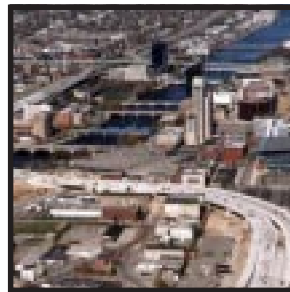
COORDINATED PLANNING IN MICHIGAN



THREE CASE STUDIES

PIRGIM
Education Fund

COORDINATED PLANNING IN MICHIGAN

THREE CASE STUDIES

TONY DUTZIK AND BRIAN IMUS

PIRGIM EDUCATION FUND

JANUARY 2002

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our deepest gratitude to the Beldon Fund for their financial support of this project, and to Peter M. Wege for his financial support in launching the PIRGIM Education Fund's Land Use Program.

This report would not have been possible were it not for the help of all those who took time from their busy schedules to be interviewed or provide information for this project. Special thanks go out to Jim Lively of the Michigan Land Use Institute and Andy Bowman of the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council for the additional perspective they gave to this project. Thanks also to Conan Smith, Land Stewardship Director of the Michigan Environmental Council, for his help with this report and PIRGIM Education Fund's work on land use issues.

Many thanks to Susan Rakov and Brad Heavner for their editorial and technical help. Also, thanks to the staff at the Traverse City and Frankenmuth convention and visitors bureaus for helping to locate illustrations and to Chris Chatto for his design work.

The authors alone bear responsibility for any factual errors. The recommendations are those of PIRGIM Education Fund. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of our funders.

Copyright 2002 PIRGIM Education Fund

The Public Interest Research Group in Michigan (PIRGIM) Education Fund is a nonprofit, non partisan 501(c)(3) organization that works as an advocate for the public interest.

For additional copies of this report, send $10 (including shipping) to:

PIRGIM Education Fund
122 S. Main St.
Suite 370
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

For more information about PIRGIM and the PIRGIM Education Fund, please contact our office at 734-662-6597, or visit the PIRGIM web site at www.pirgim.org.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5

INTRODUCTION 9

GRAND RAPIDS: TOWARD A COOPERATIVE FUTURE 13

The Grand Valley Metro Council 13

Profile: Grand Rapids 14

Limiting Sprawl: The Utility Boundary 15

Planning Together: A New Vision for East Beltline Avenue 17

A "Metro" State of Mind: Fostering Links Across Municipal Boundaries 18

Challenges Remain 19

Indications of Success 20

FRANKENMUTH: TWO MUNICIPALITIES, ONE PLAN 21

Profile: Frankenmuth 22

Common Heritage, Common Goals 22

Indications of Success 23

Development Pressure Mounts 24

TRAVERSE CITY: A DIFFERENT KIND OF COORDINATION 25

Business Promotes Common Principles 26

Profile: Traverse City 27

Protecting Farmland and Water Quality 29

Is True Coordination Next? 30

MAKING IT WORK 31

Four Foundations of Success 31

Four Obstacles 32

Works in Progress 34

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 35

NOTES 37

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sprawling development patterns have made their mark on Michigan in the past several decades, resulting in increased traffic congestion, loss of farmland and open spaces, water and air pollution, and, in many cases, inflated tax bills as local governments struggle to provide needed public services.

Despite these pressing threats to the environment and quality of life, community planning in Michigan is most often characterized by a lack of coordination. The 1,800 units of government with responsibility for planning in the state often fail - or refuse - to coordinate their plans with one another. Even within individual units of government, the planning that does take place is of varying quality and consistency, and the application of the principles embodied in those plans is spotty.

The result is a disjointed approach to planning that renders many Michigan communities powerless to deal with sprawl. The inconsistency of local plans also leaves municipalities vulnerable to legal action by developers - actions that further limit the willingness of municipalities to take aggressive action against sprawl.

One of the most important solutions is to encourage better coordinated planning between municipalities and within governments. In a growing number of Michigan communities, government officials, business leaders, and ordinary citizens are engaging in unprecedented mutual planning efforts to ensure their regions' future health and viability. There is increasing evidence that these efforts - many of which are still in their early stages - are making significant strides in the fight to curtail sprawl.

This report spotlights three examples of where coordinated planning and other examples of inter-municipal coordination are working to protect farmland, safeguard waterways, protect taxpayers, and enhance Michiganders' quality of life.

Grand Rapids

The challenge: The Grand Rapids-Holland-Muskegon area is the sixth most sprawling metropolitan area of more than one million people, according to a recent study by USA Today. Over the last two decades, while the population of Kent County (which includes Grand Rapids) increased by 18 percent, the county's urbanized area grew by 80 percent. Loss of farmland, traffic congestion, and urban decay are major local concerns.

The response: The Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC), a consortium of 31 local and two county governments, has worked for a decade to draw a common blueprint for the region's development and foster an atmosphere of growing inter-municipal cooperation.

The results:

- An urban utility boundary has been established for Grand Rapids and several of its neighboring communities - in effect, drawing a line beyond which sprawl may not proceed. The boundary is part of a package of sewer and water policies that seek to make new growth pay its own way and to encourage coordinated action on a wide range of regional issues.
- New sub-regional planning efforts spawned or inspired by GVMC have led to an innovative land-use plan for a five-mile stretch of highway and cooperation on new ordinances to protect water quality in Bear Creek.
- The population of Grand Rapids rose during the 1990s, bucking the trend of other large Michigan cities, while pressure to develop farmland in the region has eased relative to the rest of Michigan.

Frankenmuth

The challenge: In the 1970s, the population of Frankenmuth City and Frankenmuth Township jumped 28 percent. Increasing demand for residential development threatened

farmland in the township and created friction between the two governments.

The response: In the early 1980s, the city and township created a joint master plan to govern the communities' future growth. City and township planning commissions meet together on a regular basis to review development plans.

The results:

- The city and township enacted an urban growth boundary in the mid-1980s that has channeled new residential development close to the city while preserving the township's rural character. Population growth has stabilized at about five to six percent per decade.

Traverse City

The challenge: The population of the five-county Traverse City region has doubled since 1970. The five counties each ranked among the top 20 fastest-growing counties in Michigan during the 1990s. In just a five-year span during the mid-1990s, Grand Traverse County lost 11 percent of its cropland to development. Traffic congestion and concern about pollution of Grand Traverse Bay are consistently rated as top concerns in polls of Traverse City-area residents.

The response: Business leaders, working through the New Designs for Growth project of the local Chamber of Commerce, have pushed communities to adopt common planning and zoning principles to protect natural resources and improve the quality of new development. Meanwhile, small groups of municipalities have begun to cooperate on issues such as land-use planning, farmland preservation, and watershed protection.

The results:

- To date, 65 of the region's 93 municipalities have adopted the common development principles supported by New Designs.
- New projects, such as a $100 million mixed-use development in Traverse City, are more likely to follow good urban design principles and are increasingly located in already built-up areas.
- Five Grand Traverse County municipalities are working to develop a purchase of development rights program similar to a program adopted in a nearby municipality that has already saved 1,500 acres of farmland.

The three successful initiatives profiled in this report share several characteristics:

- They seek out citizen input early and often.
- They are committed to process.
- They respect the perspectives of individual communities and their right to home rule.
- They have organizations that are built to last.

Yet coordinated planning efforts in these communities also face significant obstacles.

The biggest such obstacle is outmoded state planning laws that limit communities' flexibility in forming effective coordinated planning bodies, do not ensure the consistency of plans made by different levels of government, and stoke, rather than calm, inter-governmental rivalries.

A thorough overhaul of the state's existing planning laws is needed to give citizens the tools to control their future, establish workable frameworks for inter-governmental co-operation, enhance home rule, and encourage long-term comprehensive planning at all levels of government.

Such an overhaul would spark more Michigan communities to form coordinated planning ventures similar to those highlighted in this report - enabling those communities to develop creative and effective policies to stop the sprawl that is degrading Michigan's environment, economy and quality of life.

INTRODUCTION

Aretta Schils' home in northern Mon roe County looks out on 1,000 acres of soybeans and corn. The quiet, rural character of the area is what keeps her there.

But two years ago, what Schils describes as the "Mayberry R.F.D." feel of her neighborhood nearly changed forever.

In 1999, General Motors and the Ann Arbor Railroad announced plans to build a massive auto distribution facility on the rural Milan Township land across the road from Schils' home. Asphalt was to cover more than one-third of the 1,000-acre parcel. Several trains and an estimated 450 trucks per day were to rumble through the town, bringing cars in and out of the facility.[1]

"We would have gotten the sound, the smell, the light," Schils said.[2]

The facility did not fit into Milan Township's existing master plan, which was enacted in 1979. So township officials moved to change the plan, and the zoning ordinance that implements it, to accommodate GM's proposal.

Schils joined with a group of local residents from throughout the community to fight the rezoning and the revisions to the township's master plan. In February 2000, the group won a referendum to block the rezoning. Eight months later, GM and the railroad dropped their plan.

For Schils and her neighbors, the story of the distribution center had a happy ending. But one element of the battle still irks her. Despite their proximity to the site, Schils and her neighbors had no official voice in Milan Township's decision. The reason: they live in London Township, whose border with Milan Township runs along the road in front of Schils' home.

Under Michigan law, London Township residents and public officials had no say over the location of the distribution center – even though the proposed facility posed a direct conflict with the township's land-use plans. "As a governmental body, I can't go over there and tell them what to do," said London Supervisor Kris Neuvirth in 1999 in the midst of the GM dispute.[3]

"Our side of the road was going to be agricultural and recreational. We've got the Saline River right behind our property," Schils said. "(The center) just did not fit into this area."

One doesn't have to look far to find other examples of where lack of cooperation among municipalities can lead to poorly planned development.

In fact, one only has to drive the 20 or so miles to the city of Monroe. In 1998, the city's director of community development and planning, James Tischler, found out through county officials that a neighboring township was considering amendments to its master plan. When Tischler reviewed the plan, he found seven conflicts with the city's own master plan – including planned industrial and high-volume commercial activity in the township located directly opposite existing residential and recreational areas in the city.

Concerned, Tischler sent comments on the plan to officials in the neighboring township and to the county. County planning officials acknowledged the comments and included them in their reaction to the township's master plan. But Tischler said that, even three years later, "we have never yet received any response" from the township, which then adopted the master plan over the objections of the city and county.[4]

Tischler wants to avoid a similar scenario as the city of Monroe draws up its new master plan. City officials formally notified approximately 70 groups about the process, and five are actively participating, he said – including the township that failed to respond to Monroe's concerns and another township that shares a border with the city.[5]

Yet, early last July, Tischler found out through a newspaper story that the *other* township bordering Monroe is in the process of revising its master plan – a fact that had never been communicated to Tischler despite

the community's cooperation on Monroe's master plan. "I was stunned," he said.

When it comes to land use planning in Michigan, coordination and cooperation among municipalities are the exception, not the rule. Across Michigan, about 1,800 governmental entities – cities, townships, villages, and counties – have the power to make land-use decisions.[6] Just over two-thirds of those entities engage in jurisdiction-wide zoning.[7]

Those communities that do engage in planning and zoning often fail – or refuse – to work in concert with their neighboring communities. In many cases, age-old rivalries over issues like annexation and detachment, access to municipal services, and pursuit of development that will build up the local tax base, prevent effective collaboration. Distrust also often exists between municipal and county governments, diminishing the role county planning agencies play in fostering regional responses to sprawl.

Meanwhile, the frequent lack of consistency within municipalities with regard to the development and enforcement of master plans and zoning ordinances fuels legal challenges filed by developers to those policies. The fear of litigation, in turn, dissuades many communities from taking innovative or aggressive action to limit the impact of sprawl.

Michigan's existing planning and zoning laws allow, and in some cases perpetuate, these problems. The state's four planning enabling acts, which date to 1931, allow for planning at the county, regional and metropolitan levels, but they do not guarantee that those plans are coordinated with each other, or with local plans. And the laws fail to provide for alternative arrangements, such as joint planning commissions shared by two municipalities, that could foster greater municipal cooperation.

In late 2001, the legislature took a first step toward improving coordination by requiring planning bodies to share their land-use plans with neighboring communities and providing those communities with the opportunity to comment on those plans. But the legislation, while laudable, fails to deal with the numerous other provisions of Michigan planning law that hinder inter-governmental coordination.

Some might argue that such inter-governmental conflicts are an inevitable result of Michigan's treasured tradition of home rule. Yet, across Michigan, there is a growing realization that the major land-use challenges confronting local communities do not respect municipal boundaries.

One community's decision to build a shopping mall leads to another community's traffic jams. One community's booming residential development forces sewer expansion that causes rates in other communities to rise. One community's loss of farmland and open space allows more polluted runoff to flow into a river enjoyed by the next community downstream.

In large cities and small, rural communities and suburban enclaves, citizens, business owners and governmental leaders are beginning to conclude that cooperation, not competition, is the key to preserving the true spirit of home rule – the ability of citizens in every community to make the decisions that shape their future.

And in a few pockets within Michigan, government officials and citizens from different municipalities are – often for the first time in history – sitting together on a regular basis to discuss the issues affecting their communities and how best to plan for future growth.

The three case studies presented here offer a ray of hope in the fight against sprawl. They demonstrate that citizens, government officials and business leaders from different municipalities and different walks of life can work together to develop a cooperative vision for their communities that avoids the pollution, congestion, alienation, and loss of aesthetic beauty that so often results from sprawl.

And, even more hopefully, they demonstrate that those visions can be translated into effective action.

Grand Rapids: Toward a Cooperative Future

Photo: Michigan Department of Transportation

The story of Grand Rapids and its sub urbs over the last 40 years is the story of many big cities in Michigan and elsewhere.

Between 1966 and 1990, the city lost nearly 20,000 residents – or about 10 percent of its population – as new highways opened up new opportunities for life in the suburbs. Poverty and disinvestment followed in their wake. Over the last 25 years, the number of census tracts in the city in which at least one-fifth of the residents are poor has increased from 12 to 22.[8]

The transformation was even greater in the formerly open lands outside the city limits. While the population of Grand Rapids itself was dropping, the population of the metropolitan area (which also includes the cities of Muskegon and Holland) was tripling.[9] Water, sewer and road systems struggled to keep up with the growth, as subdivisions rose on what had been farmland.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the consumption of land outside Grand Rapids far exceeded the rate of population growth. Kent County, which includes Grand Rapids, saw its urbanized area grow by 80 percent, while its population increased by only 18 percent.[10] In the 1990s alone, the amount of developed land in suburban Grand Rapids increased by nearly 30 percent.[11]

By the year 2001, Grand Rapids attracted national attention when it was named the sixth most sprawling metropolitan area of one million residents or more by *USA Today*.[12]

But Grand Rapids differs from many sprawling communities in one respect. For the last decade, citizens, businesses and government officials have been working together to develop alternatives to sprawl.

The Grand Valley Metro Council

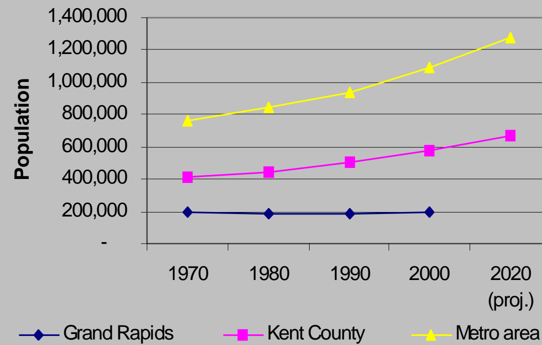
Those efforts began in 1990 with the formation of the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council. Originally made up of nine municipalities and Kent County, the council now incorporates 31 local and two county governments.[14]

Andy Bowman, planning director of GVMC, said the organization arose from a series of events in the mid-1980s. Local municipalities, he said, were looking for ways to work together outside of the moribund state-created regional planning agency that serviced the area, and pushed for the passage of legislation that would allow the formation of GVMC.[15]

Profile: Grand Rapids[13]

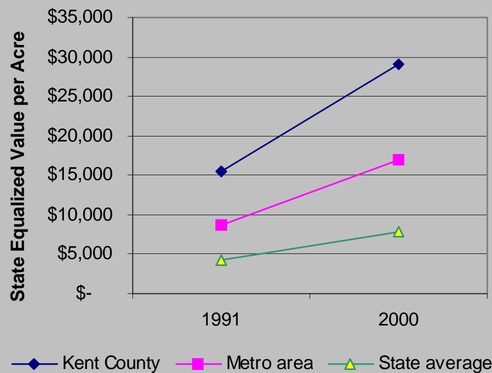
POPULATION

Since 1970, the population of the four-county Grand Rapids metropolitan region has grown at a faster pace than that of Kent County. The city of Grand Rapids added residents in the 1980s and 1990s, returning to its 1970 population.



LAND VALUE PER ACRE

Land values in Kent County are now nearly four times greater than the state average, while metro area land values increased faster than those of the state as a whole. Increasing land valuations can put added pressure on farm owners to sell their land for development.



CROPLAND

The Grand Rapids region lost only three percent of its farmland during the mid-1990s, compared to the overall state rate of loss of nearly 10 percent.

	Kent Co.	Metro Area
1992 (acres)	154,558	557,654
1997 (acres)	149,898	542,625
% loss	3%	3%

That desire, he said, was compounded by an embarrassing incident that showed the weakness of regional planning. "Two cities in our single metro area, Grand Rapids and Wyoming, built parallel water pipes to Lake Michigan; about 40 miles worth," Bowman said. "It was a startling and expensive example of parochialism in our metro area."

The council's first major task was the completion of the 1994 Metropolitan Development Blueprint. Developed after 18 months of consultation by citizens and planners, the Blueprint lays out a shared vision for the future development of the region, emphasizing themes of protecting open space, creating compact centers of regional activity, and promoting compact, livable communities.[16] The Blueprint went on to detail specific "visions" for land use, transportation, utilities, information exchange, and natural resources.

Seven years later, those visions are beginning to be realized – some through direct coordination by GVMC and some through the work of other entities.

- An urban utility boundary has been created through part of the area to reduce the pressure to develop open spaces. Sewer rates for many area communities have been recalibrated to ensure that existing residents aren't forced to pick up the tab for new development.
- Development along a five-mile stretch of highway is being carefully planned to protect open space and encourage mixed uses.

- Investment in downtown Grand Rapids is on the rise and the city is in the midst of an ambitious revision of its own master plan.A cooperative framework has been created to help municipalities deal with the often-contentious issues of annexation and detachment.
- Municipalities have teamed up to protect the health of streams affected by runoff from new development and are beginning to engage in other sub-regional planning efforts.

But perhaps the council's biggest success has been in achieving what a summary of the Blueprint listed as its number one vision: developing a "metro" perspective.

Limiting Sprawl: The Utility Boundary

Water and sewer service is the lifeblood of large-scale development. Without it, development – if it occurs at all – remains widely dispersed as residents and businesses depend on well water and septic systems. With it, formerly rural areas are opened to unlimited growth.

In Michigan, cities have typically been of two minds about the extension of water and sewer service beyond their boundaries. A few have insisted on annexing any nearby properties that receive city services. Most, however, have gladly extended their lines beyond city limits, hoping that the added customers would defray the costs of providing water and sewer to city residents.

That was the case in Grand Rapids, where the city began expanding its services to neighboring communities in the 1960s – expansion that helped fuel those communities' explosive growth.

By the mid-1990s, city officials and leaders of neighboring communities were beginning to take a step back to look at the impact of sprawl on the region and the role utility policies could play in restraining it.

Grand Rapids Deputy City Manager Eric DeLong, who has been involved in every step of the process, said the initial discussions about a new water/sewer agreement arose from discussions taking place at the GVMC about issues such as growth. "People got to know each other there," DeLong said of GVMC. "They'd had some discussions. It wasn't like they were strangers anymore."[18]

In 1996, with its contract with Grand Rapids Township about to expire, the City of Grand Rapids saw an opportunity to incorporate the growing regional consensus on sprawl into a new water and sewer policy.

Grand Rapids Township expressed an interest in bringing other customer communities into the process. Over the next two years, the parties took part in intensive negotiations that resulted in two innovative agreements (see sidebar), both geared toward limiting sprawl.

Perhaps the most important provision in the new water and sewer agreement was the creation of an Urban Utility Boundary (UUB) that sets a limit on the outward expansion of service areas through part of the region.

FEATURES OF GRAND RAPIDS' WATER AND SEWER PLAN[17]

- Establishes a Utility Service District, which includes all areas currently receiving services and those where development is now occurring. All areas within the USD will be approved for utility services.
- Establishes an Urban Utility Boundary, which includes the USD and those areas in which urban development is expected in next 20 years.
- Areas outside the boundary are protected or reserved for future development.
- Sets up an Urban Cooperation Board, a new regional planning partnership.
- Increases connection fees for new customers and ties part of the cost of water and sewer connections to the size of the lot. This reduces the cost to existing customers of system expansions.

The utility boundary is similar in spirit to urban growth boundaries that have been adopted in Portland, Oregon and other cities across the country over the last few decades, in which all developments outside the boundaries must be approved by voters. In effect, it establishes a line on the map beyond which large-scale development cannot take place.

The policy concentrates development within the Utility Service District (USD) – a subset of the UUB that includes all areas currently serviced by water and sewer and those that are in the process of being developed – by guaranteeing water and sewer extensions to proposed developments within the district. Expansion of the USD over time would be possible, but not outside the UUB.

The agreement also seeks to make growth pay for itself by increasing sewer connection fees from $100 to $500 initially, and eventually to $2,300.[19] Those developing larger lots will pay more in fees, as will those in municipalities that choose to extend services over a larger surface area. The aim of the connection fee increases is to make those responsible for new developments pay a greater share of the cost of system improvements – rather than forcing existing customers to pay through increases in their water and sewer rates.

The second compact – an urban cooperation agreement – creates a new board to focus resources on regional issues ranging from farmland preservation to recreation.

The Urban Cooperation Board (UCB) includes all signatories to the water and sewer agreement and is open to other communities that choose to join. It is supported by a $1 per capita levy on member communities.[20] The UCB parallels a similar board created by the water and sewer agreement that is intended to give customer communities, for the first time, a say in the operation of the water and sewer system.

DeLong said the UCB fills a need in the community that GVMC has not been able to fill. "The metro council has been very important to our region, but they don't have a wealth of resources for key things," he said. "What the UCB tries to do is accumulate resources and use them to accomplish a regional vision."

In its first round of grants, issued this year, the UCB has dedicated funding to GVMC's "Blueprint II" regional planning process, a local museum, land preservation activities and other projects.

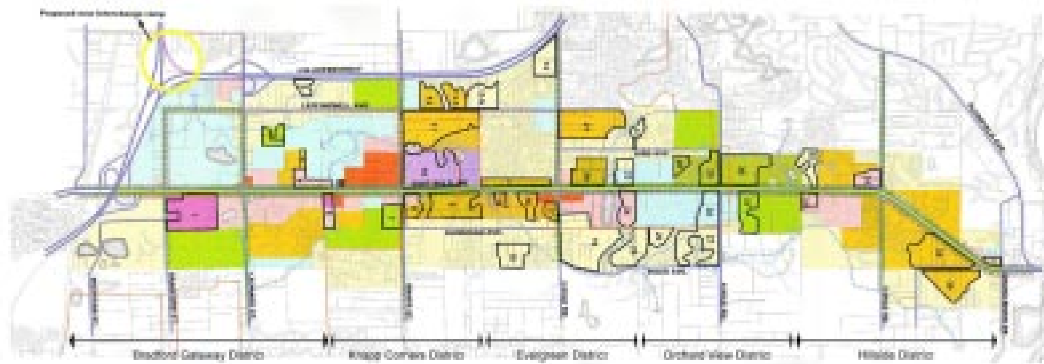
But the new arrangements are not without controversy. The North Kent Sewer Authority, which buys wholesale Grand Rapids sewer service from the Kent County Department of Public Works on behalf of five northern Kent County communities, is suing in federal court to overturn the plan, seeking, in DeLong's view, to "return to the former status quo."

Without the participation of the northern Kent County communities (which are contemplating building their own sewage treatment plant) and other municipalities in the region, the boundary may be limited in its effectiveness. However, it remains a step in the right direction that could – in concert with more broad-based growth management efforts – limit the outward spread of development in the region.

Planning Together: A New Vision for East Beltline Avenue

East Beltline Avenue on the north side of Grand Rapids is a virtual invitation to sprawling development. East Beltline is convenient to downtown Grand Rapids and to two major expressways carrying traffic to Muskegon and Holland. And it has a significant amount of land open for potential development.

It's also the kind of place that has tested the cooperation of Michigan municipalities. The road traverses three municipalities – the City of Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Town-



Source: Grand Valley Metro Council

The North East Beltline development plan divides the area along the road into five separate development zones, with more intense uses closest to the city, a "village center" district in the middle, and more dispersed agricultural and residential uses farthest away.

ship, and Plainfield Township – in just a five-mile stretch.

At first, according to GVMC's Bowman, the typical inter-municipal tensions were present in abundance. "Basically, the townships were attempting to preserve and the city was hoping to develop," he said. "Service boundaries, traffic, zoning and planning were all being hotly contested for years."

GVMC brought the parties together in an effort to hash out their differences. The result of their efforts, the North East Beltline Planning Study, is a departure from sprawl-style development. Planners divided the road into five one-mile segments, with each mile dedicated to a specific mix of uses based on its topography. Closest to the city, and nearest the highways, are zones for office, retail and institutional uses. Farther out are areas designated for residential and agricultural use.

While the plan for the area is only three years old, it is already leading to concrete results.

In the Knapp's Corner area, construction is wrapping up on Celebration Village, a mixed-use development anchored by a 20-screen multiplex cinema. The development is characterized by a "main street"-style center. Parking lots will be used by office workers in the daytime and theater-goers at night, eliminating the need for about 600 parking spaces. The development of the village center also creates the kind of node that could be served by public transportation.

Bowman said the planning study has resulted in better coordination of architectural features and access points at various points along the highway, as well a greater mix of uses within discrete "village" or "main street" areas. But he acknowledges that one important element – high density residential use – is still missing. "With a greater residential presence and connectivity, we believe the area will become a more 'walkable' or 'livable' experience."

To GVMC Chair Jim Buck, the East Beltline process was a validation of the value of coordinated planning. "I think that what the study showed was what all of us hoped many years ago would evolve out of the Grand Valley Metro Council – our ability to bring together cities and townships to sit down at the same table to iron out problems, to develop philosophies and programs," Buck said in 1999.[21]

The spirit of inter-municipal cooperation evident in the North East Beltline study has also taken hold in other "sub-regional" planning efforts, and helped spur GVMC to tackle the traditionally divisive issue of annexation.

In 1999, the council adopted a series of policies designed to bring order to land transfer issues. The policies reinforce member communities' commitment to share responsibil-

ity for planning and decision-making and set out detailed ground rules for future land transfers.[22]

A "Metro" State of Mind: Fostering Links Across Municipal Boundaries

United Growth for Kent County

In the late 1990s, the Michigan State University Extension, with support from the Frey Foundation, launched a new effort to get citizens talking across the region's urban-rural divide.

The resulting organization, United Growth for Kent County, is made up of two committees – an urban committee and a rural committee – which meet separately.

The goal of the organization is to get people from both types of communities to see that there is a link between disinvestment in the urban core, destruction of farmland, and other sprawl-related problems. Members of the rural committee have taken tours of hard-hit inner-city Grand Rapids neighborhoods, while city residents have learned about how sprawl is eating away at rural lands outside the city.

"It's really been built up that we share these common goals and these common values," Project Director Kendra Wills said, noting that one suburban school superintendent even proposed a tax on residents of outlying areas devoted to Grand Rapids city schools.

Photo: United Growth for Kent County

West Michigan residents lay out a conservation and development plan for the area as part of a planning workshop sponsored by United Growth for Kent County.

The effort has also sparked citizen involvement within communities. The City of Grand Rapids, for instance, is rewriting its master plan for the first time in 30 years, and the process is weighted heavily toward soliciting input and involvement from residents in the city's neighborhoods.

Ultimately, organizations like United Growth hope to create a common understanding of the issues that will enable citizens in each municipality to build a stronger regional vision.

The Bear Creek Watershed

In the early 1990s, officials in suburban Cannon Township began to become concerned about the potential impact of runoff pollution from new development on the creek, which is a tributary of the Grand River.

Cannon was the fastest growing municipality in Kent County during the 1980s, experiencing population growth of 59 percent.[23] Testing conducted at the time identified sedimentation and high bacteria levels as the major water quality threats to the creek.[24]

"The main concern was that all of a sudden there were all these developments proposed in the watershed near the creek," said Bonnie Shupe, who currently serves as Cannon Township's clerk and watershed administrator.[25]

In 1992, the township applied for and received a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for a project to educate the public about runoff pollution to the creek and to develop local ordinances to protect it. The most significant achievement of the grant was the passage of a new zoning overlay ordinance in Cannon Township that requires pollutant-filtering buffer zones for new developments near the creek.

The next step was to develop an ordinance to deal with stormwater runoff into the creek.

At the same time that Shupe was beginning that task, in 1998, she found out that Kent County was working to develop a model stormwater ordinance. The township merged its effort with the county's, working for three years to develop, and in the township's case, to pass, the policy. Shupe is now working with others to shop the ordinance to other municipalities around the region.

Shupe is also meeting regularly with officials from two neighboring townships to come up with a model wetlands protection ordinance that all the townships can adopt. "We're learning that it's easier to work together than to do our own thing," she said. "If we pass a restrictive ordinance to protect the creek, and (upstream communities) don't, it's not going to help us."

While regional cooperation has been key in the watershed effort, so has the leadership of Cannon Township, which has paid to keep Shupe working half-time on watershed issues since the EPA grant expired in 1998.

West Michigan Strategic Alliance

To broaden the purview of regional planning, a new organization – the West Michigan Strategic Alliance – was formed earlier this year to chart out a 25-year blueprint for the region.

The alliance's objective transcends the typical concerns of metropolitan councils like GVMC, taking into account issues such as education and health and human services as well as regional planning staples such as land-use and transportation policy.

Grand Rapids Deputy City Manager Eric DeLong, who has been involved in the alliance, said that while Grand Rapids-area governments are doing what they can to control growth, a look at the broader region shows that "we're sprawling like crazy."

DeLong said he hoped the alliance would enable communities throughout western Michigan to share ideas on curbing sprawl, much as Grand Rapids-area communities have done for the last decade.

Challenges Remain

Despite GVMC's success in promoting coordinated planning and regional cooperation, major challenges remain for the region's anti-sprawl efforts.

With so many regional planning efforts underway, one challenge of the GVMC is to bring coordination to the various types of plans being created.

"(T)here is no direct tie between water and sewer plans, transit plans, open space and recreational plans and a couple of other things," said GVMC Executive Director Jerry Felix in 2000. "You can't deal with land-use issues and put in water and sewer without regard to transportation issues."[26]

Another challenge is the continuing disparity in resources between urban Grand Rapids and the growing suburban communities at its fringe. A 1997 Frey Foundation study found that poverty has deepened in Grand Rapids over the last 25 years and that pockets of poverty have spread into nearby communities such as Kentwood, Wyoming and Cutlerville.[27]

The costs of providing infrastructure to new developments outside the city could, some fear, reduce the amount of money available for Grand Rapids to revitalize its schools and its own infrastructure. However, GVMC's Bowman said the issue of revenue sharing has, as yet, generated little interest among local political leaders, and will likely take many years of consensus-building to achieve.

The region also faces difficult decisions on transportation issues. Transportation has been a divisive issue within the region, with GVMC supporting the $400 million South Beltline expressway, which is currently under construction. The move angered some environmentalists and anti-sprawl activists who point to highways' crucial role in spreading development outward.

"The weakness of the transportation link in metro Grand Rapids is due in part to the fact that transit was simply not a priority of Metro Council or the Blueprint despite the perception that it is," said Julie Stoneman, director of land programs at the Michigan Environmental Council, in 1999.[28]

In recent years, GVMC has attempted to take a more active role in promoting public transportation. In 1998, GVMC and the Grand Rapids Area Transit Authority worked together to create a new, 20-year public transportation plan for the area that includes light rail service to Holland, Kalamazoo, Lansing and Muskegon, integrating transit into new developments, and using transit improvements to shape urban growth.[29] It remains to be seen, however, when and to what extent those plans will materialize.

Indications of Success

Despite the many challenges, there are signs that the anti-sprawl efforts of GVMC, other regional partnerships, and local citizens and officials are beginning to make a difference.

The City of Grand Rapids was one of only three Michigan cities of 100,000 people or more to gain residents during the 1990s, adding more than 7,000 people, or 4.6 percent, to its population.[30]

That population gain could be due, in part, to the heavy recent investment in revitalization of the urban core. Millions of dollars have been spent in recent years on a new convention center, university campuses, and other improvements designed to bring new life to the city.

While the area around Grand Rapids has continued to add population at a faster rate than the city, the region is losing a smaller percentage of its farmland than the state as a whole. Between 1992 and 1997, the metropolitan area lost three percent of its cropland, compared with nearly 10 percent for all of Michigan.

New outlying developments – like those planned for East Beltline Avenue – are more likely to embody good urban design principles than their predecessors. And the urban utility boundary should do even more to focus development close to existing centers.

What is perhaps most remarkable about GVMC's success is that it has come about solely as a result of voluntary cooperation among municipalities. "We can't tax. We can't draft legislation. We can't pass laws. We can't enforce anything," said Buck in 2000. "But when a group comes together on a particular issue, that carries some weight."[31]

FRANKENMUTH: TWO MUNICIPALITIES, ONE PLAN

Photo: Frankenmuth Convention and Visitors Bureau

Frankenmuth is known far and wide as Michigan's "Little Bavaria." But within Michigan planning circles, the Saginaw County city and the township that surrounds it are known for their success in coordinating planning to control growth. For nearly two decades, city and township officials have set aside the typical urban/rural conflicts to put forward a cooperative vision of their region.

Unlike many communities fighting sprawl, Frankenmuth is not located within a rapidly growing region. The population of the Saginaw-Bay City-Midland metropolitan area grew by less than one percent during the 1990s, while the population of Saginaw County itself declined.Yet, on a more local level, growth pressures remain. Frankenmuth sits in the second ring of townships surrounding the City of Saginaw. In the 1970s, Saginaw began suffering the staggering population declines that have led to the loss of about a third of the city's population over the last three decades. In the 1980s, amid a general economic decline, nearly every municipality in the region lost population.

When the economy picked up again in the 1990s, the inner ring of suburbs surrounding Saginaw did not recover with it, and continued to lose population. But in the belt of townships stretching from Frankenmuth eastward through Tuscola County, the 1990s saw a resurgence in residential development, with many municipalities posting significant population gains.

That growth also led to the loss of farmland. Between 1992 and 1997 – in the midst of a decade when the county's population declined – Saginaw County lost eight percent of its cropland. The same *USA Today* index that highlighted sprawl in Grand Rapids ranked the Saginaw area fourth most sprawling in the U.S. among metropolitan areas its size.[32]

While Frankenmuth has been buffeted by many of the same forces that have shaped development in the Saginaw region, it is, in many ways, a special case.

For one thing, the city and township have proven to be a consistent draw for new residents, regardless of the state of the regional economy. During the 1970s, the combined population of the city and township grew by 28 percent, while the county population grew by less than four percent. In the 1980s, Frankenmuth city was one of only three Saginaw County municipalities of more than 1,000 people to gain population.

The city and township have also proven to be unique in their willingness to work together to ensure that growth takes place in a steady and orderly way.

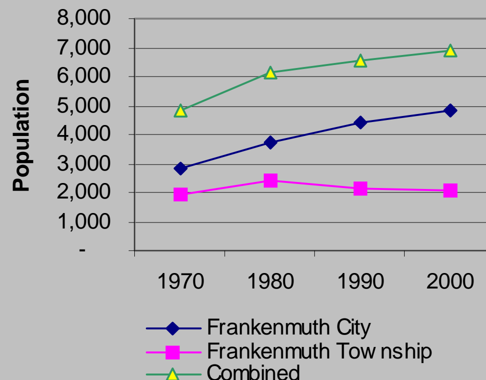
Common Heritage, Common Goals

Charles Graham, city manager of Frankenmuth city, said the cooperative spirit between the two municipalities goes back many decades. The city and township, he said,

Profile: Frankenmuth

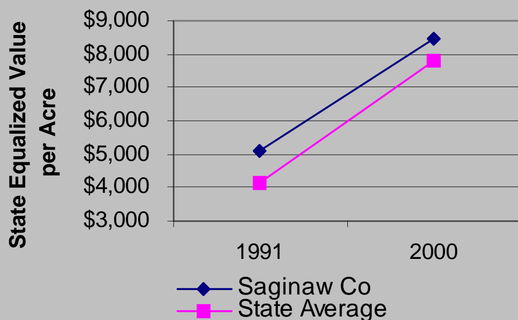
POPULATION[33]

At a time when Saginaw County's population stagnated, Frankenmuth has continued to grow. After a steep growth in population during the 1970s, successful land-use policies have helped maintain a steady rate of growth during the last two decades.



LAND VALUE PER ACRE

The value of land in Saginaw County increased at a lower rate than the state as a whole. Frankenmuth township officials say selling prices of land outside the township's growth boundary have increased in recent years.



CROPLAND

Despite stagnating overall population, Saginaw County continued to lose cropland during the 1990s, as development pushed further into the county's periphery.

1992 (acres)	290,910
1997 (acres)	268,428
% loss	8%

share "a common heritage, common background, commonality of interests" dating back to the village of Frankenmuth's founding by German settlers in 1845.[34] Over the years, the city and township have worked together to support a common fire department, which helped keep the channels of communication open.

Geography has also helped foster cooperation. Frankenmuth city is fortunate to be surrounded entirely by one township, rather than bordered by three or four, a situation that makes it easier to develop coordinated efforts.

But for all the municipalities' common history and interests, it took a typical source of urban/rural conflict – annexation – to bring about the communities' new relationship.

When he came to Frankenmuth as city manager in 1979 after stints in Colorado and Arizona, Graham said he quickly recognized the tensions inherent in city-township relations in Michigan. "I did see a basic built-in conflict. It's just undeniable that this conflict exists anyplace in the state of Michigan," he said, speaking of cities' hunger for land on which to expand and townships' desire to gain city services without losing sovereignty.

The city had a long-standing policy of not extending water and sewer services beyond its boundaries, insisting on annexation of any new area of the township that sought to receive services. That policy gave them some leverage in ensuring that the city would be able to expand when it felt it needed to – even though it meant the short-term loss of potential revenue for the water and sewer system.

But the policy also created conflict. In 1980, a family living across the road from an area

with public water and sewer service sought to be annexed by the city. The township had a policy that frowned on such "spot annexations," bringing the matter to stalemate. Graham helped the family make the case for annexation to the state's boundary commission, which adjudicates boundary disputes between municipalities. The commission ruled in the family's favor.

The action set a precedent. A second township resident applied for annexation to the boundary commission and was approved. Then a third began the process.

"At that point the township said, 'We're fighting a losing battle here, why don't we see if we can take a different approach,'" Graham said. "I said, 'What if we could all agree on some type of an overall plan that would be acceptable to both units of government?'"

So began the first effort toward coordinated planning in the two municipalities. The governments commissioned a survey, which found that "people in both areas had pretty much the same opinions about everything," according to Graham – especially about farmland preservation.

The municipalities then followed up the survey with a master plan. Approved in 1985, the plan set an urban growth boundary outside the city. Properties inside the boundary that met city and township standards would be approved for water service and annexed to the city – no questions asked.

Properties outside the boundary are eligible to receive city services through a special, township-created water district. But the township retained strict limits on building permits outside the boundary – issuing only nine such permits per year.

The rules are supported by ongoing cooperation between the two governments. The city and township passed identical ordinances to enforce the boundary, and their planning commissions meet jointly to review any development proposals within the boundary.

Indications of Success

The result of the system has been to concentrate new residential development close to Frankenmuth city. Since 1985, about 30 percent of the area inside the original growth boundary has been developed, while there has been scant development outside it.[35]

"This agreement has stopped the helter skelter subdividing of the property and having isolated little subdivisions coming up," said Frankenmuth Township Supervisor Martin Warnick. "It gave us the option to control our growth and maintain our rural-oriented community."[36]

In addition, the agreement has helped improve the quality of development taking place around the city. Without the agreement, developers looking to build in the township would not have been eligible to receive city water and sewer service. As a result, they would have had to build on large lots to accommodate septic systems, thus spreading development more widely across the township.

In the years since the adoption of the agreement, Frankenmuth has taken a path of slow but steady population growth. Between 1970 and 1980, the combined population of the city and township jumped 28 percent. But since then, the rate of growth slowed to 6 percent in the 1980s and 5 percent in the 1990s.[37]

Development Pressure Mounts

While both city and township officials maintain support for the agreement, tensions are beginning to arise. Graham and Warnick said developers looking to build housing are having an increasingly difficult time securing land within the growth boundary.

"The farms around here have been in these people's families since the German settlers first came here in 1845," Graham said. "They have such an enormous emotional connection to that land."

With land within the boundary becoming increasingly scarce, developers are beginning to make speculative investments in land outside the growth limit, in the hope of convincing township officials to loosen the growth management rules.

“Some properties are going for twice the farmland value,” Warnick said. “One sold for 3 ½ times the farmland value. These are speculations on these developers’ parts.”

Frankenmuth’s ability to defend its growth management successes would undoubtedly be easier if it were part of a regional framework. While one neighboring township has adopted a similar growth management ordinance, another has seen its efforts to guide growth turned back due to public opposition. Two other neighboring townships, which get their water from the city of Saginaw, have few limits on development.

There are some efforts being made in the direction of regional cooperation. In 1999, the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce launched Saginaw County Vision 2020, a strategic planning process aimed at developing a common vision for the county’s future. The initiative – which has attempted to involve an array of partners from government, business and the community – has developed a draft “vision statement” and is now working to develop strategies to put that vision into action.

TRAVERSE CITY: A DIFFERENT KIND OF COORDINATION

[credit] Traverse City Convention and Visitors Bureau

Traverse City's biggest assets have always been its natural resources: the sparkling waters of Grand Traverse Bay, the dense forests and cherry orchards, the hilltops with their majestic views of the bay and the lands around.

In recent years, however, the region's unique beauty has come to be threatened by sprawl.

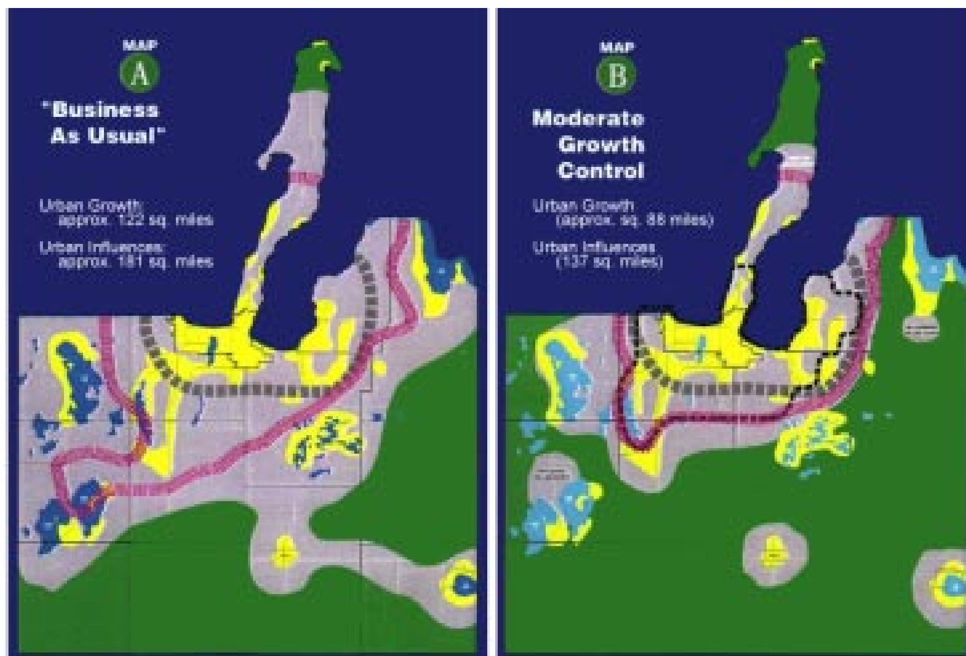
The region's five counties ranked fourth, seventh, eighth, 14th and 17th among Michigan's 83 counties for population growth between 1990 and 2000.[38] Between 1970 and 2000, the population of Traverse City itself declined by nearly 20 percent, while the population of Grand Traverse County and the five-county Traverse City area doubled.[39] If current trends hold, the population of the region could reach 190,000 by 2020, a 41 percent increase over the mid-1990s.[40]

Land values in the metro region have increased at a much faster pace than the state overall, thanks to the new development. As a result, there is increasing pressure on farmers to sell off their orchards and farms for development. In just a five-year stretch in the mid-1990s, Grand Traverse County lost 11 percent of its cropland.[41]

Polluted runoff from new development threatens the quality of the water flowing into the bay. Meanwhile, traffic congestion – so out of character for northwest Michigan – is now rated the region's number one problem by Grand Traverse County residents.[42]

Grand Traverse County officials estimate that, if a "business as usual" attitude toward development prevails, 188 of the county's 465 square miles will have been developed, or be in the process of being developed, by 2020.[43]

Unlike the Grand Rapids region and Frankenmuth, "coordinated planning" – at least in the sense of local governments meeting together to form comprehensive plans that complement one another – has been all but absent from the Traverse City region. A July 2001 editorial in the *Traverse City Record-Eagle* summed up the situation: "There remains little or no coordination between township, city and county officials on planning issues, and yet new subdivisions and commercial projects are going in every day."[44]



Source: Grand Traverse County

Grand Traverse County officials project that sprawl will increase dramatically in the region by 2020 without significant efforts to manage growth.

Yet something unusual is happening in Traverse City that bears noting. Businesses, environmentalists and citizens have been pressing individual local governments to embrace better practices for new developments, protect waterways, and preserve farmland. One of those efforts has resulted in nearly two-thirds of the area's municipalities adopting similar principles to govern future growth.

Those efforts have led, in some parts of the region, to a greater understanding of the need for cooperative efforts to address specific land-use issues and a greater willingness to engage in those efforts.

Will such efforts lead to a coordinated approach to planning in the Traverse City area as broad as that undertaken in Grand Rapids, or as deeply rooted as that in Frankenmuth? It is too early to say. But they have laid the foundation from which true coordinated planning could proceed in the years to come.

Business Promotes Common Principles

In Traverse City, the push for better land-use planning had an unusual catalyst: the business community.

Throughout Michigan and the nation, business leaders have typically opposed new efforts to curtail or lessen the effects of sprawl – arguing that any hindrance of market forces' ability to reshape the land would prove detrimental to the economy.

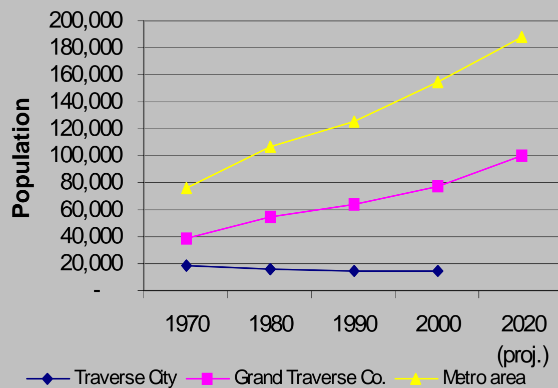
But in the mid-1990s, some Traverse City business leaders began to take a different view.

The region depends, in large part, on its scenery and access to recreational opportunities to attract visitors, new residents and businesses. The propagation of sprawl, some worried, would "kill the goose that laid the golden eggs," in the words of one local business leader.[45]

Profile: Traverse City

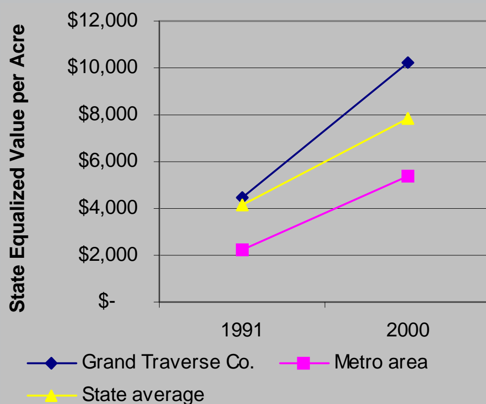
POPULATION

The population of the Traverse City metropolitan region has doubled over the last 30 years, while the population of Traverse City itself has declined.



LAND VALUE PER ACRE

Land values in the Traverse City region increased faster than the statewide average, indicating increased pressure to develop farmland.



CROPLAND

Grand Traverse County lost 11 percent of its farmland between 1992 and 1997, outpacing the statewide average of 10 percent.

	Grand Traverse Co.	Metro Area
1992 (acres)	46,467	144,479
1997 (acres)	41,530	131,862
% loss	11%	9%

In the early 1990s, county planners surveyed local residents to gauge local views toward development. Leaders of the local Chaber of Commerce conducted a similar survey of its members, finding that they shared roughly the same concerns as the community as a whole: traffic congestion, loss of farmland and open space, water pollution, and the lack of affordable housing.

The input generated by the county survey spurred the development of the Grand Traverse Bay Regional Development Guidebook, a 128-page illustrated document that laid out planning and zoning practices that municipalities could use to reduce sprawl or mitigate its negative effects.

The guidebook illustrated “common” and “better” approaches to issues ranging from lighting and signage to the protection of natural resources and open space. It was also packaged with proposed ordinances communities could use to implement the changes.[46]

While the guidebook was greeted enthusiastically, municipalities discovered that altering their planning and zoning practices was no easy matter.

“When it came time to translate the guidelines into ordinances, everybody found out how time consuming, how difficult that is especially at the same time they were reviewing so many new development projects,” said Marsha Smith, who was involved in the project’s early stages and now directs Rotary Charities of Traverse City, in 1995.[47] “Gradually, the energy surrounding the Guidebook faded away.”

Enter the Chamber of Commerce, which committed significant resources beginning in

1994 to distributing the guidebook and encouraging municipalities to adopt its principles.

The chamber, through its New Designs for Growth project, set as its goal getting all 93 governmental units in the five-county Traverse City region to adopt the guidebook principles.

But adoption of the principles was only part of the goal. New Designs sought to use the guidebook as a way to get municipalities and their citizens talking about their vision of the community's future.

To that end, the process by which communities adopt the guidebook principles is as important as the principles themselves. First, New Designs asks the local governing board to pass a resolution asking for New Designs to come into the community. Then New Designs seeks out "stakeholders" in the development process, including government officials, citizens, and the developers themselves, to participate in a community workshop.

The workshops begin with a slide presentation showing examples of good and bad development. Then community members are divided into teams, given a panel imprinted with the geological features of one section of the community, and asked to plan its future growth from the ground up.

"We give them bags of these 3-D houses and say, 'you do a development on that panel,'" said New Designs director Keith Charters. "The only rule is there are no rules."[48] The process gets local residents talking about their priorities for future growth, and provides the basis for the rest of the process. New Designs then goes through what Charters calls a "needs" process, comparing the priorities residents express during the workshop with the community's existing master plan and ordinances.

The final step is implementation. New Designs provides mini-grants to communities to hire professionals to make the necessary changes to the master plan and to zoning ordinances.

While the process takes place on a municipality-by-municipality basis, the New Designs project has brought some level of coordination to planning in the region by getting different communities to go through the same process. Charters said 68 of the region's 93 governmental units have had workshops and that 65 have implemented or are in the process of implementing the guidebook recommendations. "In hindsight, we became the catalyst for regional similarity," said Charters, who acknowledges that true coordinated planning between municipalities is made very difficult by current Michigan laws.

The group is also beginning to bring municipalities together to forge joint land-use plans. In efforts similar to those undertaken by the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council along East Beltline Avenue, New Designs is involved in two corridor studies to map out future land uses in areas that are anticipated to attract new development.

One of those studies, which is currently underway, involves Traverse City and four neighboring townships. Charters said the study starts from the premise that certain natural areas – such as wildlife areas and scenic viewsheds – identified in local master plans will be protected, then goes on to focus on what kind of development to allow where.

The other study, however – an analysis of the future build-out of an area scheduled to be linked by a new bridge over the Boardman River – became part of a larger conflict over the bridge, which has been heatedly opposed by environmentalists and anti-sprawl advocates.

Indeed, tensions over exactly what constitutes sprawl in a small, but rapidly growing region like Traverse City pop up in many contexts. For example, a committee of New Designs influenced the plans for a mixed-use development in suburban East Bay Township – a process that led the developer to include

sidewalks, minimize parking lot coverage, and give the project a more "village-like" feel.

"(I)t's great that developers are thinking along those lines," said Patty Cantrell of the Michigan Land Use Institute about the project in 1999. "But the other side is, it's a new development on undeveloped land rather than reuse of urban land."[49]

Yet not all new development is taking place in the distant suburbs. Traverse City is itself seeing a boom in new building projects, among them, a $100 million retail, office and residential complex on the site of the former Traverse City Iron Works that has won regional and national acclaim for its adherence to "Smart Growth" principles.[50]

With the Traverse City area's population projected to continue to balloon, tensions over transportation and the development of suburban areas around the city are likely to continue. But New Designs' promotion of common principles for controlled growth – combined with its recent multi-jurisdictional work – has led to greater awareness of the problems posed by sprawl, and a developing community consensus behind possible solutions. "The growth pressures just keep on coming," said Marsha Smith of Rotary Charities. "There's more of a community consciousness about these issues than there may be in other areas. That awareness bodes well for encouraging other growth management techniques."[51]

Protecting Farmland and Water Quality

While New Designs is just now beginning to venture into the world of coordinated planning, other multi-jurisdictional efforts have sprung up around two issues near and dear to the hearts of Traverse City area residents: farmland preservation and protection of water resources.

The region is already home to one pioneering farmland preservation effort. In 1994, Peninsula Township enacted the Midwest's first taxpayer-supported purchase of development rights program. Under the program, participating farmers agree to give up the right to develop their land, and are paid the difference between their farmland's value and the value it would hold if sold for development. In the program's first five years, more than 1,500 acres of farmland were protected from development.[52]

Now, five other local townships are looking to put together their own farmland preservation plan.

"What we've realized of course is that the regular development patterns that have been established in this area are not generally in our best interests in terms of protection of resources and trying to utilize most effectively our existing infrastructure," said Acme Township Planner Sherrin Hood, who is participating in the effort.[53]

The townships involved have not yet come up with a specific program for the preservation effort. But there has been little friction between the municipalities, mainly because of their shared heritage and their common interest in farmland preservation.

Coordination between municipalities is also beginning to happen in the crucial area of watershed protection.

Photo: Traverse City Convention and Visitors Bureau

Northwest Michigan bills itself as the "Cherry Capital of the World." But the area's cherry orchards have increasingly fallen victim to development pressures and agricultural economics.

The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay, a non-profit organization, was formed in 1990 to coordinate a myriad of existing public and private efforts to protect the waters of Grand Traverse Bay. From the start, said Executive Director Christopher Wright, the organization sought to bring municipal governments in as "partners" in its research, public education, and public policy initiatives.

But the pace of collaboration among governmental leaders has recently picked up. This year, the center began hosting a series of workshops with local government leaders to share information on how various governments are addressing water pollution issues. "It's sort of strength in numbers," Wright said.[54] "We want to make sure they're aware of what practices others are doing."

Wright cited examples of where such communication among governmental entities could make a difference. In the mid-1990s, for instance, the Grand Traverse County Drain Commissioner drafted a new ordinance on stormwater runoff and soil erosion that has since been adopted by a second county and is being considered by a third.

The center also recently received an EPA grant to develop a comprehensive watershed protection plan for the entire 973-square-mile Grand Traverse Bay watershed.[55] The initiative will involve planners from the local and county level and will include at least 50 meetings with stakeholders throughout the five-county region.

Another goal of the project is to produce an educational CD-ROM to distribute to local planning officials with information and tools for effective watershed protection.

Is True Coordination Next?

Traverse City has not experienced the degree or depth of inter-governmental coordination of planning that has occurred in Grand Rapids or Frankenmuth. Instead, initiatives to improve planning and restrain sprawl have typically come either from individual municipalities or from outside government altogether.

Such an approach requires an extraordinary amount of individual leadership and a constant investment of time and resources. While some cooperative efforts are beginning to spring up within certain sets of municipalities and on particular issues, Traverse City is the only community profiled in this report in which there is not a regular forum in which community leaders meet to discuss issues of regional importance.

Much progress has been made in developing a common understanding of the dangers posed by sprawl since the launching of New Designs in the mid-1990s. The next step for the region is to convert that common understanding into common action and legally binding plans to defend the area's treasured natural resources and way of life.

MAKING IT WORK

The three communities profiled in this report are not unique in Michigan for their willingness to work together with their neighbors on solutions to regional problems related to sprawl. Increasingly across the state, citizens, business leaders, and government officials are pressing for better coordination between municipalities on land-use and other decisions.

But while these three communities are not unique, they are exceptional. For years, the "built-in" conflicts between cities and townships – combined with archaic and ineffectual state planning laws – have frustrated efforts to develop a more regional approach to sprawl.

Why have these three communities begun to succeed where so many others have failed? And what roadblocks stand in their way?

The answers to these questions could guide other communities as they seek to replicate the successes of Grand Rapids, Frankenmuth and Traverse City. And they can provide a roadmap for state policy-makers as they look for effective ways to encourage inter-municipal cooperation.

Four Foundations of Success

The examples of Grand Rapids, Traverse City and Frankenmuth show that communities that do successful coordinated planning have several common characteristics.

They seek out citizen input early and often. All three case studies began with a "visioning" process or community survey that documented the major concerns of the community and used those concerns as the basis for developing a master plan or other guide to development.

Those studies found a surprising degree of unanimity among citizens on some issues, such as farmland preservation or waterway protection. That community consensus, in turn, provided public officials with legitimacy in their efforts to forward creative solutions to those problems.

They are committed to process. In all three of the case studies, substantive work on planning did not begin until a mutually agreed-upon process was developed to ensure fairness and guarantee all parties a voice.

Maintaining that commitment to process is not always easy. In the case of the New Designs for Growth project in Traverse City, it has meant countless hours traveling to communities, setting up community workshops, and painstakingly working through all potential issues. A similar, arduous process also takes place at the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, where most major decisions are based on consensus among all the affected municipalities.

But such hard work ultimately pays off by enhancing the legitimacy of the regional planning organization and ensuring that those who participate are fully "bought-in" to the results.

They respect individual communities' perspectives and their right to home rule.

In Michigan, the participation of municipalities in joint planning efforts is strictly voluntary. To the extent coordinated planning has succeeded in Michigan, it has been based on the support and investment in the process of each individual community involved.

In some cases, such as the Grand Rapids area sewer and water agreements, communities are bound in a set of coordinated planning arrangements by contract. In other cases, such as the GVMC, communities are relatively free to join up or drop out at will.

As noted above, maintaining the support and participation of various communities in coordinated planning is a massive undertaking that depends on mutual agreement on the ground rules. But if the process appears fair and positive results are achieved, communities will be enticed to jump on the bandwagon. When it's done right, communities find that they have more power to determine their own

future if they plan jointly with their neighbors.

GVMC is a fine case in point, its membership having tripled in the decade since it was founded.

"We just recently became a member a year and a half ago," said Cannon Township's Bonnie Shupe of the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council. "There are some communities that aren't members and they're still included in these things that are going on."

The best planning efforts also respect what is special in each community.

"One of the things we preach when we go to, say, Whitewater Township, is that there's no place else in the United States or on this Earth like Whitewater Township," said Keith Charters of New Designs for Growth. "You tell us what your priorities are."

They are built to last. As the case studies show, it can take years – even decades – for coordinated planning efforts to be translated into concrete improvements in development patterns, environmental quality, and overall quality of life.

Each of the communities studied here has an institution or agreement – whether it be a government body like the GVMC, sturdy non-profits like the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce or the Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay, or a pact like the agreement between Frankenmuth city and township – that is on solid enough footing to stand the test of time.

Ultimately, it is the formation of such institutions and agreements on the regional and sub-regional levels that should be the goal of policy makers in Michigan.

Four Obstacles

While the three communities profiled here have largely succeeded in getting coordinated growth management plans off the ground, they – along with many other Michigan communities – face substantial obstacles in their efforts to plan for future growth.

Outmoded state planning and zoning laws. As noted in the introduction, Michigan's planning laws do not require even the minimum amount of coordination between jurisdictions on planning or zoning issues.

While the regions profiled here have largely surmounted this obstacle through a combination of committed leadership and years of hard work, the lack of coordination in state law has had some effect.

In Frankenmuth, for instance, the city and township planning commissions meet jointly to discuss development proposals within the urban growth boundary. However, the two communities cannot legally form a joint planning commission because such a body is not recognized by state law.

The failure to notify neighboring communities of impending planning and development decisions, the lack of agreed-upon processes to handle disputes over utility services and land transfers, and the absence of sub-regional organizations devoted to protecting municipalities' common interests are among the biggest obstacles to inter-jurisdictional cooperation in efforts to rein in sprawl. Current state laws do not do nearly enough to encourage such communication and cooperation.

Outside economic and legal pressure. The emergence of business-led groups like New Designs for Growth in Traverse City is an encouraging sign. But even in regions where local business interests might agree on measures to manage growth, the influence of individual developers – either from inside or outside the community – can put enormous pressure on local governments to approve sprawling developments.

As noted above, developers have already begun buying up land outside the Frankenmuth Township growth boundary in hopes of persuading the township to loosen its development rules. Mark Nixon of the Coalition for Sensible Growth in Traverse City claims the investments made by devel-

opers in land on either side of the proposed Boardman River bridge were a major force in pushing the bridge project forward.

More ominously, municipalities throughout Michigan must constantly be prepared to defend their zoning and planning decisions from lawsuits brought by developers. Especially in small communities, the threat of litigation can cause municipal leaders to shy away from growth management policies that could provoke a legal response.

Coordinated planning is meaningless unless the plans are enforced. State law should offer protection to municipalities or groups of municipalities that go through a proper, thoughtful process of master plan and zoning ordinance development. Meanwhile, communities must ensure that significant political support exists for any master plan to defend it from attack by outside economic forces.

Conflicts between levels of government. If communities invest their time, money and effort in developing plans that reflect their values, state and county officials should at least be required to respect those plans.

Sadly, that is not often the case. In 1999, for example, the Grand Traverse County township of Acme adopted a master plan focusing on preservation of natural resources and farmland, the creation of a vital town center, and cluster residential development. Shortly after the plan was completed, the state Department of Transportation and Grand Traverse County Road Commission announced that they were considering widening M-72, the main east-west road through the township, a move that could bring more traffic and development to the corridor.[56]

Inter-governmental conflicts also limit the usefulness of existing tools that could be used to foster coordination. Counties and regional bodies already have the ability to plan under Michigan law. However, many municipalities have been loath to cooperate with county planning initiatives and many counties have failed to show leadership in soliciting municipal involvement.

With Michigan's treasured tradition of home rule, there is much resistance to "top-down" planning approaches such as a state master plan. But the "bottom-up" alternative is equally untenable unless plans are coordinated among the various levels of local, county, regional and state government. State policy should encourage communication to take place among planning officials at all levels of government, and ensure that the plans adopted by governments are consistent with one another.

Historical lack of community consensus. As the case studies show, it is much easier for municipalities to effectively work together on issues where they share a common interest. Cooperation has proven more difficult on issues where there is little consensus – such as transportation, sewer and water extensions and revenue sharing.

The only solution to this weakness in coordinated planning is more coordinated planning. Organizations like the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council have parlayed their success in relatively easy-to-address areas such as inter-municipal land-use planning and the development of a regional geographical information system into modest successes on touchy issues such as land transfers. Metro council officials are now trying to expand their efforts to cover even more difficult issues such as transportation.

Achieving public consensus on how to address Michigan's sprawl problem is an essential prerequisite to effective action. Governmental bodies on all levels need to begin engaging their citizens in a conversation about how to achieve the best possible future for their communities, their regions, and, ultimately, all of Michigan.

Works in Progress

As the three case studies make abundantly clear, coordinated planning – such as it has existed to date in Grand Rapids, Frankenmuth and Traverse City – is not without its flaws.

The limited resources of these projects – and the even more limited legal support provided by state planning law – have constrained the ability of current coordinated planning efforts to address the toughest issues, build the broadest possible support, and create the most comprehensive and effective frameworks for regional cooperation.

It also must be understood that the proper time frame for evaluating the success of coordinated planning efforts is not months or years, but decades. Today's rampant sprawl is the result of public policies that originated in the early 20th Century. In contrast, many of the initiatives profiled here have been in existence for only a few years, with the oldest being the 17-year-old Frankenmuth agreement.

As a result, the organizations and initiatives profiled here can be properly viewed as pioneers in the earliest stages of their exploration of new ways to deal with the pressing environmental, economic and quality-of-life threats posed by sprawl.

When viewed through that lens, the achievements detailed in this report are truly impressive. State policy-makers should not only focus on encouraging more communities to follow those profiled in this report, but also on giving communities like Grand Rapids, Frankenmuth and Traverse City even more tools to plan for a brighter future.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is much the state of Michigan can do to encourage communities to en gage in coordinated planning efforts like the ones highlighted in this report.

Michigan's four planning enabling acts were passed at different times and under varying circumstances. They do not require municipalities to work with their neighbors or require coordination of plans made by varying levels of government.

Those laws should be replaced by a single law with clear expectations that communities cooperate with one another in their planning.

Such a law should build on the positive experiences of communities like those profiled in this report, while removing the obstacles to their success. Specifically, it should:

Give citizens the tools they need to control their destiny.

- Guarantee that communities are notified of zoning or master plan decisions in neighboring communities that could affect their future.
- Give communities the right to comment on neighboring communities' planning proposals and to have those comments included in the public record. Legislation to this effect was enacted by the Legislature in 2001 and should be enthusiastically accepted by municipalities and enforced by the state.
- Ensure that the planning process includes ample opportunities for public participation.

Create effective processes to encourage coordination.

- Encourage greater coordination of plans made by various bodies within a municipality – e.g. planning commissions, historic district commissions, sewer and water boards, etc.
- Require greater coordination of plans made by all levels of government. County plans should be consistent with local plans, regional plans with county plans, and state policies with regional plans.
- Explicitly authorize communities to form joint or sub-regional planning commissions, and encourage participation in county and regional planning efforts. Municipalities that share economic, environmental, or cultural characteristics should have the flexibility to plan together as a group.

Enhance home rule.

- Protect communities from legal liability when they go through a proper process of master planning and zoning ordinance adoption and enforcement. Currently, the lack of coordination between master plans and zoning ordinances opens municipalities to potential lawsuits. That fear of litigation, in turn, frightens some communities away from taking actions against sprawl that enjoy broad popular support.
- Requiring zoning ordinances and other local policies to be consistent with the master plan, and clarifying the role and powers of local planning commissions to make land-use decisions, would go a long way toward easing the legal fears of local governments.
- Give local governments the flexibility to adopt the type of plans and participate in the coordinated planning endeavors that best meet their needs. The state can encourage participation in coordinated planning by giving priority for state capital funds to communities that work in concert with their neighbors.
- Provide a source of funding that would enable even small communities to prepare and implement effective plans.

Take the long view.

- Require plans to have a 20-year focus and be updated regularly to keep up with changing conditions.

- Encourage municipal planners to adopt six-year capital improvement plans to ensure that local spending priorities move communities toward realization of their master plans.

Such an approach would enhance the ability of municipalities to plan for their future while respecting Michigan's tradition of home rule. It would allow other regions in Michigan to build on the kind of successes achieved by the regions highlighted in this study – successes that hold out the promise of preserving natural treasures, community values and Michiganders' quality of life.

NOTES

[1] Sarah Hollander, "SEMCOG to Study Plan for Car Distribution Center," *Ann Arbor News*, 8 September 1999.

[2] Personal communication, 17 October 2001. Note: Unless otherwise attributed, subsequent quotes from the same individual are derived from the first conversation cited.

[3] Dean Cousino, "London Residents Object to Rail, Truck Center Next Door," *Monroe Evening News*, March 1999, obtained from Milan Area Concerned Citizens.

[4] Personal communication, 18 October 2001.

[5] Tischler refused to name the specific municipalities mentioned in the episodes described in this section in order to avoid stirring up any ill will.

[6] Kim Hill, Huron Land Use Alliance, "Managed Growth, Examples from Other Communities," downloaded from http://www.hvcn.org/info/hlua/otherexamples.html, 12 October 2001.

[7] Michigan in Brief, "Land Use," 1 April 1998, downloaded from http://www.michiganinbrief.org/text/issues/issue-42.htm, 26 December 2001.

[8] David Czurak, "Urban Sprawl: Winners, Losers," *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, 11 August 1997.

[9] Keith Schneider, "Acting as a Region to Tame Sprawl," *Great Lakes Bulletin*, Spring 1999, 10.

[10] David Czurak, "MSU Study Scrutinizes Urban Sprawl," *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, 8 February 1999, 1.

[11] Keith Schneider, "Acting as a Region to Tame Sprawl," *Great Lakes Bulletin*, Spring 1999, 10.

[12] Haya El Nasser and Paul Overberg, "What You Don't Know About Sprawl," *USA Today*, 22 February 2001, 1A.

[13] Sources for this and subsequent profiles: population data, U.S. Census Bureau, Office of State Demographer, Michigan Department of Management and Budget; land values, Michigan State University Department of Agricultural Economics, downloaded from http://www.aec.msu.edu/agecon/government/sevtaxcounty.htm, 10 December 2001; cropland figures, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1997 Census of Agriculture.

[14] Keith Schneider, "Acting as a Region to Tame Sprawl," *Great Lakes Bulletin*, Spring 1999, 7.

[15] Personal communication, 8 November 2001.

[16] Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, "Metropolitan Development Blueprint Summary," downloaded from http://www.gvmc.org/bp_summary.htm, 14 November 2001.

[17] United Growth for Kent County, "Water/Sewer Futures Project – Grand Rapids, MI," *The Urban-Rural Connection*, September/October 1999.

[18] Personal communication, 1 November 2001.

[19] United Growth for Kent County, "Water/Sewer Futures Project – Grand Rapids, MI," *The Urban-Rural Connection*, September/October 1999.

[20] Eric DeLong and James Hatch, "New Water and Sewer Partnership Creates a Platform for Key Regional Issues," *Getting Smart!*, the newsletter of the Smart Growth Network, February 2000, 5.

[21] David Czurak, "Council Keys Cooperation," *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, 18 January 1999.

[22] Grand Valley Metro Council, "Land Transfer Standards: Recommended Procedures for Municipal Units," January 1999.

[23] Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute, Grand Valley State College, "Bear Creek Watershed Project: Demographics of the Watershed," downloaded from http://www4.gvsu.edu/wri/bearpage/stewplan/demograp.html, 19 October 2001.

[24] Patricia S. Van Dyke and Holly C. Van Scoy, Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute, Grand Valley State College, "Protection, Preservation and Restoration in an Urban Watershed," downloaded from http://www4.gvsu.edu/wri/bearpage/stewplan/index.html, 30 October 2001.

[25] Personal communication, 25 October 2001.

[26] *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, "Metro Council Plugs in Communities With REGIS," 6 March 2000.

[27] David Czurak, "Urban Sprawl: Winners, Losers," *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, 11 August 1997.

[28] Kelly Thayer and Keith Schneider, "In a Major Disconnect, Highways Still Dominate Grand Rapids Agenda," *Great Lakes Bulletin*, Spring 1999, page 13.

[29] David Czurak, "Transportation Proposal Has 20/20 Vision," *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, 16 November 1998.

[30] *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, "New Issues Projected from Census," 9 April 2001.

[31] David Czurak, "Metro Council Plugs In Communities with REGIS," *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, 6 March 2000.

[32] Haya El Nasser and Paul Overberg, "What You Don't Know About Sprawl," *USA Today*, 22 February 2001, 1A.

[33] Frankenmuth Township's decline in population from 1990 to 2000 can be attributed to annexation of newly developed land by Frankenmuth City.

[34] Personal communication, 17 October 2001.

[35] Charles Graham, personal communication, 17 October 2001.

[36] Personal communication, 24 October 2001.

[37] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, "1990 Census of Housing and Population, Population and Housing Unit Counts, Michigan,"; Michigan State Budget Office, "Population for Counties in Michigan," downloaded from http://www.state.mi.us/census2000/place.pdf, 31 October 2001.

[38] Michigan State Budget Office, "Michigan Census 2000," downloaded from http://www.state.mi.us/census2000, 10 December 2001.

[39] From "1990 Census of Housing and Population, Population and Housing Unit Counts, Michigan," U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census; "Population for Counties in Michigan," Michigan State Budget Office, downloaded from http://www.state.mi.us/census2000/place.pdf, 31 October 2001.

[40] Keith Schneider, Michigan Land Use Institute, "In Michigan, Business Leads in Regional Plan," 16 June 1996, downloaded from http://www.mlui.org/projects/growthmanagement/newdesigns.otgnedes.html.

[41] U.S. Department of Agriculture, "1997 Census of Agriculture Highlights," downloaded from http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/census97/highlights/mi/mi.htm, 31 October 2001.

[42] "Survey of Local Priorities Shows Lack of Leadership," *Traverse City Record-Eagle*, 29 July 2001.

[43] Grand Traverse County, "Focus 2020: Growth Management vs. Business as Usual," downloaded from http://www.grandtraverse.org/masterp/gmvbu.htm, 25 October 2001.

[44] "Survey of Local Priorities Shows Lack of Leadership," *Traverse City Record-Eagle*, 29 July 2001.

[45] Quote from Dan Wolf, chairman of the Traverse City Chamber of Commerce governmental affairs committee. From John Flesher, "Business Must Be Involved in Anti-Sprawl Efforts, Leaders Say," *Associated Press*, 9 September 1999.

[46] Personal communication, 22 October 2001.

[47] Keith Schneider, Michigan Land Use Institute, "Novel Public-Private Partnership to Promote Jobs and Protect the Environment," downloaded from http://www.mlui.org/projects/growthmanagement/newdesigns/wyckoff.html, 26 October 2001.

[48] Personal communication, 22 October 2001.

[49] Bill Echlin, "Developers Plan Walkable Community," *Traverse City Record-Eagle*, 8 November 1999.

[50] Thomas Bevier, "Traverse City: Surge In Downtown Construction Has Many Fearing They'll End Up Too Urban," *Detroit Free Press*, 5 June 1999.

[51] Personal communication, 24 October 2001.

[52] Cari Noga, "Saving the Orchards," *Traverse City Record-Eagle*, 25 July 1999.

[53] Personal communication, 24 October 2001.

[54] Personal communication, 1 November 2001.

[55] Christopher Wright, "Major Watershed Protection Planning Grant Awarded," *The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay Member/Partner Newsletter*, Summer 2001.

[56] Keith Schneider, Michigan Land Use Institute, "Breaking the Sprawl Addiction: A Twelve Step Program," *Great Lakes Bulletin*, March 2000.