

The Smart Growth Challenge in Ohio

A strategic analysis
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Preface

The Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities is a network of foundations based in the United States and Canada that are interested in expanding their individual and collective abilities to support organizations promoting smart growth and livable communities. To help achieve this mission, the Funders' Network, in concert with interested funders, is undertaking a strategic assessment of the smart growth and livable communities movement nationally and in selected regions. Purposes of this assessment are to network leaders from multiple disciplines and to identify critical opportunities that can be seized in the coming years to raise the movement's impact through policy reform.

The foundation of the assessment process is a series of one-day gatherings that bring together key individuals to share information, network with one another, and offer insights to inform the assessment process. One of these meetings, for the State of Ohio, was held on September 19, 2002 in Cleveland. Meeting hosts included the Cleveland Foundation, Columbus Foundation, Greater Cincinnati Foundation, George Gund Foundation, and Ohio Grantmakers Forum. A list of attendees is attached to the end of this paper.

The meeting provided an opportunity for participants to review the background of smart growth advocacy in Ohio, clarify barriers to continued progress, and identify resources needed to succeed in the future. This paper (or "policy scan") was commissioned as a discussion document for the meeting.

The Ohio gathering generated enthusiasm for a stronger commitment to advancing smart growth issues. Participants agreed that Ohio has significant land use problems and is falling behind other states that are adopting smart growth programs. Although they recognized the current political difficulties of moving major policy reforms in Ohio, they concluded that the demand for reform was growing across the state and that now was the time for action. Finally, they agreed to explore the development of a statewide organizing campaign.

Executive summary

Smart growth is not anti-growth. Rather it is about developing (and redeveloping) communities and metropolitan regions in a different and positive way – a way that will be more sustainable than the highway-oriented suburban sprawl that has characterized development in America in recent decades.

In Ohio, there are many good reasons to change the way development occurs. The current, haphazard patterns of growth are consuming land rapidly, undermining the fiscal health of older cities and towns, creating serious environmental problems, and exacerbating economic and racial disparities. In recent years, other states have begun innovative programs to address these land use and development issues. If Ohio wants to compete, it needs to help its metropolitan regions achieve a better balance of development.

This paper analyzes how Ohio can move forward toward smart growth. It describes what smart growth would mean for Ohio and the unique challenges presented by this diverse state. One fundamental problem is that Ohio is a difficult geography to organize for any major policy change. With the state's metropolitan areas pulling in different directions and historical divisions dividing north and south, Ohio lacks a unifying identity. It's hard to mobilize "Ohioans" to care about the state as a whole. Smart growth, however, will require new ways of thinking and planning at the state and metropolitan levels.

Fortunately, a loose movement of individuals and organizations has developed in the past decade to promote smart growth in Ohio. They come from different perspectives – rural preservation, urban redevelopment, environmental protection, economic development, transportation reform, and social justice. And they come from different fields – community activism, academia, business, city government, planning, faith-based organizations, and others. Together, they form the basis of a statewide coalition for change.

Waiting to be organized

This winning coalition is waiting to be organized. Past attempts have failed for lack of leadership, strategy, and resources. Future attempts can succeed, but only if they are serious. Based on interviews with smart growth advocates around the state, here are some of the necessary features of a campaign for significant change:

- Compelling case for change – Demonstrate clearly how current development trends are hurting most people and how the future of Ohio is at stake. Sprawl has to be understood as an underlying cause of many other problems. The case document should be polished, professional, and graphically compelling.
- Positive agenda for a better future – Craft a message that diverse groups will rally around. The message has to be clear and simple. It has to cut through the complexities of land use issues and talk about tangible benefits.
- Message based on basic values – The message should relate to people's basic values. Polling by the Biodiversity Project has shown such values to include choice, freedom, and responsibility to future generations.
- Building on Ohioans' concerns – A statewide poll by the Ohio League of Conservation Voters in 2000 showed that 57 percent of likely voters say that "issues involving clean water, clean air and open space" are very important and a primary factor in deciding how to vote.
- Business involvement – Build on the business community's new concerns about quality of life and the new economy.
- Policy effectiveness – Make sure that the policies advocated will actually work on the ground to change the location and design of development.
- Recognition of political realities – The agenda should be revenue neutral, incentive-based, and not

- create unfunded mandates for local governments.
- Regional flexibility – Given the diversity of Ohio’s metropolitan areas, the agenda should focus on the state support of regional solutions. This not only makes political sense, but it is essential because the problems to be addressed play out at the regional scale.
 - Cincinnati focus – Politically, the Cincinnati area is key and must play a leading role.
 - Bipartisanship – Smart growth should be positioned as a bipartisan (even nonpartisan) issue. It should transcend short-term politics.
 - Timing – Assuming Governor Bob Taft will win a second term this November, he may be persuaded to exert more leadership on land use issues (an urban redevelopment and conservation legacy?). A smart growth campaign could be developed in 2003, emerge in 2004, and seek to win in 2005.
 - Media – The effort should have a strong media and communications strategy. It also should create its own electronic media.
 - Technology – The Internet provides tools that make it easier to network a large state.
 - Ability to count votes – Know what it will take to win and target resources accordingly to obtain the winning margin.
 - Seriousness – Making significant headway on smart growth in Ohio will be hard work. The effort should not be attempted unless it’s serious and has sufficient resources to get the job done.
 - Professional staff – A serious effort will likely take three to four staff people working for at least three years.

The smart growth agenda for Ohio will likely have a strong emphasis on state policies. After all, the state sets the “rules of the game” for planning and local land use control. The state also exerts influence over the location of development through transportation spending and economic development incentives. Thus, a major goal will be to make the state a better partner helping to maintain and redevelop older communities, while preserving open space. It is important to realize, however, that no single policy change will solve Ohio’s complex land use and development problems. It will require a suite of policies and programs acting over many years. The task for smart growth advocates will be to figure out which options will be most effective *and* politically achievable.

Ultimately, smart growth will require changing the location of development (more development in existing communities and less in the countryside) and the form of development (more compact and walkable, less wasteful of land). Success will be measured by real changes on the ground.

This paper is meant to stimulate discussion about how to create these changes. It is an introduction, an early sketch. It invites comment and contributions from people throughout the state. It encourages everyone to imagine a new land use future for Ohio.

Contents

What is smart growth? (What do we want?)	6
The Ohio character	9
Lack of an Ohio identity	
Lack of a strong environmental ethos	
Local identities?	
Land use trends (and problems) in Ohio	12
Land consumption	
Economic and social disparities	
Water resources	
Smart growth responses.....	17
Before 1980	
The 1990s	
Since 2000	
Accomplishments	
Failures	
Suggestions for an organizational strategy	23
Policy goals	
The opposition to smart growth	
The right leadership	
Allies to network	
Features of a winning campaign	
Endnotes	30
List of attendees from the September 19, 2002	
Funders' Network meeting in Cleveland.....	31

What is smart growth? (What do we want?)

An underlying assumption of this paper is that “smart growth” is good, important, and worth supporting. If that’s so, we should be clear about what the term means – and also what it means to advance smart growth (i.e., how do we define success?).

In the past decade, a national movement has developed to promote smart growth. The movement involves a broad range of actors – from environmental groups to the Urban Land Institute. And it is encouraging to see that these actors share similar views about the definition and goals of smart growth. Here are examples of definitions from some of these different perspectives. It’s worth spending a few minutes to skim through them and develop an appreciation of what this movement advocates and the language it uses.

U.S. EPA

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, which has been a leader of the national Smart Growth Network,¹ describes smart growth as a development process that:

- Mixes land uses.
- Takes advantage of compact building design.
- Creates housing opportunities and choices for a range of household types, family sizes and incomes.
- Creates walkable neighborhoods.
- Fosters distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Preserves open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Reinvests in and strengthens existing communities and achieves more balanced regional development.
- Provides a variety of transportation choices.
- Makes development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective.
- Encourages citizen and stakeholder participation in development decisions.

Smart Growth America

Smart Growth America,² a national coalition of groups, defines smart growth according to its outcomes – outcomes that it says mirror the basic values of most Americans. Thus, smart growth is growth that helps to achieve these six goals:

- Neighborhood livability: The central goal of any smart growth plan is the quality of the neighborhoods where we live. They should be safe, convenient, attractive, and affordable. Sprawl development too often forces trade-offs between these goals. Some neighborhoods are safe but not convenient. Others are convenient but not affordable. Too many affordable neighborhoods are not safe. Careful planning can help bring all these elements together.
- Better access, less traffic: One of the major downfalls of sprawl is traffic. By putting jobs, homes and other destinations far apart and requiring a car for every trip, sprawl makes everyday tasks a chore. Smart growth’s emphasis on mixing land uses, clustering development, and providing multiple transportation choices helps us manage congestion, pollute less and save energy. Those who want to drive can, but people who would rather not drive everywhere or don’t own a car have other choices.
- Thriving cities, suburbs, and towns: Smart growth puts the needs of existing communities first. By guiding development to already built-up areas, money for investments in transportation, schools, libraries and other public services can go to the communities where people live today. This is especially important for neighborhoods that have inadequate public services and low levels of private investment. It is also critical for preserving what makes so many places special—attractive buildings, historic districts and cultural landmarks.

- **Shared benefits:** Sprawl leaves too many people behind. Divisions by income and race have allowed some areas to prosper while others languish. As basic needs such as jobs, education and health care become less plentiful in some communities, residents have diminishing opportunities to participate in their regional economy. Smart growth enables all residents to be beneficiaries of prosperity.
- **Lower cost, lower taxes:** Sprawl costs money. Opening up green space to new development means that the cost of new schools, roads, sewer lines, and water supplies will be borne by residents throughout metro areas. Sprawl also means families have to own more cars and drive them farther. This has made transportation the second highest category of household spending, just behind shelter. Smart growth helps on both fronts. Taking advantage of existing infrastructure keeps taxes down. And where convenient transportation choices enable families to rely less on driving, there's more money left over for other things, like buying a home or saving for college.
- **Keep open space open:** By focusing development in already built-up areas, smart growth preserves rapidly vanishing natural treasures. From forests and farms to wetlands and wildlife, smart growth lets us pass on to our children the landscapes we love. Communities are demanding more parks that are conveniently located and bring recreation within reach of more people. Also, protecting natural resources will provide healthier air and cleaner drinking water.

American Planning Association

In recent years, the American Planning Association³ has made smart growth a focal point of its work with projects such as Growing Smart,⁴ a major initiative aimed at helping states modernize statutes affecting planning and the management of growth. Recently, the APA issued a "Policy Guide on Smart Growth," which offers the following definition:

Smart growth means using comprehensive planning to guide, design, develop, revitalize and build communities for all that:

- have a unique sense of community and place;
- preserve and enhance valuable natural and cultural resources;
- equitably distribute the costs and benefits of development;
- expand the range of transportation, employment and housing choices in a fiscally responsible manner;
- value long-range, regional considerations of sustainability over short term incremental geographically isolated actions; and
- promotes public health and healthy communities.

Compact, transit-accessible, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development patterns and land reuse epitomize the application of the principles of smart growth. In contrast to prevalent development practices, smart growth refocuses a larger share of regional growth within central cities, urbanized areas, inner suburbs, and areas that are already served by infrastructure. Smart growth reduces the share of growth that occurs on newly urbanizing land, existing farmlands, and in environmentally sensitive areas.

Ohio Lake Erie Commission

Here in Ohio, there also have been interesting statements related to smart growth. In 2000, the Ohio Lake Erie Commission, an agency that coordinates Lake Erie policy among state departments, released the *Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan*.⁵ The plan emphasizes that the way land is developed in the Lake Erie watershed is the key problem affecting the health of the lake. It calls for "balanced growth" practices to be followed throughout the watershed, and it recommends ten guiding principles for a sustainable Lake Erie watershed:

Activities in the Ohio Lake Erie watershed should:

1. Maximize reinvestment in existing core urban areas, transportation, and infrastructure networks to enhance the economic viability of existing communities.
2. Minimize the conversion of green space and the loss of critical habitat areas, farmland, forest and open spaces.

3. Limit any net increase in the loading of pollutants or transfer of pollution loading from one medium to another.
4. To the extent feasible, protect and restore the natural hydrology of the watershed and flow characteristics of its streams and tributaries.
5. Restore the physical and chemical habitat of the watershed to protect and restore diverse and thriving plant and animal communities and preserve our rare and endangered species.
6. Encourage the inclusion of all economic and environmental factors into cost/benefit accounting in land use and development decisions.
7. Avoid development decisions that shift economic benefits or environmental burdens from one location to another.
8. Establish and maintain a safe, efficient, and accessible transportation system that integrates highway, rail, air, transit, water and pedestrian networks to foster economic growth and personal travel.
9. Encourage that all new development and redevelopment initiatives address the need to protect and preserve access to historic, cultural and scenic resources.
10. Promote public access to and enjoyment of our natural resources for all Ohioans.

Home Builders

Finally, the Home Builders Association of Northeast Ohio has organized a Smart Growth Education Foundation⁶ to promote better planning for land development in the region. According to the home builders:

Smart Growth means meeting the housing demand in “smarter ways” by planning for and building to higher densities, preserving meaningful open spaces and protecting environmentally sensitive areas. It addresses questions of how best to plan for and manage growth; when and where new residential areas, commercial development, schools and major highways should be built and located; and how to pay for the infrastructure required to serve a growing region.

Success measured by changes on the ground

In summary, among many mainstream organizations there is broad agreement on the basic definition and features of smart growth. Smart growth is not anti-growth. Rather, it is about developing (and redeveloping) communities and metropolitan regions in a different way – a way that will be more sustainable than the highway-oriented suburban sprawl that has characterized development in America in recent decades.

Ultimately, smart growth will require changing the location and form of development. Success will be measured by real changes on the ground.

The Ohio character (or lack thereof): Factors that work against change

If enough people had spoken for the river, we might have saved it. If enough people had believed that our scarred country was worth defending, we might have dug in our heels and fought. Our attachments to the land were all private. We had no shared lore, no literature, no art to root us there, to give us courage to help us stand our ground. The only maps we had were those issued by the state, showing a maze of numbered lines stretched over emptiness. The Ohio landscape never showed up on postcards or posters, never unfurled like tapestry in films, rarely filled even a paragraph in books. There were no mountains in that place, no waterfalls, no rocky gorges, no vistas. It was a country of low hills, cut over woods, scoured fields, villages that had lost their purpose, roads that had lost their way.

—Scott Russell Sanders,
Writing from the Center

(describing his childhood along the Mahoning River in Northeast Ohio)

Ohio has more large urban areas than any other state in the Union, which makes it hard to get anything done at the state level. The media are fragmented by urban centers. There are no common sources of information. Nobody in Cincinnati knows anything about Dayton; nobody in Dayton knows anything about Columbus; nobody in Columbus knows anything about Cleveland. So when you want to change policies, you have an enormous educational challenge. It's a tough job to bring the people of Ohio kicking and screaming into the 21st century—not because they are bad people but because they don't get the information they need to make decisions.

—John Gilligan,
former Governor of Ohio

Ohio lags behind many other states in advancing smart growth. A recent survey of state planning reforms and smart growth measures by the American Planning Association found that Ohio was one of only 12 states not pursuing statewide reforms.⁷ The reasons for this lack of progress range from a strong home-rule tradition to the conservative ideology of the current General Assembly.

But, underlying the specific barriers, there are at least two, broad, cultural factors that retard progress: the lack of an Ohio identity and the lack of a strong environmental ethos. Any movement for smart growth in Ohio must deal with these factors.

A fundamental challenge: Lack of an Ohio identity

Does “Ohio” exist in the hearts and minds of most Ohioans? Do people – other than Ohio State football fans – think of themselves as “Buckeyes”?

While people feel attachment to some part of the state (a city, watershed, or region), they tend not to identify with Ohio as a whole. And that is understandable. Ohio has no coherent geography, no political or cultural center of gravity, and no mythology that celebrates it as a distinctive place. Indeed, there is no obvious reason for Ohio to exist as a political entity. Parts of the state relate, variously, to Lake Erie, the Ohio River, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Kentucky, Appalachia, or Indiana more than they do to the state capitol, Columbus.

Ohio is a crossroads state – a place that many people pass through. It's also an ecological crossroads, since the state is split up into five physiographic regions: Glaciated Allegheny Plateau, Unglaciated Allegheny Plateau, Central Lowland Till Plains, Huron-Erie Lake Plains, and Interior Low Plateau (Bluegrass Section).⁸

The state is further divided into an unusually large number of metropolitan areas, each with their own media markets. Such divisions, as former Governor John Gilligan observes in the quote above, make it extremely difficult to convene a statewide discussion on any topic, much less enact any comprehensive statewide reforms.

Moreover, there is a fundamental political split in the state that makes it hard to act as one Ohio. While most observers of state politics are aware that southern Ohio tends to be more conservative than northern Ohio, fewer may appreciate the depth and longevity of the difference. It dates to before the Civil War. As James M. McPherson writes in his book on the Civil War era, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois had a clear political and cultural division:

Most of the initial settlers there had come from the upper South and Pennsylvania. They populated the southern part of the region and evolved a corn-hog-whiskey economy, selling their small surplus in markets accessible by the Ohio-Mississippi river network. They were called Buckeyes, Hoosiers, Suckers; they dressed in homespun clothes dyed with the oil of walnut or butternut trees, and hence acquired the generic name Butternuts. They remained rural, southern, and localist in their orientation, hostile toward “Yankees” of New England heritage who settled the northern portions of these states made accessible by the Erie Canal after 1825. These Yankees established a wheat-cattle-sheep-dairy farming economy linked to the eastern markets by the burgeoning rail network after 1850. The railroads and the rapidly multiplying banks, industries, towns and cities owned or controlled by the “Yankees” caused these parts of the states to grow faster than the Butternut sections.⁹

Lack of a strong environmental ethos

This may be more of an assumption than a proven fact, but it seems that Ohio has a weaker environmental ethos than other states. A recent campaign to maintain land use planning laws in Oregon, for instance, had the slogan, “Help keep Oregon, Oregon.” If you substitute “Ohio” for “Oregon” in that slogan, it sounds almost silly. There just isn’t the same love for and identification with the Ohio landscape.

Why? One can suggest a number of possible reasons. First, Ohio lacks the awe-inspiring natural beauty of other states. Lake Erie and the rolling hills of Southeast Ohio are nice, but they can’t compare to oceans and mountains. Ohio’s scenic beauty is smaller, subtler, harder to appreciate.

Second, Ohio has lost almost all its pristine, natural landscape. Early in its history, the state was worked over thoroughly – logged over, farmed over, and then industrialized. All that’s left today are a few scattered remnants of the natural world. For many Ohioans, still, the land and water exist to be used, not preserved.

Third, Ohio has a lingering sense of Rust Belt insecurity. It’s been a no-growth or slow-growth state for so long that development is often welcomed without question. Too many compromises are made, leading to further degradation of the environment.

Fourth, Ohio has little tradition of public land. It ranks 47th among states in the amount of public land per capita. The prevailing sentiment is for private land, not the preservation of land (or regulation of land uses) for broader public purposes.

Local identities?

If there is no strong “Ohio” identity, what do Ohioans identify with? This will be an important question for a statewide movement for smart growth to answer. One positive factor to consider is that Ohio has a very stable population (in contrast to states like Florida or Nevada where everybody is from somewhere else). People have roots in Ohio, but the roots are probably local. So organizing strategies for smart growth may have to appeal to local or regional sensibilities.

Land use trends (and problems) in Ohio

The Ohio landscape is being transformed. Cornfields and woodlots are being turned into strip malls, subdivisions, and suburban industrial parks. Historic small towns are becoming booming suburbs. Overall, the state's metropolitan areas are spreading outward into the surrounding countryside at a rate almost five times faster than population growth. And state government policies and programs are actively promoting this rapid process of land consumption.

In response, there's been a rising tide of concern about land use problems in Ohio. Residents of older cities and suburbs are realizing that the "growth" at the edges of metropolitan areas is often just outmigration from the urban core—a costly and destructive shell game of population and tax base that undermines the long-term investment society has made in existing communities. Residents of the new boom towns are finding that unmanaged growth often brings sudden demands for city services, higher taxes and the loss of the rural character that attracted them to the country in the first place. Environmentalists are understanding how the way land is developed impacts air quality, water quality, and energy use. Opinion polls are showing that people see the wisdom of maintaining existing communities and preserving open space.

The concerns tend to revolve around the following issues:

- **Rapid pace of land consumption:** The strong economy of the past few years permitted larger and more expansive development that consumed more land. People have noticed that the countryside (including irreplaceable farmland) is disappearing in big chunks.
- **Fiscal constraints:** The state has so much infrastructure flung over so great a distance that it's hard to maintain the old while building new roads, bridges, and sewer systems to serve new growth. State politics are increasingly about fights over scarce resources, and these fights have been exacerbated by the recent slowdown in the economy and resulting state budget crisis. Fiscal issues also are raised by the large amount of development occurring in township areas that lack the taxing capacity of cities.
- **Environmental constraints:** There's growing awareness that Ohio's sprawling development patterns are creating intractable environmental problems. Water pollution comes from paving over the landscape. Air pollution comes from how much we drive. And our dwindling biological diversity comes from how we encroach upon our remaining natural areas.
- **Central county build out:** In a few short years, Cuyahoga County will be the first county in Ohio to use up all its virgin land and be fully developed. It will then be faced with the novel question: What next? How does a county reorient itself from growth to maintenance and redevelopment? How can it improve (obtain better housing, better jobs, a better educated population) without growing? How can the county compete with new development in surrounding counties? This will require a new mindset focused on long-term sustainability. It is an historic turning point for Cuyahoga County, and it is a future other counties in the state will have to face before long (including Hamilton, Franklin, Summit, and Lake).
- **Big-box retailing:** In the '90s, Ohio was invaded by big-box retailers like Wal-mart, Target, Kohl's, and Home Depot. New "power strip centers" have had sudden and dramatic impacts on communities. As a result, many more people are asking questions about how to maintain community character and quality of life.
- **Traffic gridlock:** Even though Ohio as a whole has minimal traffic congestion in comparison to other states, some rapidly growing communities are being overwhelmed. Places along the outerbelt highways are struggling to deal with congestion that comes from building auto-oriented communities where everyone has little choice but to drive all the time. Dispersed development patterns are a major cause of changes in transportation behavior in Ohio (along with other factors, such as increased labor force

participation). According to *Access Ohio*, the state transportation plan, while Ohio's overall population increased by only 0.45 percent over the past decade (1980-90), the increase in vehicle miles traveled in Ohio was 29.7 percent.¹⁰ Congestion will only get worse. The Ohio Department of transportation recently stated: "The overriding transportation trend in Ohio is congestion. Although ODOT has adequate and stable bridge and pavement conditions, the level and intensity of congestion continues to rise. Overall traffic volumes—and particularly truck volumes—continue to grow much faster than the department's ability to provide new capacity. The growth in congestion continues to overshadow all other trends that ODOT monitors."¹¹

- **Changing needs:** Our aging population needs walkable neighborhoods with stores and services close by. Growing numbers of childless households are seeking the excitement and diversity of a more urban experience. Most new suburbs don't meet those needs. In addition, public health authorities are recognizing that sprawling, automobile-centric communities discourage healthful exercise, such as walking, and contribute to the national epidemic of obesity.¹²
- **Social justice implications:** More people are becoming aware that unbalanced development patterns in metro regions are leaving behind older communities, the poor, and minorities. As regions spread out, they tend to stratify along lines of race and class.
- **Global competition:** Metropolitan regions are the geographies that compete in the global economy. Areas with social tensions, a deteriorated urban core, traffic congestion, and environmental problems will have a harder time prospering. On the other hand, regions that can provide vibrant urban neighborhoods and access to nature can attract highly educated workers needed for the new economy. Increasingly, business groups, such as the Metropolitan Growth Alliance in the Cincinnati region, have been studying these issues.
- **Yearning for community and authentic places:** Many people are tiring of homes on lonely cul-de-sacs and suburban strip malls. They want real town squares, historic character, and scenic vistas. They see that current development patterns are destroying the places they care about. As Richard Moe of the National Trust for Historic Preservation says, "Development that destroys communities and the places people care about isn't progress. It's chaos."

Below are more detailed descriptions of three of these issues – the rapid pace of land consumption and farmland loss, economic and social disparities, and impacts on water quality.

Land consumption

Ohio consumes a great deal of land with little net population growth, a particularly wasteful condition that might be called "sprawl without growth." Between 1960 and 1990, for instance, the amount of urbanized land in Ohio grew 61.5%, while population grew just 11.8%, a ratio of more than five to one.¹³

Another measure is the federal Natural Resources Inventory, which recorded that Ohio's "developed land" increased 21.0% during the 1990s compared to a 4.7% increase in population – a 4.5 ratio of growth in developed land to population growth. This was the sixth worst ratio among all states, according to a recent study by urban analyst David Rusk.¹⁴ On average, Ohio used up 1.24 acres of land for every net new resident from 1987-97. By contrast, Oregon (with the U.S.'s strongest, anti-sprawl state laws) used up only 0.31 acre per net new resident. With less available undeveloped land to begin with, Ohio's growth patterns consumed land at four times Oregon's rate.

A lot of the new development occurred on farmland around the state's metropolitan areas. Ohio lost 4,258,827 acres in farms between 1959 and 1992, a rate of 10,755 acres per month, according to figures from the U.S. Census of Agriculture. The seven counties in the Columbus metropolitan area (Franklin, Delaware, Fairfield, Licking, Madison, Pickaway, and Union) accounted for the largest amount of farmland lost, 425,101 acres, approximately 1,073 acres per month over the 33-year period, or a 22.9-percent change. Among metropolitan areas, counties in the Cleveland metropolitan area (Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Medina) together lost 39.4 percent of their farmland. They were followed

closely by counties in the Cincinnati metropolitan area (Hamilton, Butler, Clermont, and Warren), which lost 39.1 percent.¹⁵

Economic and social disparities

A process of outmigration drives much of the sprawl around Ohio, as higher-income households move out to new homes at edges of metropolitan areas. Left behind are central cities and older suburbs with increasing concentrations of poverty, higher social service costs, and reduced tax base. The disinvestment has been enormous. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, Youngstown lost about 40 percent of its population. During the 1970s and 1980s, the City of Cleveland lost 59,000 housing units. Over the past 40 years, Cleveland has lost almost two thirds of its assessed property valuation (adjusted for inflation).¹⁶

And this process is not just affecting a few communities in the urban core. Housing policy researcher Thomas Bier of Cleveland State University's Levin College of Urban Affairs has studied how this pattern of outmigration of people and investment will affect the long-term viability of Cuyahoga County. He also notes that Cuyahoga County will be the first county in Ohio to be fully developed. Very little undeveloped land remains in the outer suburbs, and most of it will be used within 20 years.

Here are some of the implications of this historic transition:

- Cuyahoga County is losing its capacity to grow its tax base through outer suburban development – which endangers the economic future of the county and region.
- As Cuyahoga's land supply diminishes, development grows in adjacent counties. The value of residential construction in Cuyahoga County has not increased since 1986. During the same period the annual value of residential construction in Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage and Summit counties increased from \$400 million to \$1.2 billion.
- While Cuyahoga's new suburbs are becoming built-out, its oldest suburbs are aging to where they are susceptible to decline. Two-thirds of the county's suburban homes were built before 1960; one-third of the homes were built in the 1950s alone.
- Cuyahoga residents are moving to neighboring counties (Cuyahoga is the only county in the region that is losing population). One-third of Cuyahoga's homeowners who sell and purchase another home move to an adjacent county.
- Between 1983 and 1999, growth in Cuyahoga's property tax duplicate lagged neighboring counties: Cuyahoga residential real estate increased in value 35 percent (with much of that resulting from suburban construction) while adjacent counties increased 81 percent (adjusted for inflation). Commercial real estate increased 50 percent while adjacent counties increased 60 percent. Industrial real estate *decreased* 22 percent while adjacent counties increased 30 percent.¹⁷

According to Bier, the economic stability of Cuyahoga County and the region depends heavily on extensive redevelopment of obsolete real estate, reuse of salvageable buildings, and reinvestment in Cleveland and the older suburbs.

While the above analysis focuses on Cuyahoga County, this is a statewide issue. Hamilton and Franklin counties will eventually build out like Cuyahoga and face the same challenges. The unprecedented situation calls for all levels of government – including the state – to engage jointly in determining policy and program initiatives that will secure the future of Ohio's counties as they reach build-out.

These trends of the real estate market, coupled with exclusionary zoning practices that allow little affordable housing to be built in new suburbs, isolate the poor and minorities in older urban areas. Using a dissimilarity index to measure the relative segregation of poor persons, David Rusk recently found that economic segregation is rising steadily throughout Ohio. In fact, Greater Cleveland was the nation's third most economically segregated region in 1990 (as well as the fifth most racially segregated). Schools in

Ohio's metro areas are also more economically segregated than those of other states.¹⁸

The issues of urban sprawl, racial segregation, and concentrated poverty – also referred to as “metropolitan development patterns,” “socioeconomic polarization,” and “fiscal disparities” – are threatening the future prospects of metropolitan areas throughout Ohio. A study by the Metropolitan Area Research Corporation (MARC) on the Mahoning Valley area, for example, found a region highly segregated by race and class, troubling fiscal disparities between communities, and sprawling development patterns that consume land rapidly.¹⁹

MARC's recent study on the Cincinnati region found similar issues. The central city has one of the highest rates in the nation of people living in “extreme poverty” neighborhoods, and the urbanized area is spreading out five times faster than population growth. The conclusion: “Pronounced social separation, inequitable fiscal policies, and inefficient development patterns are threatening the long-term social and economic strength of the Greater Cincinnati region.”²⁰

Water resources

Sprawling development creates environmental problems on many fronts. But the most serious and intractable may be the impact on water resources. Sprawl-induced increases in air pollution and energy use (created, for instance, when people drive cars more miles) are to some extent subject to technological fixes (such as cleaner, more efficient cars running on fuel cells). But there seems to be no easy fix for development's impact on water quality and aquatic ecosystems.

Indeed, there is a direct relationship between land conversion and the degradation of water resources – a relationship based on how water runs off the land. A recent study on the effects of sprawl in coastal areas for the Pew Oceans Commission found that the science of watershed protection converges on a central point: When more than ten percent of the acreage of a watershed is covered in roads, parking lots, rooftops, and other impervious surfaces, the rivers and streams within the watershed become seriously degraded.²¹

With regard to water resources, the typical growth patterns in Ohio create the worst possible situation. Development has a high enough density to violate the ten-percent rule of impervious surfaces, but it has low enough density to sprawl over vast areas and maximize the amount of water resources impacted.

Statewide inventories of water resources by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency confirm that development-related impacts are a growing problem. The 2000 inventory says, “The most rapidly increasing threats are those related to urban and suburban development, watershed-level modifications (e.g., wetland losses), and hydromodification. Increasing threats from nonpoint sources could erode gains made through point source abatement and result in a slowing in the rate of restoration.”²²

A regional water quality plan drafted recently by the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency echoes these concerns:

Population growth and the associated demands for newly constructed housing will result in the continued disturbance of undeveloped lands precisely in those watershed areas most vulnerable to these changes. The locations of new homes will influence many businesses to relocate to be closer to their employees or their customers. Land uses will continue to change from a predominantly rural character to urbanizing uses, and this will affect how water runs off the land surface or into the ground. The increase in urban runoff and other sources of nonpoint source pollution can degrade water quality, habitat for aquatic life and aquatic life itself. If these trends continue and no countervailing water quality management strategies are implemented regional water quality is expected to decline, reversing the gains of the last twenty years.²³

Such trends raise serious questions about the future quality of Ohio's most important natural resource, Lake Erie. Since the original European settlement of the Ohio Lake Erie watershed, over 90 percent of the marshes have been filled or converted to some other uses. Over 78 percent of the entire Lake Erie watershed has been altered from its original state, leaving only 22 percent relatively intact as forest cover or wetlands. The state's *Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan* concludes:

The development of northern Ohio often occurred without fully understanding or anticipating the impact this development would have on the natural and social environment. Too often, our land use and development decisions have accelerated erosion and nonpoint pollution, urban sprawl, abandonment of central cities, congestion of streets and highways, the loss of natural habitat and farmland, and degraded the health and diversity of plant and animal communities.²⁴

Smart growth responses

Before 1980

Ohio was once a national leader in land use planning. In 1915, one of the first statutes for municipal planning in the U.S. was drafted by Cincinnati attorney and planning law pioneer, Alfred Bettman. Subsequently, Ohio law influenced national legislation for planning, municipal zoning, and regional planning. The landmark 1926 U.S. Supreme Court decision that upheld the constitutionality of zoning (*Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365) originated in Ohio.

Since that progressive beginning, however, Ohio has slipped well behind other states. The last attempt at a comprehensive reform of the state's land use planning and regulatory structure came in 1975 when the General Assembly created the Ohio Land Use Review Committee to look at planning and land use control at the state, regional, county, township, and municipal levels. According to Ohio land use law expert Stuart Meck:

The committee's report was released in 1977 and proposed a broad array of changes. They included greater responsibilities for county and regional planning commissions, procedures for large-scale development review, and enhanced authority for municipal and county planning commissions. The report also suggested that regional tax-base sharing, a mechanism implemented in the Twin Cities area by which local governments share in a portion of the growth of the commercial and industrial real property tax base, should be studied further. As these recommendations were aimed chiefly at local governments, the report did not indicate any dramatic changes in responsibilities for state agencies. While omnibus legislation was introduced to implement the report's recommendations, it was never enacted because of lack of strong political support for the changes suggested by the Committee.²⁵

Why planning reforms failed in Ohio in the 1970s

- Opposition of agricultural interests in Ohio. They were worried that the legislation would place limitations on farmers to have their cake and eat it, too—to get tax breaks for preferential agricultural use valuation (the valuation of property at its farm, rather its speculative use) and still be able to sell it for development whenever they wanted to with no or minimal penalty.
- Opposition of some local government associations. They were against the bill because it limited local government discretion, curtailed arbitrariness, seemed to require a "reason" for governmental actions, required consistency, and called for expenditure of funds for planning prior to regulation.
- A four-track system in Ohio with vigorously competing interests—counties, townships, statutory plan municipalities, home-rule municipalities—with no incentive to work together for a single system or across local government boundaries to minimize adverse impacts of development and spread around its benefits.
- A highly dispersed urban state with each urban area seeing issues in a different way—the due process you get in Cleveland is different from the due process you get in Cincinnati.
- Lack of support by a small, narrowly-focused environmental movement, now mostly concerned with landfills and groundwater rather than broader issues of land management which animate environmentalists elsewhere.
- No growth management movement or impetus to start one—no perceived mismatch between rapid development and lack of supporting infrastructure. Planning legislation was viewed as anti-economic development. Ohio was trying to hold onto what growth it had rather than trying to slow it down.
- A state government that had no activist tradition either at the executive or legislative levels in the areas of housing, infrastructure, or the environment, much less in the provision of local government assistance.
- Finally, the impact of what I call the "garage-sale school" of land use regulation—the still-prevalent

philosophy here in Ohio that local government planning operations can be run sloppily (like a garage sale), with little attention to detail, because there were no terrible (meaning monetary) consequences for screwing up or endlessly jacking around developers and home builders with procedural delays.

—Stuart Meck,
from an article in the *EcoCity Cleveland Journal*²⁶

The 1990s

In the 1990s there was a new wave of interest in growth management issues in Ohio. A primary focus became farmland preservation, as suburban sprawl around the state's metro areas visibly ate into prime farmland and threatened to undermine the agricultural economy.

In response, Governor George Voinovich created, by executive order, the Ohio Farmland Preservation Task Force in 1996. After conducting hearings around the state, which were well attended by citizens from both rural and urban areas, the task force made its report in 1997. It concluded:

Preservation of a healthy agricultural economy and urban revitalization are two sides of the same coin. Strategic planning for the one must incorporate the dynamics of the other. Even though there is farmland loss in growing rural counties, it is the loss of farmland on the edges of municipalities that threaten Ohio's agricultural and economic vitality as well as the fabric of Ohio's small towns and rural communities...

Farmland loss cannot be reduced without strong state support for redevelopment and maintenance of central cities and older suburbs, and for compact rural development. State government affects the conversion of agricultural land to other uses through land acquisition, development projects and financial assistance for public and private development, but no state plan currently exists to ensure uniformly that state actions do not irretrievably convert agricultural land to other uses when alternatives are available. In fact, ample evidence exists that many state program implementation policies undermine local objectives of farmland preservation.²⁷

Among the task force recommendations was a proposal to encourage local governments to prepare comprehensive land use plans. Such plans would, in turn, encourage the preservation of farmland, the efficient use of public infrastructure investments, the use of agriculturally supportive zoning, and the managed expansion of urban and suburban areas, including the identification of urban service areas. The task force recommended that the state provide matching grants and technical assistance for the preparation of local comprehensive land use plans. A bill that incorporated numerous task force recommendations (including a proposal for voluntary countywide comprehensive plans), H.B. 645, was introduced in the Ohio House in December 1997, but it was not enacted (although it had bipartisan sponsorship, it failed for some of the same reasons that legislation in the '70s failed). On the other hand, a companion proposal to authorize the purchase of agricultural conservation easements was enacted. In addition, the state created an Office of Farmland Preservation in the Department of Agriculture, which is charged with developing a strategy to preserve farmland.

While the Farmland Preservation Task Force did not result in major changes, it raised the profile of growth management issues and gave them added credibility. At the same time, a number of other actors were coming to the stage to talk about growth and development issues. They came from different perspectives — rural preservation, urban redevelopment, environmental protection, economic development, transportation reform, social justice. And they came from different fields — community activism, academia, business, city government, planning, faith-based organizations. But together they formed a loose, ad hoc movement.

Here are a few of the significant actors who emerged in the latter half of the 1990s:

- Ohio State University Extension — Extension staff members organized "Managing Change" coalitions around the state to educate citizens about growth management options. They also organized two

statewide conferences about land use and development issues—"Growth & the Future" in 1997 and "Better Ways to Develop Ohio" in 1999. The conferences were well attended and served an education role.

- First Suburbs — One of the most significant organizational developments of the late 1990s was the formation of the First Suburbs Consortium of Northeast Ohio. The FSC was created by elected officials of inner-ring suburbs in response to the recognition that government policies and practices promote the development of new communities at the outer edges of metropolitan regions over the redevelopment and maintenance of mature suburbs. The FSC now is a council of governments with 14 member cities working to revitalize mature, developed communities and raise public and political awareness of the problems and inequities associated with urban sprawl and disinvestment. The FSC also has reached out to older suburbs in Columbus, Cincinnati, and other metro areas in Ohio, so now there is a statewide network of first suburbs. The group has received national attention as a model for addressing the special needs of older suburbs, and it can provide a political base for future statewide organizing.
- EcoCity Cleveland — EcoCity Cleveland focuses primarily on Northeast Ohio, but it has networked statewide on smart growth issues and has represented Ohio in national smart growth networks, such as the Growth Management Leadership Alliance (GMLA). In 1998, EcoCity hosted a national meeting of smart growth advocates and used the occasion to convene a statewide gathering in support of the "Ohio Smart Growth Agenda."²⁸ The agenda was prepared by EcoCity and researchers at the American Planning Association, and it provides a solid policy foundation for smart growth initiatives in Ohio. Among those present to endorse the agenda were First Suburbs elected officials from throughout the state, City of Cleveland officials, Cleveland Bishop Anthony Pilla, state representatives, and members of the Ohio Farmland Preservation Task Force.
- Church in the City — In 1993, Cleveland Bishop Anthony Pilla issued a white paper called "The Church in the City," which argued that urban sprawl was a moral and social justice issue because outmigration was creating two regions—rich and poor, black and white. The Cleveland Catholic Diocese developed a series of Church in the City programs aimed at raising consciousness about our divided society and the underlying dynamics of regional development. This culminated in a major symposium in 1998. The moral weight of the church added substantial credibility to the smart growth discussion.
- Faith-based organizing — In addition to the Church in the City initiative, a number of other faith-based organizing efforts around the state have made sprawl and outmigration a focus of organizing efforts. These include the AMOS Project in Cincinnati, BREAD in Columbus, NOAH in the Cleveland/Lorain area, and Action of Youngstown.
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) — Partly as a result of federal transportation reforms in the late 1990s, some of the state's MPOs began to re-examine their transportation plans and question highway projects that would induce greater urban sprawl. Not a lot has changed on the ground (in part because MPOs have no control over land use), but the increased debate has helped underscore the need for land use management statewide.
- Urban University Program (UUP) — Members of Ohio's network of urban universities have contributed important research on development patterns around the state's metropolitan areas. Annual UUP statewide forums have served as networking opportunities for smart growth advocates and have gotten state officials to speak on the record about the subject.
- Brownfields advocates — Groups across the state made brownfield redevelopment an important issue in the '90s. They worked to streamline regulations and obtain more state funding for remediation—and in the process helped to bring greater state attention to urban redevelopment needs. Governor Bob Taft appointed an Urban Redevelopment Task Force, which resulted in a new urban redevelopment office in the Department of Development and cleanup funds in the Clean Ohio bond issue.
- Open space advocates — Supplementing farmland preservation efforts, a diverse collection of open space and greenway advocates grew stronger during this time. Many communities embarked on the development of recreational trails that crossed municipal and county lines and began to link regions together in new ways. In some parts of the state, land trusts became significant players in the

preservation of open space. And rural communities began to contemplate "conservation development" alternatives to large-lot zoning for new subdivisions.

- The media — At some point in the '90s, the Ohio media discovered sprawl. *The Plain Dealer*, for example, went from printing the term "urban sprawl" in quotes, as if the editors questioned its existence, to printing serious stories. In 1996, the *Columbus Dispatch* published an outstanding, five-day series, "The Price of Progress," on growth pressures in the Columbus region. Other papers also did major series. And in Northeast Ohio, the public radio and television stations teamed up on a special series on sprawl. The prominent local coverage, combined with many stories in national publications, helped to make sprawl a household word.
- Regional conveners — Another kind of organization also emerged during this time—groups with a regional focus who brought citizens and elected officials together to discuss the region's future. These included the Northeast Ohio Regional Alliance and Citizens for Civic Renewal (Cincinnati). The Cincinnati region's business community also got involved by creating the Metropolitan Growth Alliance, which sponsored a major study of the region's place in the global economy.²⁹
- Local grassroots groups — On a local basis, countless small groups rose and fell. Most were NIMBY groups, organized to fight a specific development or road project. Although few lasted long, the agitation of thousands of people fighting for their communities kept the heat on elected officials and made growth and development issues a bigger part of local Ohio politics. (One group with more staying power is the Smart Growth Coalition of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.)

The above list covers only a few of the actors who had some role in smart growth discussions. A more complete list of constituencies who have stake in smart growth appears on page 26.

Since 2000

In some respects, smart growth activities have ebbed in the past couple of years. But while there may not be the same volume of conferences and new organizations, there have been a number of significant initiatives, including:

- The \$400 million Clean Ohio Bond issue passed in November 2000 with 57 percent of the vote, signaling that Ohioans are prepared to spend money to preserve open space, protect clean water, and revitalize cities. (On the other hand, one could argue that Clean Ohio is a diversion, since the modest amount of money provided will not alter development patterns in the state, and the campaign to pass and implement Clean Ohio consumed resources that might have been used to promote more systemic changes.)
- First Suburbs organizations continued to develop. The state network is working with the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission to develop a briefing kit for state legislators.
- Big city mayors (now all Democrats who seem to get along with each other) are meeting to develop an urban agenda for Ohio.
- The informational infrastructure continued to deepen, as "Orfield" studies of fiscal and social disparities (i.e., studies by Myron Orfield's Metropolitan Area Research Corporation) were completed for the Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Youngstown regions. The state's urban universities have continued to study the impact of present growth trends.
- A few state legislators continue to maintain interest in smart growth issues. For example, in February 2002, State Rep. Ed Jerse convened a legislative informational hearing on the implications of the impending build-out of Cuyahoga County.³⁰
- The City of Columbus is promoting traditional neighborhood design as an alternative to sprawl.
- Columbus-area advocates have organized 1000 Friends of Central Ohio to promote smart growth.
- The Cincinnati region continues to debate its land use future. The Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission is leading a broad-based comprehensive planning process, Community COMPASS.
- A Metro Smart Growth Partnership has developed in the Toledo area.
- Reflecting concerns that development trends are degrading the Lake Erie watershed, the Ohio Lake

Erie Commission has organized a Balanced Growth Blue Ribbon Panel to recommend ways that development can occur in greater harmony with natural systems. This is one of the state's first, tentative steps toward figuring out how to promote smart growth.

- Recognizing that the housing market is shifting, the Home Builders Association of Northeast Ohio began a Smart Growth Education Foundation to help educate local governments about achieving more compact forms of development. Recently, the group announced an awards competition for developments that exemplify the principles of smart growth.
- Environmental and conservation groups continued to develop statewide networks for collaboration. The League of Conservation Voters convened the Ohio Conservation and Environmental Forum, and the LCV Education Fund conducted a database "list enhancement" project to improve groups' capacity to contact member/voters. In addition, the Ohio chapter of the Sierra Club convened a series of meetings for smart growth advocates to discuss strategy.

Accomplishments

All this activity around the state has accomplished the following:

- Public education — More citizens and public officials are aware of the problems caused by conventional development patterns.
- Understanding of regional connections — More people are aware that development in one part of a metro area often comes at the expense of another part of the region.
- Core of activists — There are knowledgeable smart growth activists around the state who can form the core of larger efforts in the future.
- Broader constituencies — Sprawl has become not just an issue for a few tree huggers. Many more constituencies understand that metropolitan growth problems underlie their issues as well.
- Media sensitivity — Media outlets around the state understand that growth issues are important stories (although, except for the occasional series, they still tend to cover them in an ad hoc, fragmented way).
- Policy development — The first cut at policy recommendations has been done.
- Message development — The first cut at message development has been done.

Failures

The accomplishments listed above are significant in a state like Ohio, but they should not be sugarcoated. All this interest and activity revolving around the idea of smart growth has not moved Ohio very far toward the real goal—changing the location and form of development. Instead, the juggernaut of sprawl development continues unabated. Highways keep getting widened. New subdivisions march across the cornfields. Wetlands continue to be filled. Older communities continue to decline.

In the late '90s there was a sense of a smart growth movement coming together. But the movement did not jell, and there were no major changes on the Ohio political landscape. Why? Of course, the forces of sprawl are huge, and Ohio is a difficult arena within which to promote any comprehensive change. But the smart growth efforts themselves have had major weaknesses, including a lack of leadership, strategy, and resources:

- Leadership — In other states where smart growth has made meaningful advances, there has been strong leadership from top political leaders. In Ohio, we have a governor who is focused on other issues, and we have a General Assembly that is controlled increasingly by interests who are hostile to planning and who have a narrow view of property rights. Nonprofit organizations also have not provided strong leadership, although they have played important roles at local and regional levels. We don't have a strong "1000 Friends-type" group with a statewide reach. In the late '90s, several statewide networks were organized—1000 Friends of Ohio, Ohioans for Smart Growth—but they were short-lived. None were able to attract the people and resources needed to become significant organizations.
- Strategy — We have had no comprehensive strategy—no strategy that defines what winning means and

lays out a step-by-step process to victory. Instead, we have had events like conferences, which (although valuable as educational experiences) were seen as ends in themselves, not means to a larger end.

- Resources — No one has been able to raise the funds (or even attempted to do so) to develop the strategy and carry out the organizing needed to pull off a statewide campaign. To win anything substantial on smart growth, the effort *and* the funding will have to be serious.

Obviously, all these elements are interrelated. A sound strategy won't work without effective leadership. Funding won't be available without a strategy and credible leaders. An organization won't make the leap of faith to develop a strategy unless there is a reasonable hope that funding will be available. And so on.

Suggestions for an organizational strategy

What would put smart growth over the top in Ohio? Here are some ideas for discussion. They focus on the steps of a strategy—developing the goals, analyzing the opposition, attracting the right leadership, networking allies, and conducting a campaign to win.

Policy goals

What would change if "smart growth" were adopted in Ohio? Well, winning would mean that we would see more of the features of smart growth described on pages 5-7. Thus, in Ohio it would become easier to redevelop existing cities and towns, achieve a mix of land uses, create a diversity of housing choices, build walkable neighborhoods, preserve open space, provide a variety of transportation options, and engage citizens in the planning process. It would become harder to do the opposite.

Achieving smart growth, then, requires shifting the balance of development within metropolitan regions (promoting more development in existing communities and less in the countryside). Since individual municipalities have little influence over regional development patterns, policy changes will be needed at the state and federal levels. The state is especially important because it sets the "rules of the game" for planning and local land use control. The state also exerts influence over the location of development through transportation spending and economic development incentives.

In 1998, EcoCity Cleveland worked with researchers at the American Planning Association to recommend what the state should do to promote smarter development. This "Ohio Smart Growth Agenda" found: 1) state investments, policies, and programs greatly influence where development is occurring in the state; 2) state departments have no overall vision regarding growth and development in Ohio and tend to pursue their missions narrowly; and 3) other states provide promising models for how state government can do a better job managing growth. For example, Maryland's Smart Growth program, which aims to direct state investment to existing urban areas rather than subsidizing more sprawl, would have a positive impact in Ohio, and it could be adapted to Ohio's political and historical situation.³¹

To adopt such a smart growth strategy, Ohio needs:

- Coordination and planning: The creation of a high-level organization in state government to coordinate among state departments and promote sound planning at all levels. A first task would be an inventory of all state policies and programs that influence development.
- Land use goals: The drafting of a cross-cutting development, redevelopment, and resource conservation goals document for the state.
- Targeted investments: Development of an incentive-based state investment program that targets state growth-related expenditures (such as for infrastructure or economic development) to locally designated compact growth areas.

These changes would mean that, for the first time, Ohio would know how it wants to develop and would have investments aligned with its goals. This would be a major step forward. To accomplish this, a mix of executive orders from the governor and legislation from the General Assembly would be required.

This agenda would meet current political requirements in Columbus:

- It could be essentially revenue neutral so as to fit within state budget constraints. Aside from a small amount of planning funds, the program would focus on the reallocation of existing state spending to priority areas. In the long run, it could save taxpayers' money by focusing state investments where they will have the greatest return.
- It would not be a new regulatory program. Instead it would use the power of state investment to

- encourage private development in desirable locations.
- It would not interfere with home rule. Local governments would still make land use decisions. But they would have incentives to coordinate at the regional level.
- It would not interfere with property rights. It would just shift public subsidies that make development more likely to occur in one location over another.

Given the differences between metro areas in the state, this kind of smart growth program should allow for regional flexibility. The state's role could be to facilitate regional problem solving. It could require each region to produce a plan to assure the long-term economic well-being of all jurisdictions within the region. Local communities would have to figure out how to do this. Then the state would support the plan with its investments.

As Ken Montlack, chair of the Northeast Ohio First Suburbs Consortium, says, "Winning would mean that state decisions are made with the sustainability of the urban core and open space in mind."

In addition to focusing on priorities for state investment, there might be a number of other reforms proposed. A recent advocacy position paper of First Suburbs calls for these additional policy changes:

- A tax credit for the rehabilitation of homes more than 40 years old.
- Tightening the criteria for Issue 2 infrastructure funding to require redevelopment of existing infrastructure.
- Creating a statewide Housing Revitalization Linked Deposit Program modeled on the Cuyahoga County program that provides low-interest loans for home repair in First Suburbs.
- Restoring municipal revenue lost from SB 108, which cut estate taxes.
- Maintaining local government funds from the state.
- Changing the state's constitutional requirement that gas taxes go only for highways.
- Removing loopholes in the Enterprise Zone program to restrict the zones to truly distressed urban areas.

A more detailed policy agenda for supporting First Suburbs and other older communities, "Valuing America's First Suburbs," has been proposed by the Brookings Institution's Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy.³²

Other specific policy changes could be evaluated for inclusion in a smart growth agenda, such as reform of ODOT funding policies (ODOT is an important target for reform because the transportation dollars it controls are often the biggest flow of capital coming into communities), updates of state enabling legislation for planning and land use regulation, annexation policies, and tax policies that influence the location of development. The state also could do more to promote better urban design by encouraging communities to adopt ordinances that allow "traditional neighborhood design," including mixed uses and walkable street environments (Wisconsin has required this). And the state could provide more support for regional planning, including data and information.

When thinking about all these policy options (and this is just a beginning list), it is important to realize that no single policy change will solve Ohio's complex land use and development problems. It will require a suite of policies and programs acting over many years. The task for smart growth advocates will be to figure out which options will be most effective and politically achievable.

The opposition to smart growth

The opposition to smart growth in Ohio is less of a movement than a collection of entrenched interests that want to maintain the status quo. To identify those interests, one just has to ask who might feel threatened if the location and form of development shifted in Ohio—such as real estate developers, home builders, farmers, highway contractors, and newly growing suburbs. These are powerful lobbies, but it is

important to recognize that they are not monolithic. Each has members who are open to change. Here is an outreach strategy for each.

- Developers: There are growing number of enlightened developers (such as members of the Urban Land Institute) who believe that suburbanization has run its course and the market has shifted to urban infill. These developers can be persuaded to be on the side of smart growth; if we can identify the right ones, they may even help lead the movement. Many developers, however, will never stop speculating on land at the edges of metro areas, hoping for sprawl to spread to the next interchange down the highway so they can build a new shopping mall. They need continued public subsidies to make their developments work. To keep those subsidies flowing, they are often big campaign contributors. We may not be able to change their practices or their political influence. On the positive side, there are not many of them and they have little grassroots support.
- Home builders: As with developers, there are two types. On one hand, there are enlightened builders who see the market shifting and would like to do more work in the city if land were available. These can be our partners (such as leaders of the Northeast Ohio Home Builders, who are working with the City of Cleveland to remove barriers to home construction in the city). On the other hand, there are home builders who see smart growth as an attack on property rights—limiting their ability to build anything anywhere—and can't be persuaded otherwise. The state home builders association is often a hard-line spokesperson for this view. A smart growth campaign could find ways to respond to their concerns by emphasizing that smart growth is not about less work for home builders, only about helping them build in different locations.
- Farmers: The real estate dynamics of Ohio make it hard to change the mind of the Farm Bureau. Ohio has many urbanized areas distributed around the state, and they are all sprawling out into the surrounding farmland. So practically every acre of Ohio is within the influence zone of some metro area—meaning that most farmers can have some expectation of selling land at development prices. And, given the state of family farming, this is a desirable retirement plan. Maybe the best we can hope for on this one is to emphasize that smart growth wouldn't prevent farmers from getting windfall profits (we're not talking about urban growth boundaries like Oregon); it would encourage redevelopment and thereby reduce the pressure to develop on farmland. The other strategy would be to work closely with the smaller farm organizations that are stronger advocates for family farming, organic farming, and the preservation of farmland. Given the importance of farming in the state's economy and the importance of prime farmland for world food production, there are powerful motivations to preserve Ohio's agricultural base.
- Highway lobby: There is a powerful industry (indeed, a whole culture) that grew up with the Interstate highway system and lives off the steady flow of ODOT contracts. This includes contractors, cement and asphalt companies, construction unions, and engineering firms. The Ohio Contractors Association and the Ohio Construction Information Association are aggressive opponents of smart growth, environmental regulation, transit, and regional planning—anything that might question continual expansion of automobile-centric sprawl development. To counter the smart growth ideas, the OCIA has formed an Ohio Environment-Growth Alliance "to educate the public and officials regarding the truth about 'urban sprawl' and land use issues." Perhaps the best way to blunt the impact of this lobby is to make an effective case that smart growth would not mean the end of highway construction work. It would just mean more work repairing and rebuilding infrastructure in existing urban areas instead of new construction in the country.
- Newly growing suburbs and townships: Smart growth will mean making different choices about where to support development, so it might mean that state transportation funds will go to rebuild a bridge in the city instead of to build a highway interchange that will facilitate a new industrial park for a growing suburb or township. These will be difficult choices. They will be easier to make if there is greater awareness of the importance of the urban core to the health of the entire region. They will also be easier to make if smart growth advocates can organize allies in rural areas who want their communities to remain rural.

In addition to these interests, there are at least four other obstacles to note:

- Property rights advocates: One troublesome development on the Ohio political scene has been the emergence of the Buckeye Institute, a well-funded mouthpiece for property rights and free market ideology.³³ Part of a national network of free market think tanks, the institute has issued studies that assert sprawl is not a problem in Ohio and that all development is simply the work of the free market. The institute's studies have just enough academic gloss to sound credible, and they are often provocative enough to get extensive media coverage (indeed, the media see them as "the other side" of the sprawl debate). It is extremely difficult to debate such ideologues on the facts, but smart growth advocates need to be much more aggressive about getting out the truth to the media (including the funding and motivations behind organizations like the Buckeye Institute). One argument to make: smart growth policies will support the property rights and property *values* of most people (such as the typical homeowner in existing cities and towns).
- The Ohio General Assembly: Members of the legislature are influenced heavily by the interests described above, which makes many members hostile to the ideas of smart growth. But there are also institutional problems that prevent the legislature from dealing with land use issues (or any other big issue) in a thoughtful manner. One problem is term limits, which creates a rapid turnover of the General Assembly and produces legislators more inclined to push a narrow ideology than grapple with complex, long-term issues. Another problem is the political fragmentation of Ohio. Representatives from different regions often perceive growth and development issues in different ways. Thus, the challenge for smart growth advocates is to have the capacity to develop a statewide identity for the issue and continually educate members of the legislature.
- The state budget crisis: The recent budget crisis, along with the school finance case, has pushed most new initiatives off the table. Until conditions improve, smart growth advocates will have to work extra hard to explain why smart growth policies should be a state priority and how they can be accomplished without new spending.
- Lack of a "crisis": Unfortunately, our political system seldom changes direction until there is a crisis. And, despite all the problems created by haphazard sprawl development, it's difficult for many people to perceive a crisis. Communities change gradually; the worst impacts may not be visible for many years. Smart growth advocates need to do a better job dramatizing the impacts. Without distorting the situation, they need to make the case that there is indeed a crisis. And they need to make the case with clear language that cuts through the complexity of land use and development issues.

The right leadership

To overcome all the obstacles described above, a statewide smart growth initiative will require excellent leadership. The right leadership is needed to serve two roles—establishing credibility and managing the work.

To achieve credibility, it will be important for leaders to come from diverse constituencies, not just from the "usual suspects" like environmental groups or academia. Business needs to be involved. Elected officials need to be involved. And it will be critical to have strong involvement from the Cincinnati area, so the effort cannot be marginalized as just a Northeast Ohio effort. The mayors of the Ohio First Suburbs can provide a good foundation of leadership.

To manage a statewide effort, it will be important to have a core group of leaders who can act decisively. One limitation of previous efforts in Ohio was that they were coalitions that took months to write a mission statement. A possible organizational structure might have a broad advisory committee with representatives from major constituencies and a much smaller steering committee of people dedicated to getting the job done. The steering committee would oversee a project (e.g., the Ohio Smart Growth Project) run through an existing nonprofit organization.

Allies to network

Henry Richmond, one of the founders of 1000 Friends of Oregon, is fond of saying that urban sprawl has a paradoxical silver lining. It negatively impacts so many people, so many constituencies, that a winning coalition is out there waiting to be organized.

In Ohio, the smart growth coalition could include:

- Big cities - Now that the major cities have mayors who want to work together on an urban agenda, they can be a strong voice for new state policies.
- Second-tier cities - The smaller cities and older county seats of Ohio also suffer from outmigration and disinvestment.
- First suburbs - Older, fully-developed suburbs have more in common with the central cities than with new suburbs.
- Business - Business leaders are realizing that vibrant urban neighborhoods and access to nature help attract educated workers.
- Environmental and conservation groups - From the Sierra Club to the Nature Conservancy to Ducks Unlimited, these groups understand the environmental and habitat consequences of present development patterns.
- Community development organizations - CDCs are beginning to understand how patterns of outmigration at the regional level drain people and resources from their neighborhoods.
- Affordable housing groups - Exclusionary zoning of most new suburbs prohibits affordable housing.
- Faith-based groups - Many of these organizations have already begun working on regional development from a social justice perspective.
- Labor unions - Labor organizations are realizing that sprawl does not meet the needs of many working families.
- Historic preservationists - Sprawl hurts historic neighborhoods and landscapes.
- Civil rights advocates - Sprawl is one of the major civil rights issues because it isolates minorities from opportunities in the larger society.
- Transit and bicycle advocates - Low-density sprawl development makes it hard to offer transportation choices.
- Planners/architects - The major associations of planners and architects are supporting smart growth as a way to make better communities.
- Public health professionals - Automobile-oriented communities are now being seen as a health risk because they do not promote basic forms of exercise, like walking.
- Good government groups - Groups, such as the League of Women Voters, have endorsed smart growth as more sustainable way to develop communities.
- Urban anchors - Institutions with fixed investments in the city—churches, schools, hospitals, arts organizations, banks, utilities.
- NIMBYs - The many ad hoc groups fighting Wal-Marts, highway interchanges and road widenings in their communities.
- Enlightened developers - Developers who are tired of fighting anti-development NIMBYs and who would like to see a consensus on where development is appropriate.
- Rural advocates - Country residents who want their communities to remain rural.
- Committed farmers -- Farmers who want to keep farming without the threat of encroaching subdivisions.
- Everyone who can't drive - Children, senior citizens, and people who can't afford a car.

These are just a few of the constituencies who could be part of a smart growth coalition. The point is that a large number of constituencies have an interest in supporting smart growth—potentially a majority of the state. It will require a large organizing effort to get them all focused on a specific policy goal. But it will be possible.

Features of a winning campaign

The detailed design of a campaign should involve experienced people who have run statewide campaigns or who know the current politics of the General Assembly. But here are some suggestions for essential features:

- Compelling case for change — Demonstrate clearly how current development trends are hurting most people and how the future of Ohio is at stake. Sprawl has to be understood as an underlying cause of many other problems. The case document should be polished, professional, and graphically compelling.
- Positive agenda for a better future — We need a message that diverse groups will rally around. The message has to be clear and simple. It has to cut through the complexities of land use issues and talk about tangible benefits.
- Message based on basic values — The message should relate to people's basic values. Polling by the Biodiversity Project has shown such values to include choice, freedom, and responsibility to future generations.³⁴ The message also should articulate how smart growth supports the property rights and property values of most landowners.
- Building on Ohioans' concerns — A statewide poll by the Ohio League of Conservation Voters in 2000 showed that 57 percent of likely voters say that "issues involving clean water, clean air and open space" are very important and a primary factor in deciding how to vote.
- Business involvement — Build on the business community's new concerns about quality of life and the new economy.
- Policy effectiveness — Make sure that the policies advocated will actually work on the ground. Researchers at the urban universities and nonprofit centers like Policy Matters and the New Ohio Institute could help with the analysis.
- Recognition of political realities — The agenda should be revenue neutral, incentive-based, and not create unfunded mandates for local governments.
- Regional flexibility — Given the diversity of Ohio's metropolitan areas, the agenda should focus on the state support of regional solutions. This not only makes political sense, but it is essential because the problems to be addressed play out at the regional scale.
- Cincinnati focus - Politically, the Cincinnati area is key and must play a leading role.
- Bipartisanship — Smart growth should be positioned as a bipartisan (even nonpartisan) issue. It should transcend short-term politics.
- Timing — Assuming Governor Bob Taft will win a second term this November, he may be persuaded to exert more leadership on land use issues (an urban redevelopment and conservation legacy?). A smart growth campaign could be developed in 2003, emerge in 2004, and seek to win in 2005.
- Federal hooks — Additional leverage can come from creative use of federal regulations for transportation, air, and water. Given sprawl's water quality impacts, more work can be done to link water quality and land use under the Clean Water Act. Ohio EPA's development of TMDLs (total maximum daily load allocations) for watersheds in the state can provide an opening.
- Media — The effort should have a strong media and communications strategy. It also should create its own electronic media.
- Technology — The Internet provides tools that make it easier to network a large state. (Past efforts have broken down in part because of "I-71 fatigue," participants' tiring of the drive to Columbus for meetings.) In addition, the mailing list enhancement project of the League of Conservation Voters Education Fund now makes it possible to contact several hundred thousand conservation-minded voters.
- Ability to count votes — Know what it will take to win and target resources accordingly to obtain the winning margin.
- Seriousness — Making significant headway on smart growth in Ohio will be hard work. The effort should not be attempted unless it's serious and has sufficient resources to get the job done.
- Professional staff — A serious effort will likely take three to four staff people working for at least three

years.

Endnotes

- 1 See www.smartgrowth.org.
- 2 See www.smartgrowthamerica.com.
- 3 See www.planning.org.
- 4 See www.planning.org/policyguides/smartgrowth.htm
- 5 See www.epa.state.oh.us/oleo/lepr/lepr.htm
- 6 See www.hbacleveland.com/growth.html
- 7 *Planning for Smart Growth: 2002 State of the States*, American Planning Association, 2002.
- 8 "Physiographic Regions of Ohio," map by C. Scott Brockman, Ohio Division of Geological Survey.
- 9 *Battle Cry of Freedom* by James M. McPherson, Ballantine Books Edition, 1989, p. 31.
- 10 *Access Ohio: Ohio Multi-Modal State Transportation Plan to the Year 2020*, Ohio Department of Transportation, 1993.
- 11 "State of the Transportation System 2002," Ohio Department of Transportation (see www.dot.state.oh.us/sos00/default.htm).
- 12 "Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, Centers for Disease Control, www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/sgr.htm.
- 13 U.S. Census data.
- 14 Rusk, David, "Cleveland: 'Comeback City; or Treading Water?'" excerpted in the Summer 2002 issue of the *EcoCity Cleveland Journal*.
- 15 Meck, Stuart and Jason Wittenberg, "Ohio Smart Growth Agenda," American Planning Association and EcoCity Cleveland, 1998 (see www.ecocitycleveland.org/smartgrowth/sgagenda/agenda.html).
- 16 Rusk, *ibid*.
- 17 from a presentation by Tom Bier, director of the Housing Policy Research Center, Levin College of Urban Affairs, Cleveland State University, before a legislator informational hearing on February 22, 2002, organized by State Rep. Edward Jerse. Reprinted in the Summer 2002 issue of the *EcoCity Cleveland Journal*.
- 18 Rusk, *ibid*.
- 19 Orfield, Myron and Thomas Luce, "Ohio's Mahoning Valley Regional Metropatterns: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability," Metropolitan Area Research Corporation, 2001 (see www.metroresearch.org).
- 20 Orfield, Myron and Thomas Luce, "Cincinnati Metropatterns: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability," Metropolitan Area Research Corporation, 2001 (see www.metroresearch.org).
- 21 Beach, Dana, "Coastal Sprawl: The Effects of Urban Design on Aquatic Ecosystems in the United States," Pew Oceans Commission, 2002.
- 22 "Year 2000 Ohio Water Resource Inventory," Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (see www.epa.state.oh.us/dsw/document_index/305b.html).
- 23 "Clean Water 2000," Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (see www.noaca.org or see summary at www.ecocitycleveland.org/smartgrowth/watershed/regional_clean_water_plan/water_pressure.html).
- 24 "Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan," Ohio Lake Erie Commission, 2000, p. 6.
- 25 Meck, *ibid*.
- 26 Meck, Stuart, "Garage-Sale Planning in Ohio," *EcoCity Cleveland Journal*, 1993 (see www.ecocitycleveland.org/smartgrowth/cornfields/garage_sale.html).
- 27 "Ohio Farmland Preservation Task Force: Findings and Recommendations," June 1997 (www.state.oh.us/agr/FPTFcover.HTML).
- 28 Available at www.ecocitycleveland.org/smartgrowth/sagenda/agenda.html.
- 29 "Greater Cincinnati Metro Region Resourcebook: Preparing for the New Millenium" by Michael Gallis & Associates, 1999 (www.gccc.com/quick_links/pubs/gallis/gallis.asp).
- 30 For an account of the hearing, see the *EcoCity Cleveland Journal*, Summer 2002.
- 31 Meck, *ibid*.
- 32 Puentes, Robert, and Myron Orfield, "Valuing America's First Suburbs: A Policy Agenda for Older Suburbs in the Midwest," The Brookings Institution, 2002 (see www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/es/urban/publications.htm).
- 33 See www.buckeyeinstitute.org.

34 The Biodiversity Project has done extensive polling and focus group work on American's attitudes toward land use and development issues. The findings have been published in useful guides for talking to citizens and the media. See www.biodiversityproject.org/messagekit.htm.

Attendees at the September 19, 2002 Funders' Network meeting in Cleveland

John Aeschbury, B.R.E.A.D. Organization
Paul Alsenas, Cuyahoga County Planning Commission
Virginia Barney, City of Upper Arlington
David Beach, EcoCity Cleveland
Noreen Beatley, The Enterprise Foundation
Dale Bertsch, Burns, Bertsch & Harris
Tom Bier, Cleveland State University
Lavea Brachman, Delta Institute
Madeline Cain, City of Lakewood
Pat Carey, Northeast Ohio Regional Alliance
Don Chen, Smart Growth America
Lee Chilcote, Chilcote Foundation
Paul Christensen, Shorebank Enterprise Group
Jill Clark, American Farmland Trust
Ruth Clevenger, Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland
Marc Conte, Ohio Sierra Club
Jennifer Cowley, Ohio State University
Maggie Cretella, Columbus Foundation
Kathleen Crowther, Cleveland Restoration Society
Stephen Dana, Ohio League of Women Voters
Vicki Deisner, Ohio Environmental Council
Ruth Eppig, Sears-Swetland Foundation
George Espy, Ohio Grantmakers Forum
Eric Fingerhut, State Senator
Pam George, The Cleveland Foundation
Marty Gefand, Congressman Dennis Kucinich's office
Kimberly Gibson, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
Carol Gibson, Cleveland League of Women Voters
Dave Goss, Greater Cleveland Growth Association
Hugh Grefe, Toledo Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
Dennis Guritza, The Second Growth Institute
Amy Hanauer, Policy Matters Ohio
David Harris, John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Greg Harris, Citizens for Civic Renewal
Kathryn Hexter, Cleveland State University
Deborah Hoover, GAR Foundation
Elizabeth Humphrey, Growth Management Leadership Alliance
Stephanie Jennings, Fannie Mae Foundation

Jon Jensen, George Gund Foundation
Ed Jerse, State Representative
Ianna Kachoris, Fannie Mae Foundation
Howard Katz, Cuyahoga County Treasurer's office
Denise King, The Nature Conservancy
William Klein, American Planning Association
Todd Kleismit, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
Larry Libby, Ohio State University
Amy Liu, Brookings Institution
Dan Lorek, City of Bexley
Lyn Luttner, U.S. EPA
John Magill, Ohio Department of Development
Robert Layton, Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency
Sharon McGraw, Cleveland League of Women Voters
Priscilla Mead, State Senator
Stuart Meck, American Planning Association
Mark McDermott, The Enterprise Foundation
Hal Miksch, First Avenues
Ken Montlack, City of Cleveland Heights
Kimberly Ogren, Funders' Network
Charles Owen, Cleveland Restoration Society
Paul Oyaski, City of Euclid
India Pierce Lee, Cleveland Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
Daniel J. Prater, Porter Wright Morris & Arthur
Judy Rawson, City of Shaker Heights
Mikelann Rensel, Cleveland Neighborhood Development Coalition
Cathie Shick, The AMOS Project
Richard Sensenbrenner, Columbus City Council
Julia Seward, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
Jennifer Smyser, Northeast Ohio Center for Farmland Preservation
Ben Starrett, Funders' Network
Dawn Stockmo, Fannie Mae Foundation
Jay Talbot, The Cleveland Foundation
Lou Tisler, First Suburbs Development Council