for livable cities

The state of Oregon, with its requirements for metropolitan planning and urban growth boundaries, has perhaps the strongest and most visionary land controls in the nation. Such growth management policies are one reason why Oregon has retained an enviable quality of life even when faced with tremendous growth pressures. For more than 20 years, Oregonians have defended these policies against many legal challenges by the most determined defendants has been Henry Richmond, founder of the watchdog group, 1000 Friends of Oregon. Richmond has become a national leader in the movement for sensible land use planning to stem urban sprawl (see the Calendar page for information about his upcoming visit to Cleveland). In the following speech he explains why sprawl is at the root of many of America's most serious social and environmental problems. And he outlines a political strategy for change.

He delivered the speech to the Greenspace Network in Philadelphia in September 1994. He began by noting the Alliance's ambitious goals—acquiring 75,000 acres of open space, adopting compact development patterns to reduce infrastructure costs, support transit, and improve the environment. And then he asked Alliance members a serious question. "Are you strong enough politically to achieve these goals by yourself?"

I submit the answer to that question lies in examining four points: (1) the trends you are up against, (2) how other interests are adversely affected by the same trends, (3) how your goals could, if carried out, benefit other politically influential interests, and (4) how you might be able to accomplish even more if you work with other interests.

First, what are the trends you're up against? In part, huge shifts in the location of new development from city to suburb. From 1950 to 1990 population in suburban areas went from 23% to 51% of total national population. In half that time suburban office space went from 25% to 57%. By 1990, two-thirds of American jobs were in the suburbs.

Equally significant, however, was the vast expansion of the size of American metropolitan regions. Between 1970 and 1990, for example, the Philadelphia urban area expanded 32% even though its population increased just 3.6%. The Chicago area expanded 46% with a population increase of 4%. Cleveland expanded 33% while losing population.

The physical impact of these post-WWII development trends on suburban and rural America is all too familiar—huge and needless losses of open space, farm lands, and natural resources. In the Phoenix area, from 1950 to 1992, 328,000 acres of farmland were lost in the five surrounding counties—109,000 acres, or 20% of the remaining total, in the last decade alone.

Auto-only development
Less obvious, however, is the impact which the conversion of these farm lands into sprawling, auto-only development patterns had on air quality, water quality, energy consumption and congestion. Why do I say, "auto-only"? Why was the car the only choice people had? Because sprawl development patterns precluded transit, walking or bicycling. The problems include:

- Density too low to support transit ridership. People will only walk less than half a mile to catch a bus or train.
- Separations of uses. In many places density is adequate, but thoughtless location. Also by rigidly separating schools from homes from work from shopping, getting to nearly every destination requires a car.
- Pedestrian-unfriendly design. Examples include subdivisions with dead-end streets and boxes that force people to walk across a huge parking lot in a restinmung.

These auto-only patterns cause suburban residents to generate 12-18 auto trips per day, trips that are gradually getting longer. In the process, in the last four decades, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) has increased nationally at a rate four times faster than population growth.

Environmental harms
This rapidly expanding auto-only use—compelled by development patterns—explains the less obvious connection between sprawl and the nation's most pervasive threats to environmental quality:

- Air. Important gains have been made in reducing levels of lead and carbon monoxide in late 20 years. However, EPA now predicts ozone and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) worsening. Even with

full state and local implementation of the Clean Air Act, higher VMT will cause the VOCs to be 48% short of compliance by 2010.
- Congestion. Predicted by the U.S. Department of Transportation to worsen by 45% between 1990 and 2003.
- Energy conservation. Even with the success of doubling the fuel efficiency of the new car fleet from 1973 to 1999, at higher VMT levels cars and light trucks had 19% more gasoline in 1989 than in 1973—when new cars were half as efficient.
- Water pollution. The Susquehanna River coming out of Pennsylvania is the major source of fresh water in the Chesapeake Bay, America's largest estuary. A major study done three years ago found that if present development trends continue, runoff and auto air pollution will double in volume and will kill the Bay even at all point source of pollution (e.g., pipes from industrial pollutants and municipal sewage), and even if all agricultural runoff is to be eliminated. Two points stand out. First, we have to start dealing with the land use source of these environmental problems and stop designing exensively and unacceptably—with the symptoms of the problem. Second, and more important, these major environmental harms are only half the social harm caused by a single regional process of land development.

Social harms
At the suburban impact of regional development patterns has undermined national environmental goals set by Congress, the urban impact of regional development patterns has undermined the goal of Equal Opportunity set by the Constitution. The same regional dynamic that is converting farmland to environmentally damaging, auto-only suburbs in vastly expanding metropolitan regions is precluding investment and poverty in urban America and is regressing our society.

Here's how two prominent urban specialists describe the underdevelopment characteristics of much of urban America. Dr. Cynthia Daniels, now Director of African American Studies at the University of Rhode Island, while Associate Professor of Public Affairs at the State University of New York at Albany, wrote an essay shortly before the April 1992 riots in South Central Los Angeles. Her description of South Central Los Angeles, a "house" to nearly a half million people, is fundamentally one of underdevelopment:

A sort of emptiness and sterility, one caused by what appears to be a systematic pattern of displacement and removal of all the things that contribute to a liveable environment and viable community.

Kenneth Jackson's "Crabgrass Frontier", the classic history of suburbanization, states:

The results of the urban cycle are the stripped automobile, the turn-around buildings, boarded-up houses, rotving sewers, and glass-littered streets that see common in so many of America's inner cities. In parts of Brooklyn, the Bronx, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Cleveland, whole blocks of stores and houses lie vacant. As one federal official noted: "There are some parts of the United States where many, many people have dropped out of the cycle."

This inner-city trend of lack of development and lack of investment has resulted in too overpriced or nonexistent retailing, poor schools, bad health, welfare

Empowerment, crime, and homelessness—components of the social deficit found by the Ford Foundation in its 1985 study, The Common Good.

In 1990, 19% of central city residents were poor compared to only 6.7% in the suburbs. Unemployment rates among young black males were 25-40% in major cities. Little housing is built in cities compared to suburbs. In Chicago, from 1969 to 1990, only 13,229 building permits for single-family homes were issued compared to 300,602 in the surrounding suburbs.

Nationally, half of city suburban households pay over 30% of income for what little, often inadequate, housing remains in the city.

Impacts on developers
What about developers? We've talked about environmentalists and minorities: are developers the enemy of land use? Or do they, too, have problems with post-War II patterns of development and local land use procedures? The answer is the latter. Unless states modify the current process through which growth entitlements are awarded, developers will have to negotiate local practices that create shortages of their product and raise the price of their product. These practices include:

Ecology Cleveland O March 1996
Promoting the right development

What the conservation community—and the public generally—must come to recognize is that development is the key to remedying both the environmental harms generated in poorly developed suburbs and the harms to human welfare generated in underdeveloped cities. Yes, regulation will be needed to locate development—to identify where development is needed, to identify where urban infrastructure and development will go, and to separate urban/suburban areas from rural areas (in short, where development will go and where it won’t). But much regulation on its own is not the key. It isn’t just the scale. It can’t, itself, “cure” the problem-causing defects in existing patterns of either urban or suburban development. Only new development can do that. For this reason, a new vision for metropolitan land use must emphasize not regulation, but development—encouraging development in the right location and form, and affirmatively harnessing its power and unique community value.

But such regulation by itself is not “the key.” It isn’t just the scale. It can’t, itself, “cure” the problem-causing defects in existing patterns of either urban or suburban development. Only new development can do that. For this reason, a new vision for metropolitan land use must emphasize not regulation, but development—encouraging development in the right location and form, and affirmatively harnessing its power and unique community value.

So, no, developers aren’t the enemy. They essentially play the policy hand they’ve been dealt. And no, our problem isn’t bad developers. It’s bad policy.

Nor, less obviously, is our problem powerful developers. Our problem is that we’re working within terms of logic, or worthiness of development, but weak walls around because we are isolated. And so are cities. In 1992, about the time of the Los Angeles riots in South Central LA, a group of city leaders gathered together for a “Planning for a New South LA” conference to discuss how the cities could deal with urban economic decline. The proposal sounded in the press. But it quickly went nowhere. It is now nearly forgotten.

Environmentalists had the same experience. They wanted a tax on gasoline. They wanted stronger requirements for fuel-efficient auto engines. Like their urban counterparts—Zip—Nothing—Zero—in the 1993 Congress.

Strength through unity

What is needed is a strategy that addresses the single problem that undermines human welfare and environmental and development values at the same time, a strategy that addresses the problem without supporting many interests, a strategy that would break out of weak positions of isolation and to create political strength through unity. Such a strategy could:

• Halt the mindless expansion of regions and plug the economic drain now killing the cities.
• Redirect development to transit-oriented, compact forms in urban and suburban areas.
• Be expressly pre-development and predictable.

Such a strategy could win minority and environmental support, win support for new alliances. The cost would be that the stakes must be made so high for our neighborhoods, our cities, our countryside, and our very soul as a society.

Facing the next generation of sprawl

The stakes are high because current demographics America’s already bad land use problems will get worse. According to Christopher Leinberger, managing partner of a large, national real estate advisory

• MACAEs or suburban provisions on affordable-family development.
• Restrictions on affordable single-family densities demanded is the add-on.
• Fees—finished lot prices have gone from 9% to 35%-40% of the price of a home in the last 20 years.
• Delays—the cost of money raises home prices.
• Unpredictability—vague standards
• Every project a Holy War—because no areas are protected, local land everywhere is perceived to be appropriate for preservation, so developers face fights everywhere.

firms, between 1990 and 2005 some 70% to 80% of the 29 million new jobs created nationally and 80% of the new homes built nationally will happen in cities, even further, “Fifth Generation of Sprawl” in American metro regions.

Without a new approach to land use policy in our country, 2,000 communities, hundreds of 1,000 land trusts and 1,000 local historic preservation groups will be swimming against a relentless, overwhelming tide of policy-supported suburban sprawl. The houses and offices will be torn down even by more undisturbed and even more distant from suburban jobs. The open space you will be fighting to save is surrounded by an even more vast sea of sprawl.

Proposition predictions similar to Mr. Leinberger’s were issued—and ignored—20 years ago. The Kerner Commission predicted the kind of urban violence that would have on urban poverty on urban family life, and on black social disintegration. And, in 1972, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Task Force on Urban Development and Land Use called by Laurance Rockefeller and staffed by Bill Reilly, predicted the harmful impact on the environment and open space caused by the "vast urban region" developed in the 1970s and 1980s.

Hence, the land use stakes are high for people and the stakes are high for the environment. Dark, foreboding clouds of a sunny land use future hover above us, as far as the eye can see.

Hope for change

But does that mean we should fold up our tents? Should we just throw in the towel? I don’t think so. To the contrary, I believe a clear examination reveals a silver lining in the American land use issue. That silver lining:

• Many interests are here by present development patterns.
• Isolated interactions are having difficult achieving objectives by themselves.
• The objectives of many interests are related in the land use context.
• Land use policies can be forged that advance many interests.

For instance, the "coalition of resistance" out there, if we have the courage to break out of our old patterns and reach out to other people and to others’ peoples’ key is using inclusive processes to articulate an alternative vision for Metropolitan America—a vision that many interests can buy into. At the heart of that vision:

• Non-sprawling cities
• Cities less costly for people, for households and for taxpayers.
• Regions that thrive because a level economic suburban/urban playing field has been created and policy affirm the social value of development.

Examples of the promise and success of such a consensus-building strategy exist. They offer hope that similar efforts can be tried elsewhere.

Oregon’s urban boundaries

In Oregon, for instance, Urban Growth Boundaries have been the policy tool that has enabled consensus to develop between the state government, developers, environmentalists. State planning laws passed in 1977 and 1975 require each of our cities to adopt a UGB. These are not to slow growth, “stop it dead.” They are simply to say where development will go and where it won’t—and to ensure that taxpayers are not being sought to maintain a full range of urban infrastructure. Oregon’s real estate market is so strong that 30,000 or 40,000 will be sufficient. We’re not as rich as we used to be!

For developing in one place and making it limits on existing buildings and growth control. Of course, no one at first— prior to the policy device by which developers and environmentalists could each accomplish different objectives.

For housing inside the boundary, vacant single-family lot sizes were scaled back to more normal, more affordable sizes. More land was zoned multi-family. The result? The capacity of essentially the same vast, relatively-undeveloped and undeveloped areas, there was a surge in housing units increased from 129,000 units to 305,000 units in four years. As that become clear, the home builders became supportive of the program.

Land outside the boundary? Over 25 million acres was rezoned to farm and forest use, an area larger than Pennsylvania. We hadn’t had a chop of that. It’s an incredible achievement.

What we realized about half-way through this process was that we couldn’t have done either if we hadn’t done both. Neither environment nor development would have tolerated either half by itself. Together, however, both were won.

Linking cities and inner suburbs

In Minnesota, State Representative Myron Orfield is building another, nationally unique coalition of groups and suburbs—to achieve other regional development objectives. Rep. Orfield has conducted an analysis in the Twin Cities which shows that on many key social and economic variables, inner suburbs and “low tax capacity” suburbs have more in common with inner-city residents than they do with booming outer suburbs. Urban and suburban trends were measured regarding school levels, percent of residents below the poverty line, school lunch participation (low income measure), poverty rates, rates of increase of residential value, crime incidence, and tax base and gap between needed services.

The analysis showed about 65-70% of the voters in the region that they had a common relationship with respect to these issues. These people, he believed, were vulnerable to a regional concentration of policies, regional patterns of development were leaving them behind. By focusing on common economic issues with a basic household dimension, Rep. Orfield painted a picture of a region that elevated common concerns of fairness and economic outlook, and allowed hitherto unreachable barriers between black/white and city/suburb to be potentially overcome.

With a strong coalition of churches, inner-suburb and central-city local governments, Orfield was able to secure enactment of important affordable housing and tax-base sharing legislation for the region. Voted by Governor Arne Carlson, Orfield believes growing coalitions will result in veto-proof legislation in a future session of the Minnesota legislature.

Organizing regional constituencies

Similar bridge-building, issue-spanning efforts are underway in other parts of the nation, such as New Jersey’s4 Urban Policy Project, One New City/Surb. It’s a project to improve quality in Camden. Bay area by revitalizing central Providence, Rhode Island, and 1,000 Friends of Florida’s efforts on affordable housing and the land use limits to be imposed in Washington. It’s not in the public’s interests. Politically, the solution can’t come from Washington. It’s the issues we’re talking about are fundamentally state and local in character.

And, most important, the issue can’t be resolved in our state capitals, or by local suburban law. Because the policy interest constituency is forged, at the regional level, state by state, across America. We must frame solutions that benefit the many interests harmed by the same regional patterns of development.

Henry Richmond will speak in Greater Cleveland on April 30. See p. 13 for details.
Looking out for the Chagrin

Most of us think we live in cities and counties. But a growing number of people in Northeast Ohio are beginning to live in watersheds. They are recognizing that ecosystems often talk people together in more fundamental ways than do the artificial political jurisdictions we humans impose on the landscape.

The latest example of emerging watershed identity in Northeast Ohio is the Chagrin River Watershed Partners Coalition. At a meeting December 6 in Gates Mills, about 75 citizens from the Chagrin's 267-square-mile drainage basin agreed to form a steering committee and a nonprofit organization to lead the new coalition.

The partnership will unite municipalities, government agencies, land trusts and citizens around a common agenda to protect the environmental health and scenic beauty of the Chagrin Valley. It will serve as a clearinghouse for information and help coordinate planning among the many players who have a stake protecting the watershed.

To address these problems, it's become clear that we have to play at the watershed level," said Richard Cochran, one of the Partnership's volunteer organizers.

Flooding is a growing problem in the watershed. As new development paves over woods and fields in urbanizing communities like Bainbridge and Aurora, the increased stormwater runoff has dramatically increased flooding in downstream communities like Eastlake. Erosion and sedimentation have made the formerly clear flowing river increasingly turbid.

Some developers are even building in floodplain wetlands, which not only destroys a valuable natural resource, but places the homes at risk. At the Partnership meeting, Chagrin Falls Mayor Edward Towns said he had received recent complaints from theheatmap district residents, which placed homes under construction in a neighboring community under two rivers: the Chagrin and the Grand.

"Cars come first," Mayor Towns said. "Cleveland residents commuted recently for the opening of the Summit Village Inn, and instead of the former coordinated roundabout corners at intersections, the project planner from the Ohio Department of Transportation found it was too unsafe to drive, so cars would have an easier time turning. Never mind that it would make the street safe for pedestrians -- by increasing crossing distances and encouraging cars to go faster.

Transportation comments: The Northeast Ohio Amtrak project invited the public to comment on the high-speed rail line that will eventually connect Cleveland and Buffalo. Our presidential campaign have yet to produce a barrage about this rail spur at as devastating as our great cities, devises our landscapes, undermines our sense of community, threatens our economic security. Republicans routinely eschew revenue or guide on growth as anti-business. President Clinton comes from a lightly urbanized state. One of his early backers was the late San Walton, prior town killer and sprawl supporter of the NIMBY ideology.

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These are changing times in our region. Here is the guidebook!

Dear Readers:

During the past three years the EcoCity Cleveland Journal has covered the urban sprawl debates in Northeast Ohio, and we are proud to have played a role in heightening awareness about critical regional issues. Now we are pleased to announce our latest publication, Moving to Corn Fields, in which we've collected our best articles on land use trends, transportation planning, and strategies for revitalizing cities while preserving the countryside. This 64-page book is an essential resource for everyone concerned about the future of our region.

You can obtain your copy of Moving to Corn Fields for just $5 postpaid when you subscribe to EcoCity Cleveland or renew your subscription at the regular rate (see coupon below). If you subscribe at the $35 supporting level, we'll send you Moving to Corn Fields for free. For nonsubscribers the book is $10.

We all need to think about our common regional destiny in new ways. I hope that Moving to Corn Fields will stimulate your thinking about these planning issues.

Get it now!

David Beach
Editor

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