

COMMUNITIES TAKE ON THE BATTLE AGAINST SPRAWL

Sprawl has become one of the hottest words in the political lexicon. From the White House to the State House, America's leaders are looking for ways to relieve the strain of generations of public policies intended to promote suburban growth. Mainstream support for "green" measures is growing, and according to Phyllis Myers, president of State Resource Strategies, citizens are voting for close-to-home conservation. Myers conducted a comprehensive survey of last November's elections that analyzed 240 state and local ballot measures supporting a wide range of conservation and community enhancement activities.

Voters are tired of paying the price of sprawl: rising property taxes, crowded schools, traffic jams and long commutes, pollution, declining neighborhoods and loss of agricultural land and green space. According to Myers, conservation ballot measures rose more than 50 percent from her 1996 survey. Voters approved 72 percent of them, triggering more than \$7.5 billion in new state and local government spending. Political strategists say that it is suburban women – a voting group that helps decide elections – who are most concerned.

Most of the measures reflected a broad spectrum of conservation finance activities and elicited strong support. They ranged from recreational facility renovation in older cities to buying parks, building trails and restoring habitat for endangered species. Protecting farmland is an important part of this political landscape. New Jersey's highly-touted constitutional amendment to set aside \$98 million of sales tax revenues is intended to save 1 million acres of open space and farmland in the next 30 years. "Even though anti-sprawl was an important theme, we need to understand what people were responding to – there was a strong element of people wanting to improve their communities, to make prudent investments," Myers said. Voters supported green infrastructure in record numbers, suggesting that Governor Gray Davis was on to something when he announced an "Era of Higher Expectations" for California in his inaugural address. *continued on page 6*

INNOVATIONS

MAKING DEVELOPERS PAY FOR SPRAWL

A market-based strategy in Lancaster, California, offers an alternative approach to traditional growth management plans. Located 60 miles north of Los Angeles, this southern California community allows developers to build wherever they want – as long as they pay a premium for moving further from town.

Acknowledging that the relatively low cost of rural land is a primary factor driving suburban sprawl, Lancaster's Urban Structure Program (USP) addresses the impacts of growth by shifting the costs of new public facilities and services to the developments that require them. Adopted in 1992, it was designed to promote compact development and to ensure that new developments do not increase the cost or reduce the level of public services provided to existing residents and businesses. What makes it unique is that the USP uses a computer model to assess impact fees, including a "distance surcharge." *continued on page 2*

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In This Issue:

- 1 COMMUNITIES BATTLE AGAINST SPRAWL
- 1 INNOVATIONS: Making developers pay
- 3 POLICY REPORT: Making Sense of the Census
- 3 USING RESOURCES WISELY: Cultivating agriculture in the city
- 4 THE LAY OF THE LAND
- 5 GOOD DEALS: Colorado farm hedges out sprawl
- 6 THE LAND ON THE LINE: Urban growth boundaries
- 7 WHAT'S NEW

Communities

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**Making Developers Pay
for Sprawl**
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Innovations *continued from page 1*

The computer model calculates development impact fees for three categories of municipal expenditures: infrastructure, facilities and operating costs. Infrastructure fees pay for streets, signs and drainage/flood control projects. Facilities include parks, libraries, police and fire stations and administrative offices. The operations fee covers the projected 20-year cost of public services, such as police and fire protection, public works, recreation and community development programs.

"The operations impact fee is the heart of growth management provision," says Lancaster Associate Planner David Ledbetter, explaining that the equations used to calculate this fee include the distance surcharge. Projects that are located far from existing services must pay an additional fee based on the actual distance between the new development and the nearest public park, police station, city corporate yard and City Hall. The surcharge makes it more expensive for developers to build new homes and businesses in remote rural areas.

Lancaster's computer model incorporates substantial research documenting the connection between new development and the demand for services, the cost of providing these services and the type of services required by different land use categories. This helps ensure that fees are equitable and safeguards the program from legal challenges. The city established measurable performance objectives for municipal facilities and services to help project costs. These standards—for example, three acres of parkland per 1,000 users—help ensure a high quality of life for community residents.

Ledbetter emphasizes that the USP is not a growth management tool in the traditional sense. "It's more of a financial approach than a planning approach," he explains. "Initially, we looked at urban limit lines to manage growth," says Ledbetter. "The trouble we found was that no matter where we drew the lines on the map, there were winners and losers. We had a lot of opposition to trying to go forward with a program like that." Instead of fighting the developers, Lancaster officials changed their approach and brought developers into the process. The result has been limited opposition to the USP.

The city hired a consulting firm to design the USP. The cost—approximately \$50,000—was surprisingly modest. Ledbetter believes that other communities could use Lancaster's approach, but he emphasizes that they would have to redesign the model to fit their needs. Lancaster's fees don't include schools, water or sewer, because these services are handled by other entities. "As the jurisdiction gets larger," Ledbetter warns, "the model will become more complex, and more costly." Lancaster updates the database used to calculate fees every year. "It would be ideal to connect the model to a geographic information system," Ledbetter reflects. "It would make updating much easier."

Has the USP been successful? "It is recouping costs in fees," says Ledbetter. When it comes to fighting sprawl, the jury still is out. Lancaster developed the USP in response to the building boom of the 1980s. Between 1980 and 1990, the city's population doubled, from less than 50,000 residents to nearly 100,000. But when the program was implemented in 1992, Southern California was sliding into a deep recession, which slowed the demand for new homes. "Now the economy is picking up," observes Ledbetter, "but we haven't really hit the upswing yet. We need a sustained period of development to test growth management potential." 

USING RESOURCES WISELY

CULTIVATING AGRICULTURE IN THE CITY

"Agriculture is an essential component of any plan to create sustainable urban communities," explains Greg Watson, executive director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) and former Massachusetts Commissioner of Food and Agriculture. "It is a powerful and readily-accessible tool to close the nutrient, carbon and pollution loops that are currently wide open and potentially devastating to most urban communities." Since 1995, Watson has worked to bring agriculture to residents of a low-income neighborhood in Boston, Massachusetts, to make it a better place to live.

Fifteen years ago, concerned residents of Boston's Roxbury/North Dorchester area met to gain control of 60 acres of neglected city land. Their dream was to live in a safe, friendly neighborhood, to increase employment and decrease their poverty levels. So they hired their own planning consultants to help them redevelop their decaying community. Open space and urban agriculture were woven in as an integral part of the plan.

"Dudley Village is a work-in-progress – a unique and bold experiment in civic engagement and community-based planning and design," explains Watson. "Food and food-related enterprises are expected to play key roles in making this vision a reality." The residents' dream of economic development is coming true with the help of an urban food system including community gardens, greenhouses and possibly a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation.

continued on page 4

POLICY REPORT

MAKING SENSE OF THE CENSUS

The 1997 Census of Agriculture, released on February 1, 1999 seems to show improvement from decades of farmland loss. Data for many counties show an increase in the number of farms and acres of farmland, which at first glance seems encouraging. Unfortunately, this appears to be due to changes in reporting, not success at reversing the trend.

This was the first time the Census of Agriculture was conducted by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) instead of the Bureau of the Census. NASS collected and interpreted data differently than in the past. According to NASS, one significant change was precipitated by the North American Free Trade Agreement. To standardize industrial classes between the United States, Canada and Mexico, they expanded the definition of agriculture to classify Christmas tree and maple syrup production as agriculture instead of forestry. Another important change was that they counted entire farms enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. In the past, if the whole farm was in CRP, it was left out of the census.

What has remained the same is that land use data provided by the census – such as land in farms – does not track farmland conversion. For national data on agricultural land use trends, planners, concerned citizens and conservation professionals should use the National Resources Inventory. The NRI is compiled by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and tracks the amount of crop, range and pasture land converted to developed use during each survey period. It specifically records the amount of prime and unique farmland converted to development. The 1997 NRI is slated for release this summer. Look for a comprehensive analysis in a future issue of Connection. 🚜

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For national data on agricultural land use trends, use the National Resources Inventory. The 1997 NRI is slated for release this summer.

**Making Sense of the Census
Contact: Jennifer Dempsey
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THE LAY OF THE LAND

From 1970 to 1990:

- The U.S. population increased by 22.5%, yet the number of vehicle miles traveled increased 98.4%
Source: Selected Highway Statistics and Charts, Federal Highway Administration
- The density of urban population decreased by 23%.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau
- Los Angeles population grew by 45% while developing 200% more land; Cleveland's population dropped 11% while developing 33% more land and Chicago grew by 4% while developing 46% more land and increasing commercial areas by 75%.
Source: Farming on the Edge report; American Farmland Trust

A summary of fiscal impact studies shows that compact growth consumes 45% less land than sprawling development and costs 25% less for roads, 15% less for utilities and 5% less for housing.
Source: <http://tamalpais.sierraclub.org/transportation/sprawl/Factsheet.htm>

Eighty percent of China's arable land is designated "fundamental farmland." The death penalty is allowed to punish "saboteurs" who build on it without approval.
Source: Philadelphia Inquirer, 2/11/99

**"Dudley Village is a work-in-progress—a unique and bold experiment in Civic engagement and community-based planning and design."
Contact: Greg Watson
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Cultivating Agriculture *continued from page 3*

DSNI fought for four years to gain control over 30 acres of vacant lots slated for development. With the help of private foundations, municipal, state and federal funds, residents sponsored clean-ups and established dozens of community gardens. Today, those gardens give residents a chance to work the land and sell their goods at the weekly farmers' market in their town common. Watson started organizing Boston farmers' markets in the late 1970s, and still believes they are a good way to foster community development and help urban residents connect to where their food comes from.

Agriculture is growing in the Dudley Street neighborhood. Plans are underway to clean up the site of a former garage by redeveloping it as an ecologically calibrated greenhouse or "bioshelter." Using funds from the Massachusetts Highway Department, by summer this project will have transformed a contaminated brownfield into a community greenhouse as part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Supplemental Environmental Program.

Residents will sell fresh greens and herbs grown in the greenhouses to local restaurants as a way to foster economic development. By taking advantage of their ethnic diversity, Watson hopes that growing food that reflects the residents' multi-cultural mix will add value to their agricultural products and give locally owned businesses a leg up. Proceeds go into a community fund for youth programs or other projects. In addition, a study is being conducted to determine if a 5- to 10-acre CSA could work in the neighborhood. Watson even imagines using the Internet as a direct marketing tool that could lead to contracting with rural farmers to meet expanded demand.

Watson stresses that partnerships between the farm and city are two way. He asks: "Can we make cities livable, vibrant and desirable? Cities are built for density – can we use technology to make them so desirable that people want to stay in them and so reverse the trend taking over agricultural and other natural lands?" Contact Greg Watson, 617-442-9670. 📞

GOOD DEALS

COLORADO FARM HEDGES OUT SPRAWL

When the Colorado Open Space program bought development rights to the Shanahan Farm, it protected more than a working operation and great views. The Shanahans' land was a critical piece of the city of Boulder's greenbelt, which serves as a hedge against sprawl. Purchasing the farm's development rights was a way for the city to use agricultural land protection to promote good planning and maintain its quality of life.

Driving into Boulder from the south on Colorado Highway 93, "The Shanahan farm is the last open land on the left," says Ann Fitzsimmons of the Boulder Open Space Department. "It's an expanse of grass that's kind of cradled against the slope of a hill." The farm's strategic location made it a high priority for the open space program. Because of the topographic change, "The view from the south is quite striking and ... if you developed down the slope and onto the farm, you wouldn't get the distinct edge of the city," she explains.

Boulder residents and officials were ahead of their time in recognizing the need to protect agricultural and other resource lands. The city developed its first open space plan in 1967 and started buying properties on its southern edge to form a greenbelt. Open space planners raced for time against developers who already were platting subdivisions from the north. In 1985, when COS purchased its development rights, the Shanahan farm was like a line in the sand. Protecting it helped stop a wave of new houses from flowing over Boulder's city boundaries toward the Denver suburbs.

During the 1970s when the city first approached the Shanahans about the possibility of protecting their land, they were reluctant to sell. "The land's been in the family since 1868," says Lynn Shanahan, whose great-grandparents were homesteaders from Minnesota. Although Lynn and his parents had no desire to develop their property, they were concerned about giving up any control over their land. He says they ultimately decided to sell their development rights to avert the chance of the city taking their land by eminent domain. The Shanahans signed agreements *continued on page 6*



Greenbelt Connection

Photo courtesy of
Planning Department,
City of Boulder, Colorado.

Colorado Farm *continued from page 5*

with the city to sell development rights on two parcels, totalling 178 acres. In exchange, the city paid them nearly \$2 million for the deal, which included a share of the family's water rights. The Shanahans also donated a public access easement for a trail, which connects their land with other city open space parcels.

The OSD identified four important reasons to protect the farm:

1. Reserving Open Space for the general public's scenic enjoyment;
2. Preserving existing farming and ranching areas and use;
3. Protecting the buffered area at the southern boundary of the developed part of the city; and
4. Protecting the entrance into the city.

Since then, Lynn and his wife, Sandy, took over the property and farming operation from Lynn's parents. They raise hay and calves on the land. After his family's initial hesitation, Lynn now concludes that the deal "probably worked out better for everybody. The county and the state still get their taxes paid, and we still own the ground." Reflecting on his childhood and all the families that used to farm around Boulder, he reports, "we're about the only ones who still own our land." 🚗

THE LAND ON THE LINE

URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARIES: PROMOTING OR PREVENTING SPRAWL?

Urban growth boundaries (UGBs) establish lines around settled areas to encourage development within the boundary and to discourage it outside. They are a key component of Oregon's Growth Management Law. Adopted in 1973, it zoned 40,000 square miles for agriculture and forestry and generally is considered the most effective law of its kind at protecting rural resources. Portland Oregon's UGB restricts land outside the boundary to residential, farm or forest use. While lot size varies by jurisdiction, a 40-acre minimum is common. Recently, several California counties adopted similar measures and public debate surfaced about the use of UGBs.

Proponents claim that UGBs reduce the costs of public services by promoting efficient land use and extension of infrastructure systems, encourage redevelopment of central cities and preserve farm and forest land in rural areas.

Critics argue that Portland's UGBs have not expanded sufficiently and have driven up land and housing costs and encouraged leapfrog development into rural areas outside of the boundaries.

Please share your knowledge and express your views by sending an e-mail message to landworksonline@farmland.org – to join the discussion write <subscribe> in the subject heading and leave the body of the message blank. 🚗

Communities Against Sprawl *continued from page 1*

When Vice President Gore announced the Lands Legacy Initiative, he expressed a growing national view: "In too many places, people move out to the suburbs in search of the American dream only to find that they're playing leap-frog with bulldozers." Lands Legacy is the \$1 billion conservation proposal announced by the Clinton administration in January.

Gore's sentiments were echoed in state-of-the-state addresses by governors from both parties. Vermont Democrat Howard Dean said, "We have an extraordinary opportunity to preserve what we value about Vermont's landscape and to keep

**Urban Growth Boundaries,
what do you think? Help
advance the quality of this
dialogue by joining our
discussion group at
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our sense of community. If you think these values are not at risk, look around you at other states: forest lands stripped, big-box stores turning downtowns into ghost towns, grazing fields now supporting condominiums." Florida Republican Jeb Bush said, "We can bring opportunity and growth to our urban cores, and in the process, sustain our natural environment."

The antidote – smart growth – is gaining national attention, official clout and a marked increase in media coverage. But according to Myers, the dilemma is more complex than the headlines and political dialogue suggest. Part of the difficulty is that sprawl has a tendency to cross jurisdictional lines, but land use issues often are decided at the local level. Americans are wary of regional proposals – much less proposals that suggest national land use planning. Describing his Livability Agenda to help communities preserve green space, enhance economic competitiveness and improve their quality of life, Gore stressed, "We've been proud to play a role – not by telling communities what to do, but by helping them to do what they want to do." A recent phone survey by the Competitive Enterprise Institute found that 67 percent of respondents want state or local governments to address sprawl issues, while only 8 percent believe the federal government should take the lead.

From Portland Maine to Portland Oregon, local measures are gaining strength. According to Myers, "the big picture is that people are very involved in their communities' efforts to deal with growth and development pressures, and the votes indicate that they're willing to put money behind solutions to these issues." More than 226 of the November measures were considered in counties, towns, cities and special districts. Of these, 163 were approved, contributing about one-quarter of the total funding. The Northeast had 111 ballot measures and an 86 percent approval rating. Western states experienced a significant step-up of activity and New Mexico and Utah saw their first-time passage of bonds for open space. If nothing more, these victories serve as a barometer of public opinion. *continued on page 8*

WHAT'S NEW ON LANDWORKS HOMEPAGE

It is 4 p.m. on Friday and you need to know the status of The Montana Agricultural Heritage Act (SB 342). Where do you turn? LandWorks Web site, of course! We post a weekly national *Policy Update*, a biweekly newsletter called *Field Notes*, as well as legislative alerts, an online, linked version of *Connection*, model documents and more.

What's new on the LandWorks site? We recently posted an agricultural statistics sheet with important national facts and links to the sources of data. The *Resources* section features a set of sample documents that can be adapted for your use. Check out the updated version of our state and local matrices on the status of Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement programs, which show the track record of active programs to date.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

We want the LandWorks Web site to give you the most timely and relevant information to help you be as effective as possible. Please let us know how we can serve you better. Share any thoughts or ideas you have on how we can improve our services or additional services you could use by e-mailing Landworks@farmland.org. We look forward to hearing from you. 🚗

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Communities Against Sprawl *continued from page 7*

In Ventura County, 67 percent of voters approved a ballot initiative called SOAR (Save Open Space and Agricultural Resources) requiring proposed zoning changes in areas covered by agricultural zoning to be approved by public referendum. Lancaster California's new Urban Structure Program uses a market-based strategy to fight sprawl (see story p.1) More recently, in February, Pennsylvania State Representative David Steil introduced three bills to curb urban sprawl. One of these requires developers who want to build within proposed urban growth boundaries to buy development rights from property owners outside the boundary.

Myers found that existing state and local conservation programs do very well. "People voted overwhelmingly to renew these," she said, "They love them." But 67 measures were not approved – 64 of which were local. Green initiatives continue to struggle in the South, where in Georgia, the only statewide tax on the ballot failed, and the approval rate of conservation and growth-related measures declined in the Midwest. "These are still hard battles, they take a lot of grassroots preparation, and seem to fail if they are perceived as overly narrow or too vague," Myers explained.

More and more resources are available for local leaders to turn for help. For example, in partnership with the Sustainable Communities Network, the Smart Growth Network helps create coalitions to encourage environmentally, fiscally and socially smart development. The World Wide Web is a good place to turn for examples of successful community action. Here are some good places to start:

- American Planning Association: www.planning.org
- Smart Growth Network: www.smartgrowth.org
- Planners Web Sprawl Guide: www.plannersweb.com
- The Center for Rural Affairs: www.cfra.org
- The Aspen Institute Rural Economic Policy Program: www.aspeninst.org/rural
- Sustainable Communities Network: www.sustainable.org
- New World Idea Networks: www.worldideanet.org

Livability at the Ballot Box: State and Local Referenda on Parks, Conservation and Smarter Growth, Election Day 1998 by Phyllis Myers and published by the Brookings Institution is available at www.brook.edu/ES/urban/publications.htm 