



The Urban-Rural



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Fall 2005

Go Green!

In addition to being an expression of school spirit, “Go Green!” is an important value that we can all embrace no matter what team we support. “Go Green!” as the theme of this quarter’s newsletter, refers to ways we can all work to increase the health of our natural systems and environment. Inside this issue you’ll read about a diverse range of programs being implemented here in Kent County. From Green Building and LEED to Commerce Centers. From natural features inventories to Michigan

Department of Environmental Quality programs, there are several ways individuals, businesses and organizations can contribute.

“The absence of land use planning that considers resources, ... integrity of ecosystems and the degradation of urban environments will continue to be the greatest threat to the quality of Michigan’s environment.”

-Governor’s Relative Risk Report, 1992

As a Michigan State University Extension project, United Growth for Kent County works to benefit the natural environment by promoting the efficient use of land. In 2005, United Growth’s committees took on several projects that have a direct impact on strengthening our urban core and preserving prime and unique farmland. These projects include: researching Commerce Center policies that direct state funding toward communities served by existing infrastructure, researching Kent County’s policies related to the funding of the Purchase of Development Rights Program, promoting a forum for groups working on land use issues in Kent County, keeping apprised of the City of Grand Rapids zoning ordinance re-write process, and understanding how local and state budget issues are impacting land use decision-making.

Thank you for taking the time to read about the important work going on in our community.

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This newsletter is posted on the United Growth website at www.msue.msu.edu/unitedgrowth. We hope you will take a few moments to let your friends and colleagues know about the value of the newsletter. Thank you to United Growth Coalition members and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for supporting this publication. For information on becoming a member, please see the membership form included on the last page.

Building Green in West Michigan

By: Nate Gillette, AIA, LEED-AP
Architect with Bazzani Associates

The green building movement is pushing ahead faster than any previous revolution in the design and construction world. Articles in the newspaper and periodicals about green building are appearing more and more frequently. But, what exactly is the green or sustainable building movement? Put simply, the green building movement is concerned with creating healthy buildings that meet the needs of today without compromising the needs of future generations.

Blazing a trail for the sustainability movement is the US Green Building Council (USGBC). The USGBC was formed in 1993 with the task of defining what a green building is. Until that point there was no strict definition of what constituted a green building. Some architects and builders were focusing strictly on energy use while others were concentrating on recycled materials or healthy indoor environments. In the end there was more confusion than real fact about whose building was “greener”. After the USGBC was formed it gathered stakeholders from all facets of the design and construction industries. Building owners, scientists, architects, general contractors and many more were all assembled to define the parameters of holistic green building. After seven years of discussions and laying the framework, LEED was born.

LEED is an acronym that stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmen-



tal Design. It is a voluntary point based certification that a building can receive after meeting certain parameters. The certification has different levels that start with the base level of being Certified, Silver, Gold, and then the upper echelon Platinum buildings. Currently there are only nine Platinum certified buildings in the world. The closest one to the West Michigan area is the Chicago Center for Green Technology in northern Chicago, Illinois.

Although LEED was originally intended for commercial projects the USGBC is beginning to look to the residential market. LEED for Homes has recently been introduced and builds off of the EPA’s Energy Star program. There has been a strong interest from homeowners and builders to develop a program to certify homes. West Michigan is home to one of only eleven LEED for Homes providers in the nation.

The main parameters for green building fall into one of five categories: sustainable building sites, water efficiency, energy efficiency, use and selection of building materials, and the quality of the indoor environment. There are seven prerequisites that all projects must meet. The prerequisites involve protecting storm sewers from sedimentation during construction, commissioning of building systems, minimum energy efficiency, CFC reduction in air conditioning equipment, implementation of a recycling program, minimum indoor air quality standards, and restrictions on smoking in the building. The remaining points are voluntary and are chosen at the design team’s discretion. The building system commissioning is somewhat unique and requires third party verification that the building’s heating, cooling, and electrical systems are working as specified.

West Michigan is home to a significant pocket of LEED certified projects. There are twelve buildings in the Western half of the state that have completed the LEED process. Currently there are six certified, two silver, and four gold projects. A few local examples of buildings that are LEED certified are; the Bunker Interpretive Center at Calvin College, Herman Miller’s Marketplace, the ITP bus transfer station in downtown Grand Rapids, Bazzani Associates’ Headquarters, and the City of Grand Rapids Water Services Department. Twelve may seem like a small number, how

(Continued on page 5)

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Special thanks to Cynthia Price for
creating the heading for the Urban-Rural
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Researching Commerce Centers

By Carol Townsend

United Growth Urban Component Coordinator

The Legislative Committee of United Growth for Kent County is in the process of exploring the concept of Commerce Centers. Establishing Commerce Centers was a top priority recommendation of the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council, the bipartisan commission charged with developing a state policy framework for revitalizing cities, preserving farms, and protecting Michigan's natural resources.

What exactly is a "Commerce Center"?

The actual answer is - nobody knows. That is why the Legislative Committee decided to explore the concept and encourage discussion in helping to create a definition.

The basic premise of Commerce Centers is to direct public investment to communities with existing infrastructure and incentivize compact, mixed use, mixed income, multi-modal development. The intended outcomes would be increased economic vitality of urban areas while also maintaining agricultural lands and other green space.

What areas would become Commerce Centers?

Once again, there is no definitive answer. Some have recommended that every county in the state (83) have a Commerce Center. Others propose only 6 to 10 of our most distressed cities become Commerce Centers. The Legislative Committee is leaning toward using the "Core Communities" cited in the Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act, Public Act 146 of 2000. They are entertaining the addition of criteria that would consider: the labor pool available, the infrastructure already in place, condition of the public schools, and population density.

The Legislative Committee has been studying the proposed Senate Bill (S.B. 344) that would establish Commerce Centers. The Committee is hoping to work with Senator Allen's committee as well as with state organizations interested in this issue. The Committee will be issuing a draft position paper on Commerce Centers. It will be distributed for feedback. Please call Carol Townsend at 336-2029 for a copy or e-mail at townse36@msu.edu.

Special thanks to Andy Guy and Penny Pestle for contributing to this article.

Hiring of the Land Policy Educators

By Soji Adelaja

John A. Hannah Distinguished Professor in Land Policy
Director of the Land Policy Program
Michigan State University

The purpose of United Growth of Kent County is to unite citizens and organizations around the promotion of positive land use in Kent County. This directly aligns with the mission of the Land Policy Program and the People and Land Initiative (PAL) and correlates with our goals to increase public's understanding of land use management and its impact on Michigan's environment, economy and quality of life and to develop local and state land use leaders. United Growth works to develop local leaders and equip them with the knowledge and tools to implement innovative land use policies, works to remove policy barriers and supports effective planning models. United Growth is unique to Kent County and is the envy of other places in Michigan that do not have this useful infrastructure. Both the Land Policy Program and PAL believe strongly that other places could benefit from the United Growth model.

Thanks to the United Growth coordinators for their vision, we have been able to develop a program whereby the United Growth of Kent County can provide leadership and coordination for the creation of a network of similar organizations across Michigan. Starting this year, United Growth will assist new areas of Michigan as we expand Kent County's model to other places. With the help of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, People and Land is establishing a United Growth of Michigan network under the leadership of the United Growth of Kent County. This initiative will be staffed by new Land Policy Educators to be hired in various

places in the state. The Land Policy Educators' program is a competitive one. Counties and groups of counties all over Michigan were offered the opportunity to apply for Land Policy Educators positions on a competitive basis and many counties applied. I am happy to report that five new Land Policy Educators positions are being recruited in the state to execute the United Growth Model and meet other land use education needs.

A new Land Policy Educator will be coming to each of the following areas of Michigan soon: Muskegon County; St. Joseph County; Hillsdale and Lenawee Counties; the Tri-County area of Ingham, Clinton and Eaton; and the five-County thumb area of Huron, Tuscola, Sanilac, Lapeer, and St. Clair. The Land Policy Educators are expected to deliver land use and land policy education at local and regional levels. These

individuals are responsible for developing and delivering well-defined programs. In addition, these individuals will be expected to help bridge gaps between campus-based land use programs and MSU Extension (MSUE) land use education statewide.

One goal of People and Land is to expand inter-regional cooperation statewide. In counties/regions with both a core urban community and strong rural community, the Land Policy Educator will follow the United Growth of Michigan model, fashioned after the United Growth of Kent County program. Land Policy Educators will also deliver Citizen Planner Programs, allowing MSU to expand its Citizen Planner training reach. The Land Policy Program and People and Land are delighted to work with our Kent County partners to implement this new initiative.



Tool Kit Advisors

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United Growth for Kent County

¹ The Ada Open Space Protection Plan is discussed in the Tool Kit and the accompanying CD contains the entire plan plus other useful resources such as a consultant list, data sources, and a Best Practices summary of twenty-five community initiatives for green inventories from Michigan, the U.S. and Canada.)

Looking for Green

By Julie Stoneman, Land Conservancy of West Michigan

A new tool exists to assist local communities wishing to protect important natural features. The *West Michigan Tool Kit for Local Green Inventories* is a “how-to” booklet for local governments that want to undertake inventories for natural features, natural resources and other elements, often the first step in the development of an open space protection, recreation, or a green infrastructure plan. Several factors inspired the creation of the *Tool Kit*, not the least of which is Ada Township’s Open Space Protection Plan and the growing interest of citizens in neighboring townships to initiate similar programs in their communities.¹

The *Tool Kit* covers a wide range of topics from steps to consider before beginning an inventory to integrating the findings into other planning tools such as a master plan. Prepared by the Planning & Zoning Center, Inc. with an advisory committee of local citizens, planners and other land use experts working in Kent County (see left column), the *Tool Kit* was funded by People and Land (a project of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation) and the Grand Rapids Community Foundation with grants to the Land Conservancy of West Michigan, the region’s nonprofit land trust. The Grand Valley Metro Council is another key partner. “We hope to present the *Tool Kit*

with workshops targeting metro area communities as part of our planning outreach,” said Andy Bowman, a Metro Council planner and *Tool Kit* advisor. Both urban and rural communities recognize the importance of identifying and protecting natural lands as vital to a healthy environment, as a means of developing new recreational opportunities such as trails and nature preserves, and preserving community characteristics that contribute to its quality of life. “I think it would be helpful to have an inventory of the entire township,” said Bonnie Shupe, Cannon Township Clerk and *Tool Kit* advisor. “We might have scored additional points on a grant application if we had an inventory in place and could point to the property’s significance.”

If your community is contemplating the value of protecting natural lands and open space, *West Michigan Tool Kit for Local Green Inventories* is a great place to start even if you lack planning or mapping resources. A limited number of copies of the *Tool Kit* are available to Kent County communities. Contact either the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (616-451-9476 or lcwm@naturenearby.org) or the Grand Valley Metro Council (616-776-3876). The *Tool Kit* can also be reviewed and/or downloaded from www.gvmc.org

(Continued from page 2) Building Green in West Michigan

ever there are many more projects in this area that are LEED registered and the numbers grow every week.

An ever growing number of sophisticated building owners are demanding that their projects become LEED

certified. It makes sense from a business standpoint. Buildings are less costly to operate and some business owners feel it gives them an edge over their competition. Enthusiasm in green building isn’t limited to the private sector. Municipalities and governments are getting on board as well. Governor

Jennifer Granholm’s ED 2005-4 signed earlier this year stipulates that all new State of Michigan governmental buildings over 1 million dollars be LEED certified. Green building is a revolution in the design and building industry that won’t be slowing down anytime soon.

A Land Use Book Review

By Jay Hoekstra, Grand Valley Metro Council Planner and
United Growth Urban Committee Co-Chair

Standing. Have you stood lately and watched what was going on? — on a street corner, at a construction site, in a mall? Where would you prefer to stand and watch? Silly questions. But think about it. I bet you would choose a place where you could watch people doing things. I like to walk to a construction site at noon, and I am always disappointed if the workers are not there. Watching people and their activities, sometimes joining in, is one of life's most satisfying and important activities. And informal people watching almost always takes place in and around buildings. In fact the closeness of buildings and how they are arranged can make outdoor social life abundant or nearly impossible.

These topics, the value of outdoor social activities and the physical conditions that influence them are the subjects of Jan Gehl's book — *Life Between Buildings*.

An example: "Distances are used to connote different relationships among people. Such phrases as 'close friends' and 'keeping an arm's distance from someone' indicate the degree of intimacy achieved. Correspondingly, small spaces tend to be perceived as warm and personal. The small dimensions make it possible to see and hear other people, and in small spaces, the details as well as the whole can be enjoyed. Conversely, large spaces are perceived as cold and impersonal. Buildings as well as people are 'kept at a distance.'"

Many of us speak of the pleasant public places that we have visited, but we may not be sure of exactly why we liked them, or how we could replicate them. As visitors, we would not know how such places affected the psychological and social life of the residents. This book is a good source of this information. It would also increase your understanding of the

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"... this is a book that is a great inspiration to me in my work, and I look upon it as one of the classics for all professional or amateur students of architecture and community building, regardless of their age and background, or how short or long their experience may be."

— Ralph Erskine, foreword to
Life Between Buildings

.....
potential richness of neighborhood and town places. Here are some excerpts which may entice you into reading this book:

"Nothing happens because nothing happens."

"In areas with twice the number of children, four times the level of play activity was found."

"People tend to congregate where other people are assembled."

"Slow traffic means lively cities."

"...background noise... must be reduced to 45 to 60 decibels for people to hear most of the other loud and soft sounds of voices, footsteps, songs, and so on, which are part of the complete social situation." If it is louder "Children cannot ask about what they see, and they cannot be answered."

"Opportunities for talking — with companions, with met friends, and in the right circumstances with strangers."

"In the entire history of human settlement, streets and squares have been the



"Contact at a modest level — but definitely contact."

elements around which all cities are organized."

A walk of 1600 feet can be experienced as very long or very short, depending on the quality of the surroundings.

There are many pictures in this book. The pictures are rather old, but clearly and often poignantly illustrate the ideas. The author uses page and paragraph headings to clarify and reinforce his points.

Life Between Buildings is not a new publication (1970's) but still excellent and recommended by many urban designers. The most recent edition is most easily obtained from Denmark over the internet. Don't be afraid. The world is getting smaller and you can use your credit card to buy things in Euros from Denmark and delivered to your door in a week or so. Go to www.arkfo.dk and click around. About \$50 including shipping. Buy two with a friend and save on shipping. Paperback: 202 pages
Publisher: The Danish Architectural Press (June 26, 2003)
ISBN: 8774072838

Land Use Website of the Quarter: Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

By: Dave Bee, West Michigan Regional Planning Commission and
United Growth Coalition Member

Following the newsletter's theme of improving the environment, this article highlights a site maintained to help inform people of the many programs in place to improve Michigan's unique environment. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) maintains a very comprehensive website (www.michigan.gov/deq/) that demonstrates the breadth of responsibilities covered by the DEQ. Since the website is located within Michigan's overall website, it is very easy to visit other related departments to find information.

From the DEQ home page users can access a listing of online services that include dozens of options. A sample of such services include air quality forecasts, requesting speakers, permits, a list of leaking underground storage tank sites, or a list of Michigan plants – so you can learn not to linger in a patch of *Toxicodendron radicans*. The home page also provides a quick

reference to current announcements and upcoming workshops, lists current issues, provides an environmental assistance contact, guides people to help for reporting pollution emergencies, offers opportunities to subscribe to environmental Listservs, and provides a complete list of contact information.

To address the large number of programs the site divides programs into four categories: Air, Land, Waste, and Water. Each of the divisions has spotlight issues, announcements, and featured online services, but each is tailored to guide users to more specific information. Under "Air" the site details how the DEQ works to keep Michigan's air clean through air monitoring, laws and rules, programs, and enforcement. The "Land" section addresses a variety of issues related to keeping Michigan's land clean, redevelopment, and protecting unique features such as sand dunes.

Information about oil and gas wells is also under this heading. Under "Waste" there is a description of Michigan's programs to manage solid waste, liquid waste, and hazardous waste. "Water," which is so important to Michigan, describes the DEQ's water programs that cover the Great Lakes, inland lakes and streams, drinking water, and wetlands.

The quantity of information contained in the site can keep anyone busy for days. If you are working with a certain program within the DEQ, staff is always very knowledgeable about pertinent information and is able to guide users through the site to specific information or forms – saving both parties a lot of time. But, if you are in no hurry and are interested in learning more about Michigan's environment and the programs designed to protect our environment, this site is a great place to spend some time.

Guess What This Photo Is

The purpose of this activity is to familiarize people with their community in a fun and interactive way. Each issue of *The Urban-Rural Connection* will have a different photo of a location in West Michigan. The first person to correctly identify the object or location in the photograph will be recognized in the following issue. Hint: It's not in Grand Rapids.

To submit an answer, send an email to Kendra Wills at willsk@msu.edu or call her at (616) 336-2028.

The correct answer to last month's photo contest is Lincoln Pool on the West side of Grand Rapids. Unfortunately, there were no correct guesses.





**Thank you to
our current
2005-06 members!**

Individual

James R. Buck, City of Grandville Mayor
 Michael Cary, Grand Rapids Housing Board of Appeals
 Tom Cary, West MI Environmental Action Council
 Rick Chapla, The Right Place, Inc.
 Brian Clinger, Westdale Co.
 Stuart and Nancy Cok, Pleasantree Farm
 Dennis Cole, Prein & Newhof
 Rod Denning, GVSU Annis Water Resources Institute
 Kate Dernocoeur, Vergennes Twp Open Space Committee
 Jim Ferro, Ada Twp Planning Director
 Paul Haan
 Rev. George Heartwell, City of Grand Rapids Mayor
 Gail Heffner, Calvin College
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 Tom Mort, City of Grand Rapids
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 Herb Ranta
 Bonnie Robinson, Sparta Township
 Laurin Waldecker
 Marsha Wilcox, Vergennes Twp Open Space Committee

Gold

Alpine Township

Silver

Ada Township
 DuRay Development LLC

Bronze

Aquinas College
 Calvin College
 Cannon Township
 City of Wyoming Clean Water Plant
 Dyer-Ives Foundation
 Fair Housing Center of GGR
 Gaines Charter Township
 Jay and Laura Hoekstra
 Kent County Farm Bureau
 Lowell Charter Township
 Michigan Land Use Institute
 The Rapid
 Township
 Township
 lker
 ndation
 Michigan Regional Planning
 on
 l Williams, Aquinas College
 Works and John O'Connor

United Growth for Kent County Membership Form

Membership Term: May 2005 – April 30, 2006

Name: _____ Position: _____

Organization/Local Unit of Government: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ Web Site: _____

Tel: _____ Fax: _____

Member Benefits

- Supporting the United Growth's Coalition's work to promote positive land use in our community
- Quarterly newsletter "The Urban-Rural Connection"
www.msue.msu.edu/unitedgrowth
- Reduced registration at United Growth events and the annual Networking Luncheon
- Land use organization networking opportunities
- Eligible to apply for future mini-grant funds
- Recognition in United Growth publications, web site and at events
- All membership benefits are transferable to all individuals within the member organization

Membership Level

_____ Individual Membership (Suggested minimum dues is \$15.00)

Organization Membership Levels:

_____ Bronze \$100 _____ Silver \$250 _____ Gold \$500+

Please make check payable to Kent/MSU Extension, includes this form and mail to:
 Attention: Kendra Wills, Kent/MSU Extension, 775 Ball Street NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503.

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