

## Chapter 2: Getting Started



To reach the goal of forming a United Growth Coalition, first an Urban and a Rural Committee must be organized. Each Committee will work on land use issues that have the most interest to them. Rural residents and others interested in township and agricultural issues will come together around concerns that most directly affect them. The same is true for urban residents and others interested in neighborhood issues and city government. After the Rural Committee and the Urban Committee are functioning, they can begin the process of identifying the common ground between them. Before organizing committees, it is suggested the following steps are taken:

### **1. Develop a statistical/background piece for each committee.**

For the Urban Committee, document the neighborhood disinvestment that has occurred, population loss, etc. For the Rural Committee, research how many acres have been developed in the last decade, the township investment in new infrastructure, etc. These informational pieces can help in committee member recruitment and framing the issues. It will also acquaint you with county land use patterns. This begins Phase 1 of the United Growth model – *Education*. Examples of some informational pieces are at the end of the chapter.

### **2. Begin compiling names of potential individuals and organizations who can be contacted to join the two committees.**

In the application for your position from your extension office to the Land Policy Program, names of potential individuals and organizations should be listed. Talk with co-workers and others for contacts. See Appendix B for a list of United Growth for Kent County members and look for partners in your region.

### **3. Outline a possible funding plan.**

Determine what expenses will be incurred by the committees (agenda and copies, refreshments, etc.) and how expenses will be covered. Remember that LPE positions in Hillsdale/Lenewee and Muskegon have been allocated \$10,000 in year one operating expenses and \$5,000 for each of the second and third years of the WKK grant. Other LPE positions should check with your CED. Your Extension office may also have additional funds available. Again, talk with your CED. Contact the Land Policy Program for information on how to access these funds.

When committees undertake activities, start planning for how associated costs will be covered and consider the long-term funding options for your own position. (See Chapter 7 for more information on funding.)

It might seem more natural to begin with the group you know the most about. However, start with the more difficult group first. You are apt to work a little harder at the beginning to get your first committee organized. With less energy as you tackle the second group, it should be the one you are more comfortable with. So, if you know more about farmland and your Extension office has more contact with townships than city government, organize the Urban committee first. Or conversely, if your expertise is urban, organize the Rural Committee first. The following are suggestions on how to organize your first committee.

## Organizing the Urban and Rural Committees

As stated previously, the United Growth model calls for the organization of rural stakeholders into the Rural Committee and the organization of urban stakeholders into the Urban Committee. Each committee will pursue the land use issues of most concern to them. Later we will begin to build the common ground between them so that the Coalition can be organized. For right now, however, the focus is on organizing the Urban Committee and the Rural Committee.

### Organize the committee that you have less knowledge of first.

#### Identify Stakeholders for Each of the Committees

From day one, you need to compile a list of names of people who might be good candidates for these committees. Gather names from the following sources:

- your County Extension Director
- your Extension co-workers
- the application to the MSU Land Policy Program that created your position
- special interest groups: Farm Bureau, neighborhood associations, environmental groups, etc.
- community-based organizations, chambers of commerce, REALTOR associations
- local government: townships, cities, both elected and appointed officials
- area colleges and universities
- religious organizations
- referrals from everyone with whom you talk

Begin asking people you've identified if they would be willing to serve on the committee. Explain the purpose of the project and committee member responsibilities (monthly 1.5 hour meetings, providing input for program development, function as a resource for the project, help publicize the project within your own contacts.) After you have 5 or 6 people who have expressed an interest in being on a committee, prepare to call the first meeting. Don't forget that the first committee organized should be the one in which you have the *lesser* experience.

#### Preparing for the First Committee Meeting

When talking with people about their interests/concerns regarding land use, begin identifying who you think might provide some leadership to the committee. It is always preferable to have someone else chair meetings - *not* the Extension Educator. The following steps might help you flush out committee leadership early on:

1. Meet with 2 or 3 people who said they would serve on a committee. Discuss with them what should be on the agenda for the committee's first meeting:



**A United Growth meeting. Pictured are members representing the faith community, a developer, an urban community development specialist and an interested citizen.**

- An educational piece, for example, a summary of the research on land use patterns in your county.
  - An explanation of a new program operated by one of the committee’s members. (This would also ensure that person’s attendance at the meeting!)
  - A brief review of the United Growth model.
  - Initial brainstorming on what issues/events the committee would like to pursue.
  - An assessment of who else should be invited to join the committee.
  - Decision on a regular, monthly meeting date and time.
2. Whatever items were decided in #1 above, put into an agenda (see a sample agenda at the end of the chapter) and e-mail or snail mail it out to committee members about two weeks in advance of the meeting. A reminder e-mail or phone call a day or two before the meeting is always a good idea.
  3. Ask for a volunteer to help prepare the agenda and chair the next meeting. If no one volunteers, suggest a rotating chair for the next several months - each one taking a turn at chairing.
  4. Your role as staff to the committee requires a balance between providing some guidance to the group - but making sure that *they* are the ones deciding the specific direction. Your role is more “behind the scene”, recruiting good committee members, developing leadership, providing educational resources, and building the capacity of the committee to decide their goals and what activities they would like to undertake.

***“People  
support that  
which they help  
create.”***

**Author Unknown**

### **Future Committee Meetings**

It will be difficult for the committee to “gel” as a group at first. Here are some suggestions on how you can build an identity for the committee and its members:

- Develop an educational base around the land use issues of interest to committee members so that they share a common understanding. Make copies of pertinent articles and send them to committee members. Encourage research on issues that are raised.
- Continue to recruit committee members (12-20) so that the committee is broadly representative of the rural or urban area they represent.
- Develop leadership within the group - make sure chairs and co-chairs of sub-committees are designated.
- Undertake a committee activity as soon as possible (suggestions are included in Chapter 3.) An activity can be as simple as printing a brochure on a topic of interest to the committee, taking a tour as a group, or as complex as committee members undertaking a special project.
- Create a pleasant atmosphere at committee meetings: refreshments are always nice, give members an opportunity to network and get to know each other, demonstrate your appreciation for their involvement, etc.

### **Organizing the Other Committee**

After your first committee has met several times, you will want to start organizing the second committee. Follow the same steps for establishing the first committee.

*Outcomes:* At the end of your first year, you should have an active Urban Committee and an active Rural Committee, both meeting monthly. Each committee should have 12 to 20 members. There should be a chair and co-chair for each, and they should have accomplished one or more activities/projects.

#### **Supplemental Information**

The rest of the chapter consists of examples for Kent County that can be used as templates for your program. Please note that a lot of the information will be different for your county/region, but the basic framework of the materials should be useful.

# Kent County is Growing...Changing...Sprawling

## Population and Urbanization

- ⇒ The population of Kent County increased 19% from 1978 to 1993.<sup>1</sup>
- ⇒ The amount of land in Kent County that is urbanized increased 80% during that same period.<sup>2</sup>
- ⇒ The urbanized land of the Grand Rapids area grows 3 to 4 times faster than the population.<sup>3</sup>
- ⇒ The City of Grand Rapids *lost* 4.3% of its population from 1970 to 1990.<sup>4</sup>
- ⇒ The population density of the City of Grand Rapids is 29% greater than the national average; but the population density of Grand Rapids' suburbs is 35% less than the national average.<sup>5</sup>
- ⇒ The population of Kent County is projected to increase 35% from 1990 to 2020.<sup>6</sup>



## Housing and Segregation

- ⇒ Grand Rapids' housing segregation by race index is 72, worse than Michigan's index of 70 which is worst in the nation.<sup>7</sup>
- ⇒ Grand Rapids' school segregation by race index is 77, worse than Michigan's 75 which is worst in the nation.<sup>8</sup>
- ⇒ The region does not provide enough housing that is affordable to its poorest residents. However, the City of Grand Rapids provides more affordable housing than other areas of Kent County, concentrating low-income households in the central city.

## Crime

- ⇒ A recent study by Myron Orfield documents the social and economic disparities across Kent County. These patterns generally mean that those areas with the highest social needs will have the fewest resources with which to meet those needs. Rates of crime are clearly concentrated in the central city.
- ⇒ A study in *Social Forces* provides evidence that neighborhood disadvantage contributes to crime. The authors conclude that "...both the absence of positive [influences] [such as

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<sup>1</sup> Government Information Sharing Project, Oregon State University, USA Counties: [Online], Available: <http://govinfo.library.orst.edu/cgi-bin/usaco.ist?24-081.mic>

<sup>2</sup> Michigan State University Institute of Water Research, [Online] Available: <http://www.iwr.msu.edu/farmbureau/fdupdate.htm>. See also Footnote 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. "In 1960, the Grand Rapids urbanized area (the central city and contiguous suburbs) contained 294,000 residents in 94 square miles of urbanized land. By 1990, the urbanized area contained 436,000 residents in 223 square miles of urbanized land. The population grew 48%; the amount of land used to accommodate the increased population grew by 137%" (David Rusk cited in Frey Foundation. (1997). *Today's Winners--Tomorrow's Losers*, Summary of Workshop, April 1997.)

<sup>4</sup> State of the Cities Data System, [Online] Available: <http://io.aspensys.com/socds/scripts/>.

<sup>5</sup> David Rusk. (1996). *Acting as One: Presentation for the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Livable Communities Conference*. Lansing, MI.

<sup>6</sup> Michigan Society of Planning Officials. (1995). *Patterns on the Land*, cited in Frey Foundation. (1997). *Today's Winners--Tomorrow's Losers*, Summary of Workshop, April 1997.

<sup>7</sup> David Rusk, cited in Poulson, David. (199?). Poverty, race tied to use, abuse of Michigan's land, *Grand Rapids Press*. [Poulson also explains, "A score of 100 means census tracts are completely segregated by race. A score of 0 means total integration--every census tract has the same percentage of minorities as found in a city's entire metro area."]

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

persons with high status occupations] *and* the presence of negative influences [such as concentrated poverty and male joblessness] contributes to crime as a form of social dislocation.<sup>9</sup> The study also provides evidence that “...the causes of crime are rooted in the structural differences among communities rather than in race/culture.”

### **Abandonment and Disinvestment**

- ⇒ Those able to move to and live in low-density areas are generally those with resources. Human and financial resources are abandoning the city.
- ⇒ This is suburban sprawl. The result is concentrated poverty in the central city with increased racial and economic segregation.

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<sup>9</sup> Lauren J. Krivo & Ruth D. Peterson. (1996). Extremely disadvantaged neighborhoods and urban crime. *Social Forces* 75 (2): 641.

# Commerce in the Creston Neighborhood

A commercial district can be the beating heart of a vital neighborhood. It is a place for people to meet and interact, trading goods and services for the sustenance of life. A commercial district gives a neighborhood vibrancy and energy. However, suburban sprawl threatens the vitality of urban neighborhoods. Suburban sprawl is poorly planned, low-density development of the built environment at the urban fringe coupled with abandonment of existing infrastructure at the urban core. Resources of all types are leaving established central city neighborhoods and being invested on what once was farmland. Creston neighborhood, for example, is feeling the effects of suburban sprawl as its commercial district is forced to compete with nearby “big box” stores on Alpine and Plainfield. Michigan State University has been working with several Grand Rapids neighborhoods, including Creston, to address the effects of suburban sprawl on the neighborhood. Together, the neighborhood association and MSU are exploring several strategies for revitalizing the commercial district and the neighborhood. Some of these ideas include:

## 1. Follow the money and keep it circulating in the neighborhood.

A neighborhood acts like a “leaky bucket” when resources flow out of the neighborhood rather than circulating inside the neighborhood, says Dr. Rex LaMore, State Director of MSU’s Center for Urban Affairs. Circulating resources create a “multiplier effect” which can benefit both residents and businesses of the neighborhood. Residents can promote circulation by buying goods and services locally even if the prices are higher and the selection smaller than at the “big box” stores. Businesses can promote circulation by offering goods and services valued by the neighborhood residents. Over the past several decades businesses such as clothing and variety stores seem to have left the Plainfield commercial district. Market studies can help reveal which businesses are in demand locally. Businesses can also circulate resources within the neighborhood by employing local residents. These residents can then spend their income at other local stores.

## 2. Get people out of their cars.

Cars in a neighborhood produce traffic congestion and safety problems. People in a neighborhood are the source of vitality and life. According to retailing planner Robert Gibbs, commercial corridors need 20,000 “slow-moving” cars per day to remain viable. Plainfield has that volume of traffic. The key, however, is



compelling those drivers to stop and get out of their cars. Dan Burden suggests parking be allowed on the street to both slow traffic and facilitate quick shopping stops by commuters. Gibbs recommends parking be placed behind the store but that patrons be enticed to walk around the building (past other stores) to enter the business by the front (street) door. A walkable, vibrant commercial district also encourages neighborhood residents to discard their cars altogether and meet their needs for goods and services close to home.

### **3. Make the streetscape visually appealing.**

Most of us value settings that are clean, tidy, orderly and interesting. Commercial districts only have a few seconds to present an attractive image to drivers. Signage and window displays are important. Robert Gibbs suggests that sidewalks be power washed two times per day. He also suggests that doors be washed every hour and windows every day. The ground-level face of commercial buildings should be 70% clear glass to be inviting to passers-by. Obviously, building owners will be concerned about broken windows and crime, but attracting pedestrians back onto the sidewalk throughout the day is a great crime prevention strategy.

Creston also has historic architectural assets on which it can capitalize. Historic preservationist Don Rypkema calls historic buildings “assets not yet returned to productive use”. According to the report *Emerging Trends in Real Estate 1998* traditional neighborhoods have great potential. People are rediscovering the value of living in a real neighborhood.

### **4. Cooperate for mutual gain.**

Competition for markets is central to our economic system. However, commercial districts exist so that people can access several commercial opportunities in one place. This is one reason that malls have been so successful. Often similar businesses all benefit by locating near to one another. Wealthy Street here in Grand Rapids, for example, has been emerging as an antiques corridor. Plainfield has always hosted several furniture stores. The type of businesses that occupy a commercial district is not merely a matter of chance or abstract market forces. West Palm Beach provides an example, Steve Langerfeld says, of “us[ing] loans and other incentive to manipulate [a] ‘tenant mix’”. In other words, people and organizations, working together, can find ways to create neighborhood commercial districts that meet their needs. Businesses can also help each other by offering coupons redeemable at neighboring businesses. Businesses in Creston should continue to search for ways they can cooperate for mutual benefit. The creation of a vibrant commercial district not only will improve the neighborhood, but also will contribute to the development of an attractive city that will slow suburban sprawl.

By Tom Bulten, MSU Center for Urban Affairs

# Smart Growth Strategies for Neighborhood Economic Development

Building a strong neighborhood economy is fundamental to creating a high quality of life in a central city neighborhood. A “smart neighborhood” attracts new economy jobs as it revitalizes its housing and other infrastructure components.

- Smart economic growth means maximizing the use of every possible asset, including brownfield sites.
- Infill projects that are mixed-use developments equal smart economic development.
- Smart economic growth entails the revitalization of neighborhoods while addressing the concern of gentrification.
- Smart growth utilizes existing infrastructure more efficiently, reducing the need to expand that infrastructure. Smart economic growth means developing effectively around existing infrastructure, which saves money, preserves the environment, and economically strengthens the current infrastructure.
- A key smart economic growth strategy is to support private development and create investment opportunities in distressed neighborhoods.
- Economic vitality and neighborhood stability generally go hand-in-hand.
- Smart neighborhoods are diverse in use and population.

# Rural Committee Goals

## A. Early in Year One – Four Goals

1. Ag Profitability
2. Taxation Policy
3. Smart Growth
4. Farmland Preservation/Urban Redevelopment

## B Revised in Year One

1. Public Education
2. Public Dialogue
3. Legislative Policy to address:
  - a. Effective Land Use
    - (1) Regional Planning
      - Transportation
      - Utilities
      - Urban Redevelopment
    - (2) Smart Growth Model Communities
    - (3) State Advocacy
  - b. Agri-sustainability
    - (1) ID of prime and unique land
    - (2) Profitability
      - Taxes
      - Value-added products
      - Cost containment
      - Ag recreation and tourism

### Ten Principles of Smart Growth

These principles or tenets were developed by Smart Growth Network. For more information and examples visit [www.smartgrowth.org](http://www.smartgrowth.org)

1. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
2. Create walkable neighborhoods
3. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration
4. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
5. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective
6. Mix land uses
7. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
10. Take advantage of compact development design

## 2001 Urban Committee Goals

The following goals/activities for the year 2001 were adopted by the Urban Committee on January 11, 2001:

- Organize a “summit” on an urban issue.
  - organize a planning committee (January)
  - select the issue(s) (January)
  - research the issue(s) both locally and nationally (January-June)
  - identify possible co-sponsors (February)
  - obtain a national expert as keynote speaker (February)
  - develop the action component (June)
  - convene the summit (October)
  
- More fully utilize the United Growth web site.
  - publicize address, including through e-mail messages (ongoing)
  - ask Partners to link their web sites to ours (February)
  - identify other papers, etc. that should be included on the site (ongoing)
  
- Assist in organizing the United Growth Coalition.
  - have representation on an organizing committee that will map out the Coalition’s formation (February)
  - participate in a facilitated meeting with the Rural Committee to identify common issues and goals (October)
  - help decide what organizational structure the Coalition should pursue (December)
  
- Monitor Grand Rapids’ Master Plan update process.
  - analyze its impact on abating sprawl (ongoing)
  - assure neighborhood voices are being heard (March, September, and December)
  
- Research Mixed Income Neighborhoods/Affordable Housing Issue
  - continue committee meetings (ongoing)
  - present to the Rural Committee (March)
  - research tools needed to create mixed income neighborhoods (October)
  - work toward holding a “summit” in 2002



**Rural Committee Meeting**  
**July 17, 2001 Sparta Township Offices**  
**8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.**

**Agenda**

1. Welcome and Introduction of New Vice Chair, Cynthia Price
2. Approval of Minutes
3. Update from Coalition Formation Subcommittee – Andy, Cynthia, Sr. Lucille, Kendra
4. Update on Citizen Planner - Kendra
5. Update on Coordinate Planning Act Review Committee – Andy, Cynthia, Sr. Lucielle, Gene, Kendra
6. Formation of Joint Subcommittee: House Land Use & Environment Committee Presentation – Kendra
7. Discussion on Committee Goals and Objectives for the Upcoming Year
  - Rural Committee Goals for 2000-01
  - Rural Component Progress Report on Goals
  - Side-by-Side Comparison of Rural and Urban Committee Goals
  - Draft 2001-02 Goals
8. Announcements
9. Next Meeting – August 21, Location?
10. Adjournment



**A G E N D A**  
**URBAN COMMITTEE – United Growth for Kent County Project**

March 1, 2001  
MSU-West 8:30 am

- I. Call to Order -- Danielle Bult, Chair
- II. Welcome and Introductions
  - A. Overview of MSU-West – Carol Townsend
  - B. Overview of United Growth – Kendra Gunter
- III. Discussion with Representative Jerry Kooiman
- IV. Committee Reports
  - A. Mixed Income Neighborhoods – Mary Hartfield
  - B. Slum Landlord Summit – Linda Likely
  - C. Coalition Planning Committee
- V. Other Business
  - A. Approval of last meeting's minutes
  - B. Funding update – Kendra Gunter
  - C. Committee member announcements
  - D. Next Urban Committee meeting – April 5 – featuring Phil Schaafsma and the housing survey report
- VI. Adjournment