



The Urban-Rural

C.O.N.N.E.C.T.I.O.N

Spring 2007

State Incentives Proposed for Local Government Cooperation

By: Dr. Eric Scorson, State and Local Government Program, Michigan State University

Governor Granholm, in her FY 2007-2008 budget, has addressed the issue of financial incentives for municipalities who engage in cooperative efforts. The program proposal is entitled “Local Government Collaborative Effort Fund” and has been allocated **twenty seven million dollars in the state’s budget**. The theory behind such a program is that funds are needed to spur local government action to cooperate on service provisions across boundaries. The state hopes that such cooperation will maintain critical public services while enhancing the economic development competitiveness of Michigan.

In essence, the money is available to local governments through the revenue sharing program. If the program works as expected, **local governments would be eligible for up to a 2.5 percent increase in revenue sharing as a bonus payment**. Counties are not eligible for the money at this time, only cities, townships and villages.

However, many of the details have yet to be worked out. One of the open questions is whether past

cooperation will count towards these funds. Several groups, including the Michigan Municipal League and Michigan Government Finance Officers Association, have recommended that for the first years of the program, past cooperative ventures would count towards communities being eligible to receive funds. It is likely that in future years that eligibility would only be open to communities working on new cooperative ventures. Other open questions include how cooperation will be measured and whether the funds will be restricted in use or purpose. Meetings are ongoing between state officials to define the terms of the program.

The Senate Majority leader, Michael Bishop (R-Oakland County) has expressed his general interest and support for this type of program, although he has said that the Senate may offer a different version of the plan. Other states such as New York, Maine and New Jersey are currently operating similar programs. However, **Michigan’s, if implemented, would be the largest of its kind in the country.**

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This newsletter is a joint effort between United Growth for Kent County, Inc. and Kent/MSU Extension.

United Growth for Kent County, Inc. has recently become an independent non-profit corporation and is working on obtaining 501(c)(3) status.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has provided funding for this newsletter as a land use education and outreach tool.

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The Fremont Community Joint Planning Commission

*By: Jim Breinling, Fremont City Council Mayor Pro-Tem,
Member of the new Fremont Community Joint Planning Commission
representing the City of Fremont, Past Co-Chair of the Fremont Area Planning
Commission and Mason/MSU Extension Director*

In Newaygo County in 2001 a Joint Planning Committee (JPC) was honored by the City of Fremont and the Townships of Dayton and Sheridan Charter. This was one of the first joint planning efforts in the state. The communities had been working together for several years and had a strong sense of trust – which I feel is the biggest factor for successful joint planning. All three communities needed to update their plans so they decided to do a joint plan to work more efficiently on a regional scale.

The JPC created a Joint Comprehensive Plan for the Fremont community. The community has a metro-wide population of 12,000 and is characterized by an urban center (Fremont) surrounded by inland lakes, rural farmland and open space within a 72 square mile area. **The JPC developed 425 agreements between the three communities within a defined urban growth area.** The JPC was a significant cooperative effort; however the JPC had no binding authority over planning matters – it was only advisory in nature.

After the Joint Municipal Planning Act was adopted as Public Act 226 of 2003 (MCL 125.131, et seq.), the City of Fremont, Dayton and Sheridan Townships all adopted ordinances in 2006 that formally established the Fremont Community Joint Planning

Commission (FCJPC). This process was facilitated by Joe VanderMeulen, PhD, Executive Director of the Land Information Access Association (LIAA), and a grant from the *Partnerships for Change* program.

The first task of the thirteen (13) member FCJPC is the update of the 2001 Joint Comprehensive Plan. While this task is underway, the three existing individual planning commissions continue to function. The plan is to phase out individual planning

(Continued page 6)

Potential Benefits of a Joint Planning Commission:

- Reduce the number of meetings and back-and-forth planning reviews between communities;
- Save planning and zoning costs by sharing the cost of consultants and zoning administration;
- Strengthen in the defensibility of planning and zoning, and specifically against the charge of exclusionary zoning;
- More clearly articulate what development the whole community desires, which can attract investment, reduce infrastructure costs and offer greater protection of natural resources.

*Source: Joe VanderMeulen, Ph D,
Executive Director,
Land Information Access Association.*

United Growth's First Membership Meeting Was a Success!

Forty people were in attendance at United Growth for Kent County's first membership meeting as an independent, non-profit corporation on March 20, 2007 at Kent/MSU Extension.

Highlights of the meeting included: 1) a presentation by internationally recognized urban planning expert and MSU professor June Manning Thomas, Ph.D; 2) the election of the first Board of Directors; and 3) a presentation from each of United Growth's three committees on their action plans for 2007.

Highlights from Dr. Thomas' presentation include:

- Talent, Innovation, Diversity, and Environment (TIDE) are key components of economic development according to Michigan's Cool Cities program.
- Talent is most widely measured by the number of people with a college degree. State and localities should create, attract, and retain an educated workforce.
- Dr. Thomas research showed that a large immigrant population is consistently correlated with economic growth as immigrants are generally entrepreneurial.
- The protection of non-developed land requires further development of central city neighborhoods - their destinies are interconnected. This is why United Growth making the urban-rural connection is so important.

United Growth's three committees are:

- Revitalizing Neighborhoods
- Land Preservation Education
- Intergovernmental Cooperation

The action plans for each committee have been posted at United Growth's new web site at www.unitedgrowth.org.

Anyone is welcome to participate on these committees. Those interested should contact Kendra Wills to confirm the next meeting date. Normally, all three committee meet at the same time on the third Tuesday of the month from 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. at Kent/MSU Extension.



Carol Townsend presents Dr. Thomas with a check for \$100 from United Growth for Kent County as a contribution to the scholarship fund recently established in her name at MSU.

Congratulations to the Newly Elected United Growth for Kent County Board of Directors!



The United Growth for Kent County Board of Directors is pictured above. From left to right: Christine Helms-Maletic, Midtown Neighborhood Association; Dr. Mike Williams, Aquinas College Dean emeritus; Herb Ranta, retired attorney; Kevin Wisselink, ITP/The Rapid; Bonnie Shupe Blackledge, Cannon Township Clerk and Paul Haan, Creston Neighborhood resident and Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan. Not pictured: Cynthia Price, Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council.

At United Growth for Kent County's first Membership Meeting as an independent non-profit organization on March 20, 2007, the first Board of Directors was elected unanimously by the 21 voting members in attendance.

The Board met for the first time on April 17 and elected Paul Haan as President, Mike Williams as Vice President, Herb Ranta as Treasurer and Cynthia Price as Secretary. In addition to providing the overall direction and administration of the organization, the Board will begin the process of becoming a 501(c)(3) organization and will administer the 2007-08 membership campaign with a goal of 100 members. Kendra Wills, Kent/MSU Extension Educator will provide staff support to the Board.

Senator Birkholz Helps Citizen Planner Launch Online Course

*By: Glenn Pape, Program Coordinator,
Citizen Planner Online*

The MSU Citizen Planner Program announced the launch of its complete seven-module Citizen Planner Online program on January 25, and Senator Patty Birkholz (R-Saugatuck Township) issued a West Michigan Challenge to enroll local planning officials.

“This is a great opportunity for our communities and our people who work in planning and zoning,” said Birkholz, “I am going to do my best to make sure that every local official in West Michigan meets this challenge.”

The Citizen Planner Program is adding incentive to the West Michigan Challenge by offering a \$50 discount for individuals and a \$110 discount for each of at least four enrollees from the same jurisdiction who enroll in the full online or classroom program. The counties qualifying for the discounts are: Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, Allegan, Barry, and Eaton Counties.

A former township official and county treasurer, Birkholz has long supported training for local officials. She said they put in long, often unappreciated hours. She believes the Citizen Planner Program can help them do their work more efficiently and wisely. “We need citizen planners. It begins at the local level.”

Wayne Beyea, statewide coordinator for MSU Citizen Planner, explained: “The seven online modules provide a starting point for creating a sense of place and tools to preserve it while managing economic development and growth. The modules are structured around units focusing on specific topics, allowing participants to use the information in an organized fashion and relate the training directly to their needs.”

More than 100 planning officials started the online course as soon as it was made available in December.

To register for the Citizen Planner
Online Course click on:
cponline.msu.edu

To receive the West Michigan Challenge
reduced registration fee, at Check Out use the
discount code: WMICICP7

Kent/MSU Extension will be hosting the Classroom West Michigan Challenge Citizen Planner Program

Wed, May 2: Introduction of Planning and Zoning:
Smart Growth, Ethics and Planning Resources

**Wed, May 9: Legal Foundations of Planning and
Zoning:** Cases, Statutes and Other Planning Authority

Wed, May 16: Roles and Responsibilities Part I:
The Planning Team and the Comprehensive Plan

Wed, May 23: Roles and Responsibilities Part II:
Zoning, Site Plans, and Zoning Board of Appeals
Process

**Wed, June 6: Best Practices for Innovative
Planning and Zoning:** Causes of Sprawl, Traditional
Design and Conservation Design

Wed, June 13: The Art of Community Planning:
Participation, Effective Meetings and Managing Conflict

Cost: \$300 per participant for all 7 sessions or \$240 per
person for 4 or more registrants from the same local
unit of government.

Time: 6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Location: Kent/MSU Extension
775 Ball Ave NE Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Register online at:
http://web2.msue.msu.edu/citizen_planner/westmi07.htm

For more information contact:
Kendra Wills (616) 336-2028 or Tom Tilma
(616) 336-3185.

Ethanol Demand Impacts Local Farmers

With six new ethanol plants in Michigan, corn acreage is expected to increase 14% to 2.5 million acres in 2007. In Kent County, corn acreage is expected to top 49,000 acres compared to 43,000 in 2005.

MSU Extension is conducting research and educational programs for farmers on the best varieties of corn for ethanol production. Increased efficiency comes from varieties that have a high level of starch. To view the results of this research, visit www.fieldcrop.msu.edu and click on corn, then hybrid and variety trials.

As an alternative to petroleum based gasoline, up to 10% ethanol can be burned in any gasoline engine. Automakers have increased the production of “flex fuel” vehicles that are designed to run on 100% gasoline or up to 85% ethanol.

Source: Dennis Pennington, Barry and Kent/MSU Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator (616) 336-3280 or pennin34@msu.edu

Michigan Agricultural Preservation Fund Announces 2006-2007 Grant Recipients

Kent County was one of six local Purchase of Development Rights Programs to receive funding from the most recent round of Michigan Agricultural Preservation Fund (MAPF) grants. Kent County will use \$259,000 grant toward the preservation of the 152 acre Robinson dairy farm in Sparta Township. The Robinson farm is the top scoring farm since the county program was launched in 2003.

Other funding sources to preserve the Robinson farm are \$65,366 from the Robinson family, a \$65,366 match from the Steelcase Foundation and \$68,097 in left over grant funding from last year’s MAPF grant. The Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board hopes to raise the remaining \$28,500 needed to preserve this farm as soon as possible.

Funding sources of MAPF grants are penalty fees from the Public Act 116 program and additional tax dollars collected from the “pop-up” tax when farmland is converted to development. These funding sources have provided approximately \$1.3 million in 2006 and \$500,000 in 2007 for MAPF grants statewide. Kent County has been fortunate to receive grants both years totaling \$511,000.

In order for farmers to access these funds, townships must be pre-qualified by the state. Only four townships in Kent County are qualified: Ada, Grattan, Lowell and Sparta. Qualifications include: designation of an area for farmland preservation on the Future Land Use Map and text in the Master Plan document describing how the township intends to protect and preserve farmland.

Michigan Agricultural Preservation Fund Board 2007 PDR Contributions

Applican	Parcel Acreage	Combined Scoring	PDR Contributions	
			Federal	State
Barry County	114.8	1	\$ 51,750.00	\$ 25,875.00
Washtenaw County	118	2	\$296,250.00	\$296,250.00
Eaton County	106	3	\$106,000.00	\$106,000.00
VanBuren County	8		\$160,000.00	\$ 80,000.00
Kent County	152.4	5	\$259,000.00	\$0
Scio Township (Washtenaw County)	177	6	\$118,413.67	\$0
Total:	749.2		\$991,413.67	\$508,125.00

For more information, contact Kendra Wills, Kent/MSU Extension Land Use Educator at (616) 336-2028 or willsk@msu.edu.

Creative Funding Source for PDR

Isabella County found itself in the same position as many communities with a newly created PDR Program. They had a landowner contributing the maximum 25% of the cost of the development rights purchase, they received a grant covering 50% from the USDA’s Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, leaving 25% to be raised by local funding sources.

A County Commissioner worked to obtain local funding for PDR from the Public Act 123 tax reverted properties program. Like Genesee County, Isabella County created a tax reverted property sales program where funds stay with the county instead of with the state. The County Commissioner and the Isabella County Agricultural Preservation Board with staff support from MSU Extension, worked with state legislators to enact Senate Bill 868 last fall, which amended Public Act 123 and resulted in a sizable allocation of tax reverted property funds to Isabella County. As a result, \$38,000 from this funding source was allocated by the Board of Commissioners to preserve the 120 acre farm. Closing will hopefully take place this year!

Partnering for Success

By Soji Adelaja, Ph.D.

John A Hannah Distinguished Professor in Land Policy
Director, Land Policy Institute
Michigan State University

(Continued from Page 2)

The Fremont Community Joint Planning Commission

commissions over the next two years. After the plan is updated, a Joint Zoning Ordinance will be developed and adopted. LIAA has been contracted to provide technical assistance.

While the Fremont Community Joint Planning Commission is just getting started, future cost savings are anticipated. Over the next five years **a savings of nearly \$300,000** is anticipated through these cooperative efforts. The largest area of savings is reduced consultant fees as only one consultant will be hired when three would have been.

A more detailed history of the Fremont Community Joint Planning Commission effort, how joint planning and zoning commissions can work and other examples of joint planning in Michigan are included in an article by Dr. VanderMeulen in the June 2005 issue of *Planning & Zoning News*. The title of Dr. VanderMeulen's article is "Cooperative Land Use Planning with the Joint Municipal Planning Act, Are Michigan's Local Governments Ready?"

To request a copy of the article, contact *Planning and Zoning News* at (517) 886-0555.



Soji Adelaja, Ph.D.

One of the things that our system of governance affords us is the ability to make local decisions about important local issues. From our schools and libraries to local land use regulations, our communities have significant power to shape their futures. In the old days when the success of communities was principally locally driven, this framework for decision-making worked very well. However, in an increasingly global economy, more and more issues are emerging that require inter-local strategy and cooperation.

With each of the 1800+ local units of government in Michigan making decisions about its future, one wonders who is making decisions about their collective futures. Many of the things that are important to our communities do not have finite municipal boundaries, but indeed are

better dealt with at a more regional scale. For example, one of the key challenges Michigan faces today is how to revamp the economy and create new and sustainable job opportunities for its citizens. The old strategies that target old and tired industries as anchors of economic development just do not work any more. The new economic paradigm is that leveraging our strategic assets (talent, green infrastructure and quality of life, for example) is the way to go. There is little that a particular municipality can actually do about real job creation without working with its neighbors or poaching on them. To be successful in creating sustainable economic development, communities must work together to strategically position themselves to be attractive magnets for employers, entrepreneurs and the creative class. Similarly, there is little that can be done by a given community to reduce costs associated with the delivery of services without working with others to achieve economies of scale.

The fact of the matter is that we need more cooperation amongst our communities. More importantly, we need to give more support to those regional organizations that are bringing business, entrepreneurs, civic leaders and local officials together to achieve regional and multi-jurisdictional goals. West Michigan is particularly endowed with regional organizations. These organizations are not only important, but our success depends on them.

Land Use Book Review

By: Jay Hoekstra, Grand Valley Metro Council and United Growth Member

Book: Visualizing Density

Authors:

Julie Campoli and Alex S. MacLean;
February 2007. \$39.95; 160 pages;
Paperback; ISBN 978-155844-171-2



If you are a public official or planning commissioner, you have probably heard the following comments about proposed developments or zoning changes: “It’s too dense!” “It’s nice, but we’re not used to that much density around here.” “It is too much density, think of the traffic!” “It won’t look good, it is too dense. It is four units per acre!” “It isn’t dense enough.”

We all talk about density, but are we communicating accurately? Finally there is a book which will show you exactly what 4 or 10 units per acre looks like. So that will be simple. But the pictures of places with the same density don’t look alike. There is another “D” word that is just as important, perhaps more so – and that is DESIGN. The many photos in this book show not only what the density numbers look like, it also shows how design makes a very big difference in how dense places look and function.

The publisher’s web site, the Lincoln Institute on Land Policy describes the book:

“Visualizing Density” includes an essay on the density challenge facing the United States, an illustrated

manual on planning and designing for “good” density, and a catalog of more than 250 diverse neighborhoods across the country, noting density in housing units per acre for each site. Four photographs of each location are included—close-up, context, neighborhood, and plan views—to provide an impartial and comparative view of the many ways to design neighborhoods.”

From the Lincoln Institute web site. Both of these sites are 10 dwelling units per acre. © 2005 Lincoln Institute of Land Policy



In fact, well designed density is necessary for cities and towns to function efficiently and beautifully. There are many other books which show how to design towns well – *The New Civic Art*, *Great Streets*, *The Urban Design Handbook*, *Life Between Buildings*, *Pattern Language* – but this book, *Visualizing Density*, gives you a very quick and thorough tour of many places, and starts giving those confusing numbers an image.

You can order this book from the Lincoln Institute web site (it is so new it hasn’t made it to Amazon yet). Or you can order it through your locally owned book store. While you are visiting the web site - www.lincolinst.edu – be sure to click on “visualizing density” under “Resources and Tools.” This website complements the book by providing four resources: a short, illustrated essay on density, a game where you build a neighborhood placing buildings and streets to meet a density goal, and a gallery of photos from across the country showing different densities. There is a section which shows which densities provide good amenities, plus a helpful table which shows density thresholds for transit and retail. And then you can test your new-found expertise with a graded quiz. With this book in your hand you will be the one who knows what ten units per acre might look like.

2006-2007 Highlights

United Growth for Kent County became an independent, non-profit corporation. With the newly elected Board of Directors, work will begin on obtaining 501(c) (3) status. A MOA with Kent/MSU Extension defines the supportive relationship.

Sponsored the first Online Citizen Planner Bookend program in the state with participants representing eight Kent County local units of government, a neighborhood association and two home building professionals.

Hosted a "Can Small Towns Be Cool" workshop presented by Dave Ivan with MSU Extension covering lessons learned from 135 visits to Midwest and East Coast communities.

Honored Senator Patty Birkholz as the first recipient of United Growth's Land Use Stewardship award given at the fall Land Use Networking Luncheon.

Hosted a workshop for 45 neighborhood commercial district business owners and supporters on economic development trends and tools presented by Dr. Zenia Kotval, MSU Urban Planning professor.

Launched the new www.unitedgrowth.org user-friendly web site. With expertise from The W Group and funding from the WKK Foundation, United Growth printed its first professional brochure for use at conferences, workshops and other public events.



United Growth for Kent County Membership Form

Membership Term: May 1, 2007 – April 30, 2008

Name: _____ Position: _____

Organization / Local Unit of Government: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ Web Site: _____

Tel: _____ Fax: _____

Membership Benefits:

- Supporting the United Growth's Coalition's work to promote positive land use in our community
- Quarterly newsletter "*The Urban-Rural Connection*"
- Reduced registration at United Growth events including the annual Networking Luncheon
- Land use organization networking opportunities
- Eligible to apply for future mini-grant and scholarship 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 \$25.00)

Organization Membership Levels:

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

Please make check payable to Kent / MSU Extension, write "United Growth member dues" in the memo area, include this form and mail to:

United Growth for Kent County, P.O. Box 6939, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6936

www.unitedgrowth.org

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