

State and Provincial Land Use and Smart Growth Trends in the Great Lakes Region



Land Use, Environment and Quality of Life¹

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In Great Lakes states between 1982 and 1997, the amount of developed, nonfederal land increased by 27 percent and more than 11 million acres of farmland was converted to other uses – an area greater than lakes Erie and Ontario combined. The Great Lakes Canadian provinces followed a similar trend between 1981 and 1996 with a 65 percent increase of urban land and a loss of 2.3 million acres of farmland from 1981 to 1991.²

Land use activities are inherently linked to the overall health of the Great Lakes and the region's quality of life. On the environmental side, changes in land use have a cumulative impact on water quality and quantity, and thus the vitality and resiliency of ecosystems in the Great Lakes region. For example, the conversion of farmland to urban development within the basin increases the amount of paved surfaces, resulting in increased problems associated with stormwater runoff. Increased stormwater runoff further impairs water quality. Stormwater in the form of rain or snow melt runs off the ground or impervious surface, carrying with it concentrations of pollutants in the form of chemicals, sediments, nutrients and pathogens and deposits these into streams, rivers and lakes – sources of drinking water for the more than 33 million people that live in the Great Lakes basin. Higher temperature stormwater impacts coldwater ecosystems and can spur excess algal growth, while stormwater

conveyance systems deliver water in surges, which scour streams and streambanks, exacerbating erosion and destroying aquatic habitat. Although land development necessarily creates some impervious surfaces, the total amount of imperviousness in any given area is directly affected by the form that development takes. It is well documented that development that is spread out and poorly planned results in higher levels of environmental degradation.³ More compact development, that incorporates environmental design features, can reduce the impact of development on the land, air and water resources.⁴

On the socioeconomic side, unplanned, low-density growth (e.g., urban sprawl), long thought to be cheap and efficient, is increasingly proving to be economically inefficient and socially problematic. A 10-year study led by Prof. Robert Burchell of Rutgers University⁵ offers a comprehensive analysis of the economic costs of sprawl from 2000 to 2025. Based on a complex economic model, it was estimated the residents of the Chicago-Gary-Kenosha metropolitan area (Ill., Ind., and Wis.) will pay \$189.3 billion over 25 years to live in sprawling communities, or \$19,103 per person. If just 25 percent of the low-density growth is shifted in the future to compact growth, residents would save \$15.3 billion or \$1,544 per person. As development sprawls out from the urban fringe, urban centers with existing



infrastructure suffer economic blight. Increased costs of providing public utility services, housing, and roads, along with declining employment opportunities, aging infrastructure, and declining quality of schools are consequences of the population loss that accompanies sprawl. Detroit’s population dropped from a high of about 1.8 million people in 1950 to under one million in 2000 – the largest population decrease of any American city in the history of the United States.⁶ Some estimates maintain that Detroit has more than 50,000 abandoned properties. Even as its census is declining, Detroit’s population, like that of many older former industrialized cities, is spreading out, meaning that fewer people are occupying more land area while those who remain in urban centers pay higher proportionate costs to maintain urban infrastructure originally designed to serve larger population (Table 1). In the 1950s, the Detroit had an installed infrastructure

sufficient to support a population of 2.2 million. Today (2007), fewer than one million residents must pay to maintain and improve that infrastructure.

Since the 1990s, there is increasing recognition among local, state and federal decisionmakers that in order for urban and urbanizing areas to remain competitive in the global market, land use must be managed in a much smarter way. Chicago, Minneapolis and Toronto are examples of metropolitan areas where counties, cities and smaller communities are working together to efficiently manage their public services and land uses more efficiently and sustainably. Several Great Lakes states and provinces have also been thinking creatively about how to improve land use to enhance economic opportunities and maintain a healthy environment. Here we highlight some of those efforts.

Land Consumption Forecast in Selected Great Lakes Metropolitan Areas

Metropolitan Area	Est. urbanized area, 2000 (mi ²)	Forecast urbanized area, 2025 (mi ²)	Change in mi ²	Percent Change 2000-2025
Chicago	1766	2640	695	39.3
Detroit	1238	1549	311	25.1
Cleveland	650	985	335	51.6
Milwaukee	546	833	287	52.5
Buffalo	323	571	248	76.7
Total	4223	6578	1876	44.4
Average				48.3

State and Provincial Land-Use Policy Frameworks

Starting in the late seventies, Great Lakes states have adopted coastal management (CZM) programs that address a broad range of community development, economic and natural resource issues at the state and local levels. Through matching grants and technical assistance, state CZM programs support a variety of coastal community land-use projects.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania passed laws to promote smart growth and comprehensive planning in local communities. These laws vary in their details, but each identifies statewide land use planning goals; encourages local communities to develop plans according to those goals in cooperation with other localities; and provides technical assistance for local planning efforts. Additionally, these initiatives encourage state agencies to review their policies and programs to improve interagency coordination in accordance with state planning, smart growth or local plans that reflect state goals.

Around the same time, state governments in Illinois, Indiana and New York formed interagency and/or multistakeholder task forces and councils to examine the need for statewide action on land-use issues. For Illinois and New York, these groups developed statewide goals and action plans for land-use management. They laid the groundwork for state programs to provide technical and financial assistance for local community planning,

emphasizing the importance of preserving natural resources, improving quality of life and revitalizing urban centers.

In 2003, her first year as governor, Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm created the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council, which produced a report with more than 150 recommendations for addressing Michigan's land-use issues. Since then, a few state laws have been passed to implement some of those recommendations, but the state's momentum for smart growth has since declined. In Ohio, smart growth efforts have been spearheaded by the Ohio Lake Erie Commission. The Ohio Lake Erie Commission began examining these issues with its Balanced Growth Blue Ribbon Task Force in 2001. The task force recommendations were adopted by the Ohio Lake Erie Commission in 2004, creating the Lake Erie Balanced Growth Program. The program calls for the establishment of watershed



planning partnerships and the development and implementation of balanced growth plans that identify priority development areas and priority conservation areas, among other things. Funding assistance has been made available for pilot project watersheds to develop watershed-based balanced growth plans. Four watershed planning partnerships have been established, and four pilot projects have been funded under this program to date.

Since 2000, the Great Lakes Canadian provinces have also been addressing the issue of smart growth and sustainable land use. In Québec, the greater metropolitan communities of Montreal and Québec City have formed multi-municipal planning organizations called metropolitan communities. The metropolitan communities are able to pool their services and coordinate development patterns. In 2004, the Québec provincial government also released a land-use planning guidebook for local governments aimed at reducing anthropogenic greenhouse gases. Additionally, the province adopted the Sustainable Development Act, in 2006 providing a process for integrating sustainable development into its activities.⁷ This act is a core element of the provincial Sustainable Development Plan developed in 2004. The province of Ontario launched major smart growth initiatives in 2004 and 2005. Legislation was passed to strengthen provincial and local planning laws and policies. Ontario created a greenbelt and

a greenbelt plan to guide urban and rural development, curb sprawl and promote efficient development in existing areas.

By 2006, eight out of 10 of the Great Lakes states and provinces had adopted some form of state/provincial-wide policy framework to promote smart growth and/or comprehensive planning. Additionally, since 2003, six Great Lakes states have participated in Great Lakes Commission-sponsored land-use roundtables to explore ways to build on progress in smart growth. However, the path has not been smooth for all of them and several states have experienced considerable setbacks in their land-use planning/smart growth endeavors. For example, in 2001 the Minnesota legislature repealed the state's 1997 Community Based Planning Act, which promoted the integration of sustainable development principles into local planning. And funding for community planning assistance in Minnesota was completely eliminated in 2005. In 2005, Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels dissolved the legislatively established Indiana Land Resources Council, which was about to release a report on smart growth policies. Then, in June 2006,



State and Provincial Smart Growth and Planning Frameworks

State/Province	Law/Policy	Lead Agency(ies) and Program
Illinois	Local Planning Technical Assistance Act, 2002 Local Legacy Act, 2004*	Dept. of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Local Planning Technical Assistance Program*
	*Pending Legislation to fund the Local Planning Technical Assistance Act	Dept. of Natural Resources, Local Legacy Act
Indiana	Public Law 214 (Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority), 2005 Marquette Plan: The Lakeshore Reinvestment Strategy	None
Michigan	Executive Order 2003-4 to create the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council Joint Municipal Planning Act, 2004 Public Law 577-579 (contract zoning) Michigan Zoning Enabling Act *Cool Cities Program	Dept. of Labor and Economic Growth* (Dept. of History, Arts and Libraries; Dept. of Environmental Quality; Dept. of Natural Resources; Dept. of Transportation and Dept. of Agriculture - all have dedicated staff)
Minnesota	Sustainable Development Act, 1996 Community Based Planning Act, 1997 (repealed 2001) Smart growth bonding criteria	Dept. of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis Minnesota Planning
New York	Executive Order 2000 -102 to create the Quality Communities Task Force Open Space Protection Plan Community Preservation Act	Dept. of State, Quality Communities Program
Ohio	Ohio Lake Erie Action Protection and Restoration Plan	Lake Erie Commission, Balanced Growth Program
Ontario	Planning Act Provincial Policy Statement, 2005 Strong Communities Act, 2004 Places to Grow Act, 2004 Greenbelt Act, 2005 Greenbelt Plan, 2005	Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Land Use Planning, Ontario Municipal Broad, and Greenbelt Protection Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Growth Planning Program
Pennsylvania	Executive Order 1999-1 to designate the Governor's Center for Local Government Services responsible for land-use issues Environmental Stewardship and Protection Act (a.k.a. Growing Greener) Acts 67 and 68, 2000 (a.k.a. Growing Smarter) Land Use Action Plan, 2003 Governor's Keystone Principles for Growth, Investment and Resource Conservation, 2005 Transit Revitalization Investment District Act, 2004	Dept. of Community and Economic Development, Governor's Center for Local Government Services Dept. of Environmental Protection, Pennsylvania Growing Smarter
Québec	Act respecting land use planning and development, 1980 Québec Land Use Policy Statements, 1994-2005 Sustainable Development Plan & Act, 2004-2005 Strategy and action plan on biodiversity 2004-2007	Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Regions, Land Use Planning and Development
Wisconsin	Comprehensive Planning Act, 1999	Dept. of Administration, Division of Intergovernmental Relations, Comprehensive Planning Law
		Dept. of Natural Resources, Land Use Team



Gov. Daniels re-established the Council. The Council is tasked with reviewing the Indiana Department of Agriculture's draft land-use strategy and considering incentives, model ordinances and land-use tools for local governments to preserve farmland. The Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Law has also been challenged by state representatives from rural areas, who threatened to repeal the law in 2005. The Illinois Planning Technical Assistance Act was enacted in 2002, but has yet to be funded.

While the Great Lakes states and provinces are making some strides to improve land-use decisionmaking, a 2006 study by the Brookings Institution found that the Great Lakes is among those regions where most of the laws governing land use planning have not been revised significantly since the original Standard Planning and Zoning Enabling Acts of the 1920s. The prevailing approach to land-use regulation in the Midwest (including

the Great Lakes) is heavy reliance on local zoning and comprehensive plans designed to exclude and separate uses with very little or no reliance on growth management measures. About 25 percent of Great Lakes metropolitan areas have no comprehensive plan and about 14 percent have no zoning at all. Of the municipalities that do have comprehensive plans, many of those are well outdated and hardly useful for contemporary problems. This same study found that those regions which rely on traditional methods of land-use regulation are less dense, have fewer opportunities for low-income residents and minorities to live in suburbs, offer less opportunity for people to own homes in central cities and have central cities that appeal less to college graduates. Conversely, the study found that regions that employ more progressive land-use and growth management policies are denser, offer more opportunity for low-income residents and minorities and have more competitive housing markets.⁸

Continuing a Smart Growth Momentum in the Great Lakes Region

In 2007, for the first time, half of the world's population will live in urbanized areas.⁹ Although all Great Lakes states practice "home rule" (delegating authority for site specific land use decisions to the local level), the need to address the impact of how we plan for and develop urban areas is imperative. The role of the states and provinces in addressing sustainable land use should not be underestimated. The most significant laws affecting urban redevelopment and open space protection are established at the state and provincial level. These include planning and zoning enabling laws, taxation laws and transportation policies, as well as brownfields policies and farmland and open space protection policies.

While the Great Lakes states and provinces have proceeded at different paces, sustainable land use and smart growth is critical to the future health and vitality of the region's environment and economy. Areas with little or no land use regulation to mitigate environmental impacts from poor land development practices are destined to develop environmental, economic and social problems that will multiply over time. The key issue is not whether or not to have a policy framework for managing and regulating development across the Great Lakes region, but what will make up that framework. The role of the states and

provinces in setting a policy agenda for sustainable land use and smart growth cannot be overstated.

There is no shortage of examples and ideas for policy frameworks, programs and best practices. Many of these are linked through the Great Lakes Sustainable Land Use web site at <http://www.glc.org/bridges>. A regional smart growth forum could provide a mechanism for states to share information, build capacity, reverse policy setbacks and provide a unified, long-term vision for land use in the region. Additional research to improve the understanding of land-use trends and their environmental and economic impacts, and outreach on the results of such research, will also help improve land-use decisionmaking. For example, in 2003 the Great Lakes Commission endorsed the concept of a major binational study to update understanding of land-use trends and impacts in the Great Lakes basin, and suggest prospective policy responses based on environmentally and economically responsible design solutions.¹⁰ More than 200,000 square miles of land drain into the Great Lakes. Sustainable use of that land is key to the future health of the lakes and the quality of life for the more than 35 million people who live in the basin.



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¹Adapted and updated from a Commission staff briefing paper provided in the Commission's 2006 Semiannual Meeting briefing book.

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