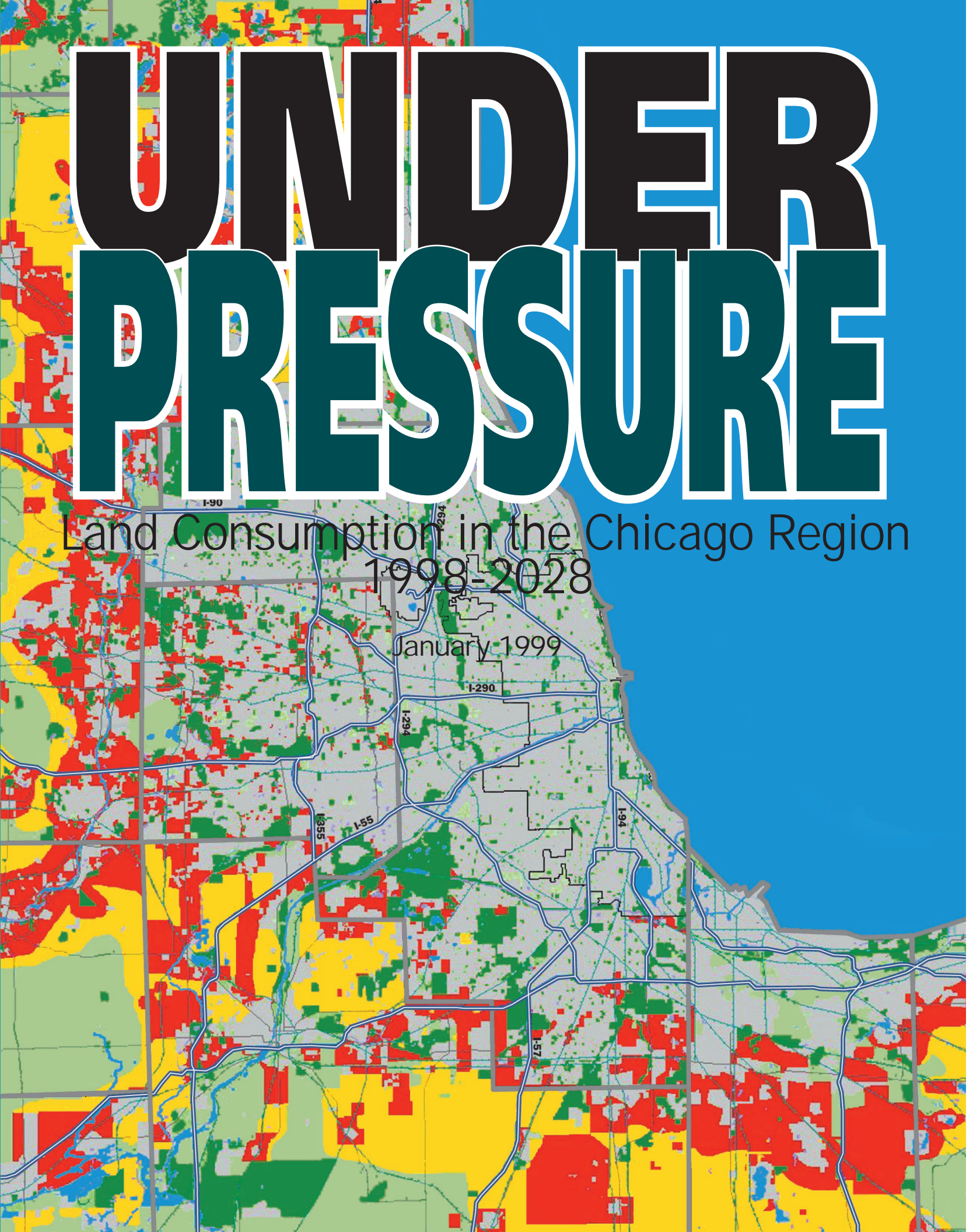


UNDER PRESSURE

Land Consumption in the Chicago Region
1998-2028



UNDER PRESSURE

Land Consumption in the Chicago Region, 1998-2028



January, 1999

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under Pressure: Land Consumption in the Chicago Region, 1998-2028 is the second of two reports prepared as part of the Strategic Open Lands at Risk (SOLAR) mapping project undertaken by Openlands Project. It features a map of a 13-county Chicago region that extends north into Wisconsin and southeast into Indiana. It provides an overall picture of likely future development patterns, and demonstrates that recent trends toward higher land consumption per capita are likely to continue. It presents a picture of continued land consumption unrelated to either population growth or economic development—a consumption pattern that fosters ever increasing reliance on the automobile and further depletes the quality of life for area residents.

General findings

- Developed land in the thirteen county area could double over the next thirty years, creating a development footprint the size of eight Chicagos if all land under pressure is developed.
- The amount of land at risk of development illustrated by the map is not needed to provide for increased population or employment growth.

Regional population and employment forecasts for 2020 suggest the Chicago region will sustain significant growth—25 percent overall. But in the next ten years alone, developed land could increase by 55 percent.

- The metropolitan area will extend beyond even thirteen counties if development trends continue.

The map shows future development extending to the farthest edges of Will, Kenosha, and Kendall

Counties. In Kane and LaPorte, development pressures are moving inward from their western and eastern boundaries, respectively. The I-90 corridor through Kane and McHenry Counties faces pressure as commuting increases between Rockford and the northwest suburbs. In the near future, Racine County in Wisconsin, Boone, DeKalb, LaSalle, and Kankakee Counties in Illinois, and St. Joseph County in Indiana may comprise the outer boundaries of the Chicago region. Berrien County, Michigan, with its tremendous growth in vacation homes, may not be far behind.

- More than 300 natural areas and critical species habitats are at risk of being lost to development.

Although it is the most populous region of the Midwest, the Chicago region is home to some of the rarest and most biologically diverse natural communities in the world. The region's landscape includes a variety of unique plant and animal communities, ranging from dunes complexes along the shore of Lake Michigan to wooded communities along major waterways to prairies and savannas scattered throughout the region. Its wetlands are among the most diverse on the North American continent. This collection of unique natural features has made the Chicago region the center of several national efforts to recover rare, endangered, and threatened natural communities.

- Infill development in Chicago and other older, established communities can accommodate some, but not all the anticipated growth. To avoid replicating the sprawl that has persisted in recent years, growing communities must plan for more compact, walkable environments, thus preserving more open land.



Chicago's population has declined each decade since its peak in 1950. Although the projection for 2020 shows a significant increase over 1990 Census figures, Chicago will still house 20 percent fewer people in 2020 than in 1950. Now-vacant land could easily accommodate the predicted increase. But because households are smaller than in decades past (traditional nuclear families comprise less than a third of all households), the 2020 population will require nearly the same number of dwellings as did the larger 1950 population. Market demands and living standards will not tolerate high-rise densities in any but a few select locations. Accordingly, as Chicago experiences redevelopment of vacant residential sites, its population is unlikely to return to peak levels.

County findings

- Kane and Will Counties are experiencing the greatest development pressures.

The counties with the greatest amounts of land under pressure for near term development are Will and Kane. Will County stands ready for tremendous growth in land coverage, both in the short and the long term. The possible construction of a third regional airport in Peotone would stimulate

development in eastern Will County that is unlikely to take place without it. In western Will County, the extension of I-355—the southern leg of the tollway—would contribute to the already rapid land consumption taking place.

Kane County has experienced rapid population growth in recent years, and forecasts suggest growth will continue to accelerate. Although Kane County's comprehensive plan establishes a rural protection zone west of Route 47, land near the Fox River remains under development pressure.

- Over the next ten years, Kenosha County will have the greatest proportion of land at risk of unplanned, sprawling development.

Kenosha County has the highest percentage of its land under pressure for development during the next ten years—27 percent—followed closely by Kane, with 25 percent. The Kenosha County planning department and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources have worked cooperatively in the issuance of septic field permits to limit scatter-development. This cooperation in permitting has resulted in a fairly compact development pattern, even though many towns and cities have not adopted the County's plan or development stan-

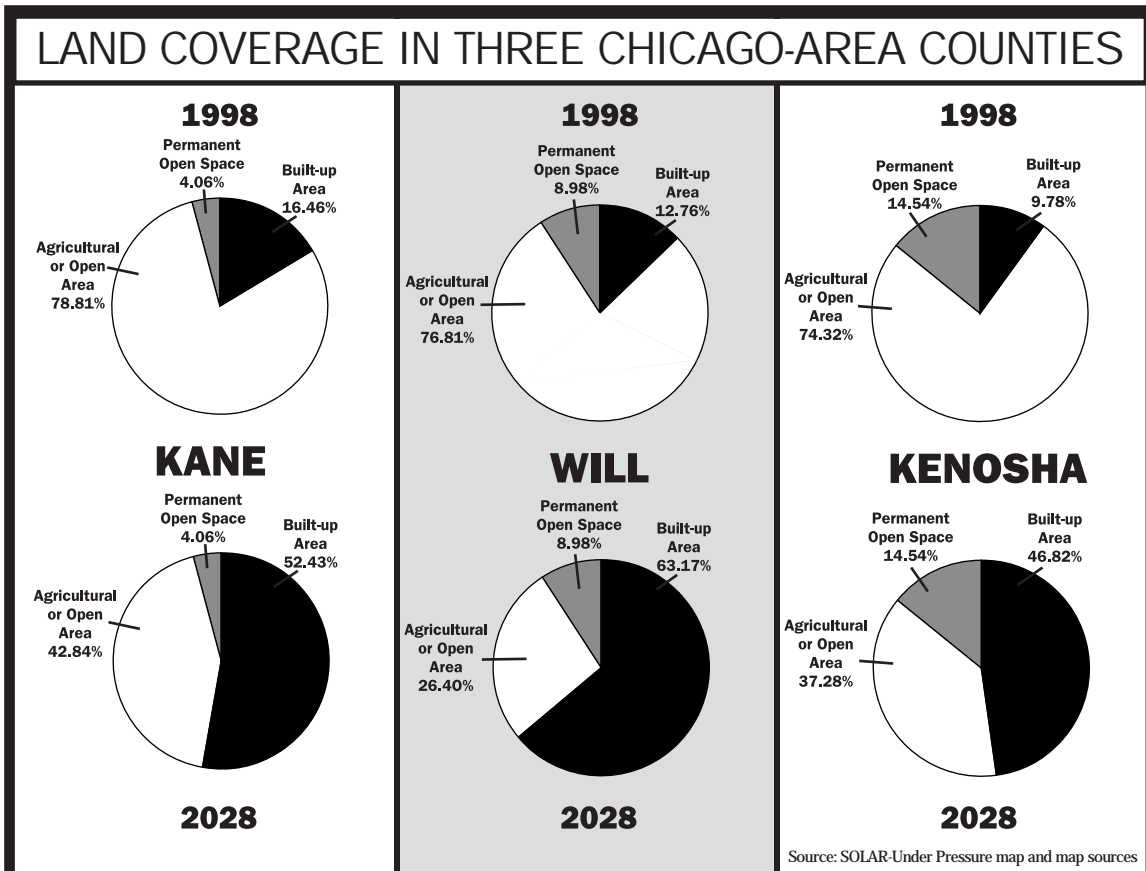
dards. However, the prospect of a change in Wisconsin regulatory practice would eliminate these agencies' roles in reviewing applications for septic fields. The result would be residential development in areas unserved by public sanitary sewers, opening vast amounts of land on both sides of I-94 for development. Access to the expressway, not proximity to cities and towns, would provide the greatest attraction with the fewest barriers.

- Kane, Kenosha, and Walworth are the counties most successfully combating sprawl while meeting development needs.

Traditional land-use controls—comprehensive planning, zoning, subdivision regulations, facility plans—can, in fact, lead to the desired outcome, assuming other regulatory agencies do not interfere, elected officials maintain consistency in enforcing the plans, and there is mutual cooperation between and among county governments and their municipalities. Kane County, while certainly an area under development pressure, also represents one of the bright spots in the region. Kane County's land-resource management plan, which has received awards from the American Planning

Association, directs most development to its eastern, urbanized sector. The plan allows for carefully planned development within its central managed growth corridor and promotes densities based on watershed carrying capacities. Construction in this corridor takes into account the potential effects on drainage and runoff, and limits land coverage to a percentage of the watershed area. The westernmost portion of the county remains designated for agriculture. Through outreach and ongoing assistance to its municipalities, Kane County appears to be moderating sprawl in its managed growth corridor. Nonetheless, much new development along the Fox River corridor reflects the sprawl found throughout the region.

The Wisconsin portion of the region—Kenosha and Walworth Counties—has adopted regional planning policies promulgated by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC), particularly with respect to protecting primary stream corridors. There appears to be greater unity in county adoption of the regional planning agency's policies in comparison with the Illinois and Indiana counties, and greater consistency in their application.





Recommendations

I. Establish A State Land Preservation Program in Illinois and Indiana, and Permanently Fund Existing Program in Wisconsin

The states of Illinois and Indiana should establish state land preservation programs similar to the Green Acres Program in New Jersey or Maryland's Project Open Space and Rural Legacy Program. In Wisconsin, the State Stewardship Program should be permanently funded beyond 2000, when current funding ends. The mission of the land preservation programs should be to acquire or otherwise protect significant land resources under development pressure. State land preservation programs should target critical natural areas under development pressure. They should also facilitate the acquisition of lands to implement regional and local open space plans as well as lands to meet the growing outdoor recreation needs of the region's residents.

II. Establish a State Office of Planning and Land Conservation to Modernize State Land Use Policies

The office of planning and land conservation would:

1. develop state-wide land use goals to encourage development in existing communities while protecting open space and farmland in undeveloped areas;
2. coordinate policies and actions of the various state agencies that affect land use;

3. establish priorities for state capital expenditures, directing state funds to existing communities and away from designated resource protection areas; and

4. provide incentives to local government to adopt state land use goals.

III. Establish a New Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Chicago Region

A new regional planning organization should be established that combines the functions and goals of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) and the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS). This new agency would be designated the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization for purposes of federal funding. This new agency would ensure coordination between land use and transportation plans and would give priority to transportation improvement projects that encourage transit-oriented development and land conservation.

IV. Create a Tri-State Regional Task Force to Coordinate Growth Management Efforts

The governors of Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin should establish a tri-state regional task force to examine ways to better coordinate growth management efforts, policies, and actions between Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin. The task force should include elected officials, representatives from state agencies, county and regional planning commissions, and citizens.



INTRODUCTION

The landscape of northeastern Illinois is undergoing a rapid transformation at the suburban fringe. Where new residents found bucolic pastures only a few years ago, they now find an expansion of the residential and commercial developments they sought to escape.

Though this phenomenon is hardly new, either in this region or elsewhere in the United States, the distance individuals must travel to find more country-like settings has increased dramatically, bringing this issue to the forefront of public awareness.





Suburban expansion has kept pace with changes in transportation technology since the time of the horse-drawn streetcar during the mid-19th Century. The widespread ability of the middle classes to purchase one or more cars in the post-World War II era, coupled with Federal housing and transportation policy, made suburban growth inevitable.

Public policy experts, urban planners, and urbanists have expressed concern about unabated sprawl for many years. As inner-ring suburbs have begun experiencing problems once limited to the inner city, city dwellers, suburbanites, and the press have also begun to question the impact that land development policies have on the quality of life.

Under Pressure: Land Consumption in the Chicago Region, 1998-2028, the second and final report of the Strategic Open Lands at Risk (SOLAR) mapping project, demonstrates that sprawl will only worsen in a thirteen-county region extending from Kenosha to LaPorte if land at risk of development over the next thirty years is, in fact, developed.

If land develops at rates even close to those indicated by the map on pages 16 and 17, population density in built-up areas will continue to decrease in all parts of the region but Cook County (where it will increase slightly). The SOLAR map portrays a future where farmland continues to disappear, where towns and villages lose their distinct characters as sprawl development bleeds their edges, and where driving times continue to increase. The quality of life that leads people to the fringes of the urbanized area will become ever more elusive as suburban development consumes the countryside.

Openlands Project

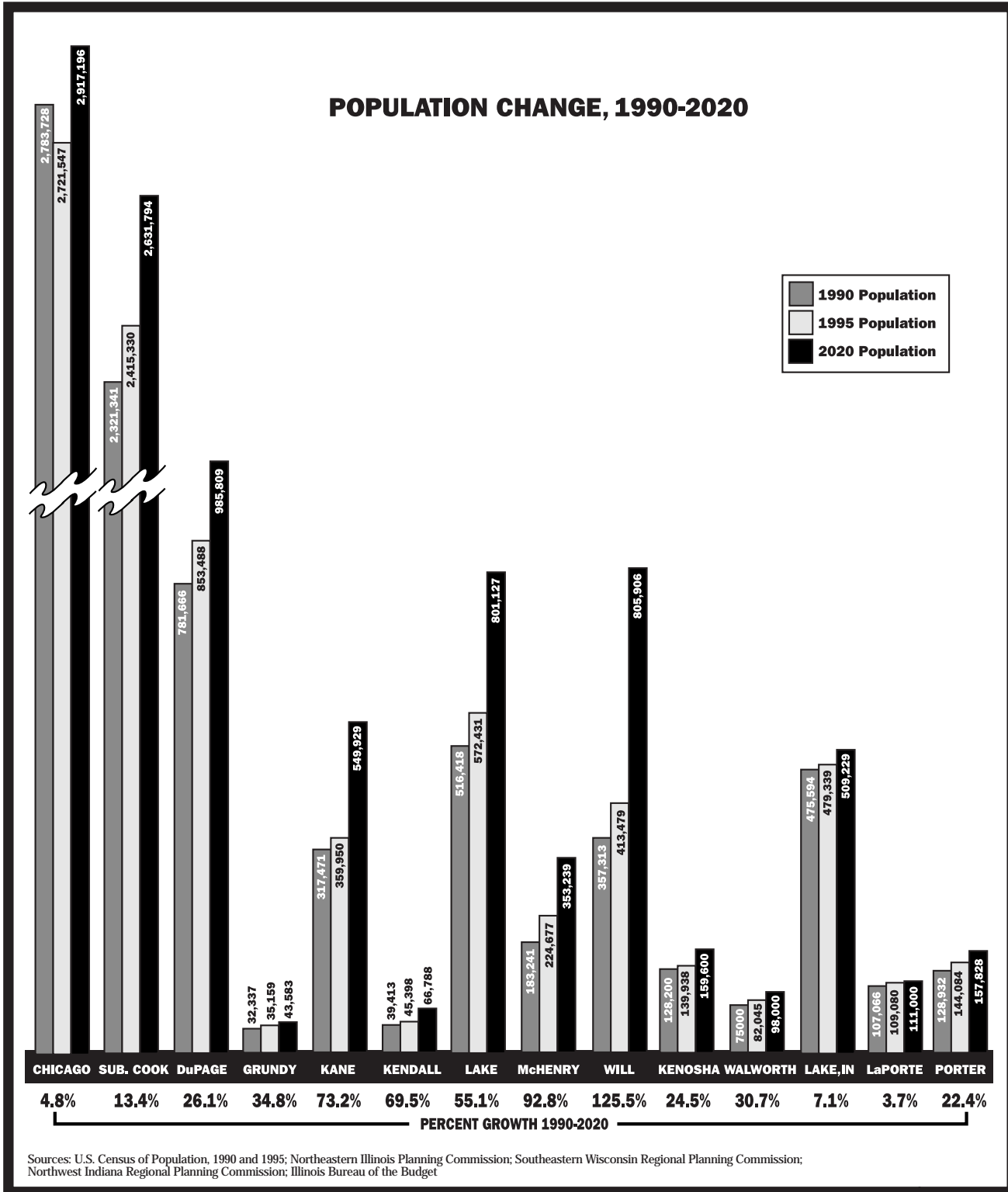
Openlands Project, a non-profit organization devoted to preserving and protecting public lands in the Chicago region since 1963, initiated the SOLAR mapping project to document the rapid and increasing rate of land consumption in the Chicago region. Openlands completed its first greenways plan in 1992, in conjunction with the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC), the regional planning body for the six counties immediately surrounding Chicago. The greenways plan calls for a linked network of parks and greenways that runs throughout the region. Although the greenways plan successfully envisioned a regional open space system and has

led to further public land acquisition, Openlands determined that traditional methods of preserving land for public open space could not keep up with the relentless spread of development. As documented by NIPC, the population of the six-county Chicago Primary Statistical Area (PSA) grew by only 4 percent between 1970 and 1990, while the amount of land developed increased approximately 46 percent. Preserving open lands for recreation and conservation would require a different approach to both open space protection and to the development process.

To better understand these trends, Openlands initiated the SOLAR project. By depicting growth pressures for two time horizons, 10-years and 30-years, the SOLAR maps demonstrate the need for preserving open lands for the public and for reshaping the policies that now encourage sprawl development. In providing a regional map, the project establishes a regional "report card" to track progress in slowing sprawl.

While Openlands is primarily concerned about the effects of sprawl on natural resources, its concerns about sprawl are not limited to land conservation. Chicago, like many older American cities, has lost population while its suburban areas have grown. (Sprawl can also occur even as the central city and surrounding suburbs grow, as evidenced by Seattle, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, et al.) With the decrease in size of households that has been taking place since the 1970s, population might well have declined within central cities, all other factors being equal. However, central city population loss did not take place by happenstance. It began in the 1950s as federal housing and transportation subsidies enticed people from city neighborhoods to the suburbs with low-interest, federally-backed mortgages and interstate highways. Racial prejudice played a part, with "white flight" being a phenomenon that continues to this day. Demolition of acres of housing followed over the next decades, when these neighborhoods could no longer compete in the racially segregated housing market. Among the results were gaping holes in the fabric of many inner city neighborhoods. This phenomenon is not unique to large cities; abandonment and demolition have occurred in the traditional satellite cities of the region and in many inner-ring suburbs as well.

A number of Chicago area policy initiatives are currently addressing the consequences of urban



sprawl. These include the Campaign for Sensible Growth, initiated by NIPC and the Metropolitan Planning Council, in which Openlands is playing an active role, and the Metropolis Project, a three-year effort of the Commercial Club of Chicago. In addition, the Environmental Law and Policy Center is nearing completion of the Chicago Regional Planning Simulation Project, which provides visual

alternatives to the “development as usual” scenario. In northwest Indiana, the Quality of Life Council is examining the consequences of sprawl as well. The sheer number of projects demonstrates both the critical nature of this issue and a growing consensus that development patterns must change if we want to preserve and make best use of our natural and human resources.



WHAT'S WRONG WITH SPRAWL?

Sprawl, sometimes prefixed by urban or suburban, refers to a pattern of low-density land development reinforced by a strict separation of land uses. (This type of zoning is known as Euclidean zoning, in reference to the landmark Supreme Court case *City of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Company*. The Court held in 1926 that Euclid, Ohio could enforce its zoning code, which required industrial and commercial uses to be in different zoning districts from residential areas. Many cities, and especially suburban communities, adopted such codes by the 1950s.) Residential neighborhoods are typified by a single housing type (apartments separated from single-family housing), wide streets (although on-street parking is usually banned), and cul-de-sacs. Neighborhoods, as such, are built as independent developments. They usually remain separate from one another since streets rarely connect. Commercial areas remain separate from residential ones, even when virtually adjacent. To ensure that traffic from commercial

activity does not flow onto residential streets, commercial buildings are accessible only from a major street, while shielding themselves from neighborhoods with landscaped berms. Non-residential buildings require acres of land, individually owned parking facilities, and result in large distances between buildings and between different land uses. Office campuses, religious institutions, schools, and shopping centers all maintain carefully landscaped lots and generously sized parking lots. Sprawl has several adverse consequences on communities.

Sprawl creates social isolation. While many people move to the suburbs because they perceive it to be a safer environment, the extreme segregation of activities fosters isolation and dependence, particularly for children, the elderly, and the poor, who cannot afford or are unable to drive. Residents cannot walk to work or a corner store or the shopping mall, even if these facilities are nearby, because



major streets lack sidewalks and can be very dangerous for pedestrians. Cars become a necessity for trips of a half-mile or less.

Sprawl makes public transportation inefficient.

Even when suburban communities have good rail service to the central city—as many Chicago suburbs do—a car remains a necessity in low-density neighborhoods. Commuter parking lots at some rail stations have waiting lists as long as three years. Because neighborhoods are built at such low densities, buses cannot serve them with any degree of efficiency, so it remains necessary to drive to the train station. Bus trips would require too many stops and take too long to get people to their respective trains. Buses work only when riders can easily walk to their pick-up spots.

Sprawl drives up the cost of public infrastructure.

Sprawl occurs because land at the periphery of already-established areas is inexpensive. Land con-

sumption continues as if the supply were inexhaustible and there were small costs in discarding or under-using older areas in favor of new ones. However, sprawl drives up the cost of providing public infrastructure, because per unit costs increase as density decreases. This phenomenon has been demonstrated in various studies, beginning with the 1974 report “The Costs of Sprawl.”

Sprawl creates environmental problems.

Sprawl presents problems for both the natural and social environment. The loss of farmland and access to nature are among the consequences of a spread-out urbanized landscape. Water quality is diminished by contaminated urban runoff when too much land within a watershed is paved, preventing the ground from filtering rainwater back to the aquifer. Air quality suffers when short trips require use of an automobile. Clustered development, providing for a full range of land uses, allows more land to be preserved in its natural state.



POPULATION IN DEVELOPED AREAS 1998-2028

COOK

DuPAGE

GRUNDY

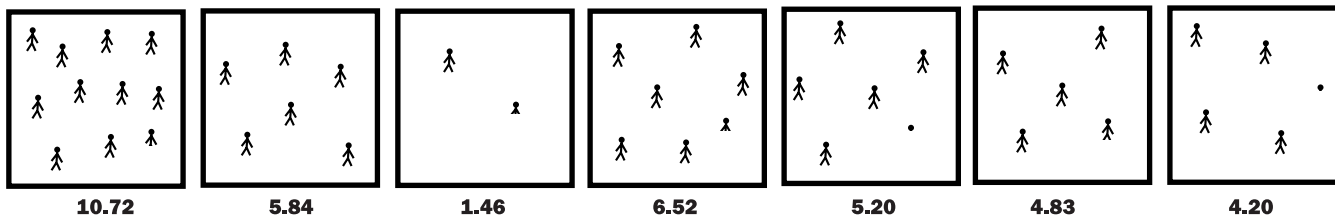
KANE

KENDALL

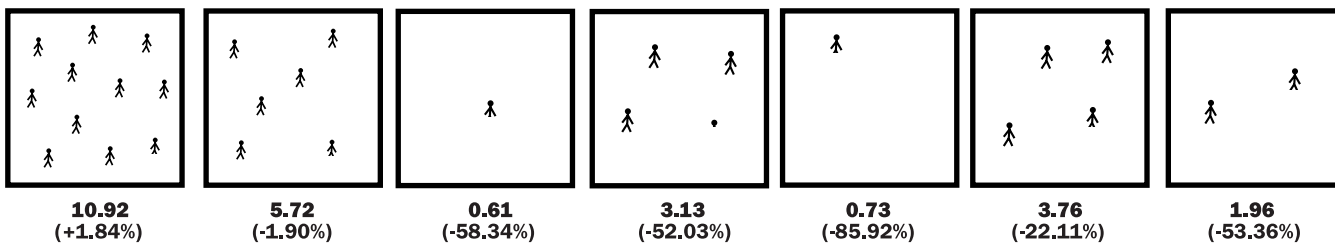
LAKE, IL

McHENRY

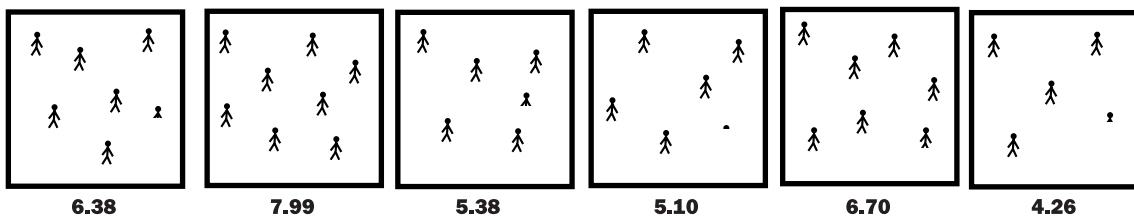
CURRENT AVERAGE DENSITY PER ACRE IN BUILT-UP AREAS



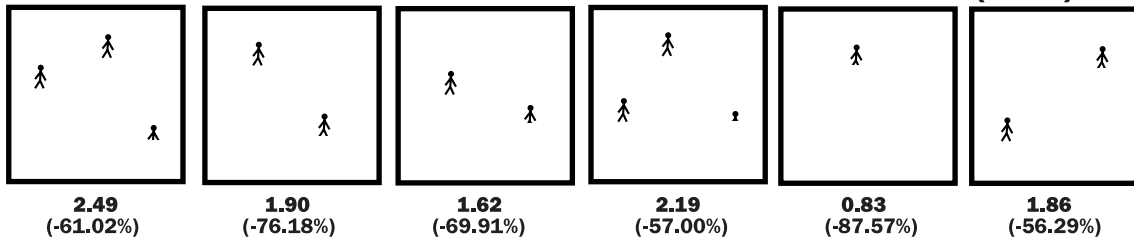
FUTURE AVERAGE DENSITY PER ACRE IN BUILT-UP AREAS (2028)



CURRENT AVERAGE DENSITY PER ACRE IN BUILT-UP AREAS



FUTURE AVERAGE DENSITY PER ACRE IN BUILT-UP AREAS (2028)



WILL

KENOSHA

WALWORTH

LAKE, IN

LaPORTE

PORTER

Source: SOLAR-Under Pressure map and map sources

Project Description and Methodology

Modeled in part after the work of the Greenbelt Alliance in the San Francisco Bay area, SOLAR staff obtained information about likely future land patterns through several sources. A principal feature of the project was the series of meetings held in each county of the project area (except DuPage, whose exclusion from the meeting process is discussed later in this section). Participants were invited to attend one or more county meetings depending on their geographic area of expertise, and they represented a broad range of policy makers, professional planners, open space advocates, builders and developers. The meetings took place from January through June 1998.

Each meeting began with a discussion of whether or not participants held confidence in population forecasts for their particular county, and was followed by a discussion of general land use and development trends. Participants provided information about future sewer service expansions, highway extensions, and other future infrastructure improvements. They discussed major land holdings, the development of which would greatly shape growth, and the owners' probable actions, as well as the role municipal plans play in the overall development of the county. They offered insights into the politics of land use, including changes in plans and zoning codes, the frequency with which zoning variances are granted, and other actions that would make orderly growth unlikely.

Prior to each meeting, staff prepared a base map from which to begin the discussion of development trends. Each county base map identified urbanized or built-up land, permanent open space, water features, and major roads and expressways. Project staff previously had gathered existing land use maps, comprehensive plans, open space inventories, other maps and documents from county and regional planning agencies and published digitized map sources, identified on the *Losing Ground* map.

Before identifying future development trends participants helped correct the base map, expanding urbanized areas to include the most up-to-date development information, and correcting other features, such as public open space, water, and roads. They discussed the various factors causing development pressures, and whether areas would likely develop in the short term (within ten years) or the longer term (from ten to thirty years). Staff facilitated the discussions, and participants reached consensus before locations were mapped.

An unanticipated technical difficulty encountered by staff was caused by the inaccuracy of many published commercial digitized mapping sources. Errors included: areas shown as dedicated rights-of-way where streets were never built; lands mapped as public open space that were neither public nor open; and planned-unit developments that were not illustrated as such. In addition to cor-

rections offered by meeting participants, staff reviewed the draft *Losing Ground* map with land resource professionals in each portion of the region to ensure the greatest possible accuracy.

Openlands conducted focus group discussions in each county of the study area except DuPage County. DuPage County had recently completed a thorough analysis of vacant land and had convened a special task force of informed participants. Holding an additional focus group meeting with many of the same people seemed redundant. The county's Department of Development and Planning provided Openlands with accurate, current data files depicting all vacant parcels; and planning staff advised that all such parcels are likely to be developed within the 10-year time horizon if not acquired for public open space.

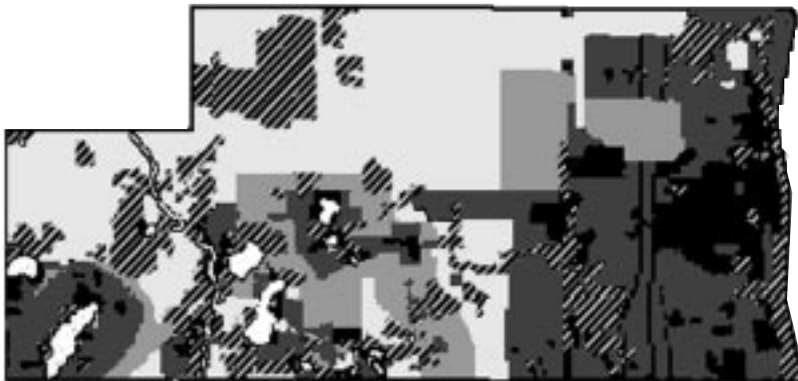
With respect to Cook County, the only sizable areas remaining undeveloped lie in the southern portion; hence a focus group was conducted specific to that locale. In Will County development trends vary dramatically between the western and eastern halves. In order to foster the most open responses about growth pressures, Openlands convened focus groups in each half of the County.

An initial query in developing the project was to determine which counties comprise the Chicago region. Traditionally, Chicago and suburban Cook County, plus the "collar counties" of DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will formed the metropolitan area. This six-county region was defined by the Illinois Legislature when it established the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) in 1957, and it remains the Primary Statistical Area for the U.S. Census. But the scope of suburbia has grown beyond the collar counties for several reasons, including the movement of major employers away from Chicago. With the growth of suburban employment centers such as Schaumburg in northwest Cook County, Naperville in western DuPage, and Vernon Hills in central Lake County, Illinois, employees often consider a radius around the workplace in determining their residential options. As those radii stretch into rural areas, the opportunities for purchasing a new home for less money with a quick drive to work become attractive. In time, these rural areas become part of the suburban landscape, and commuting times increase with the construction of each new housing development.

To reflect these trends, Openlands added seven counties to the NIPC area for its examination of sprawl: Kenosha and Walworth, Wisconsin; Kendall and Grundy, which lie south of DuPage and west of Will in Illinois; and Lake, Porter, and LaPorte in Indiana. If trends bear out, future updates of SOLAR may include DeKalb, LaSalle, and Kankakee Counties, Illinois; Racine County, Wisconsin; and St. Joseph County, Indiana. Berrien County, Michigan may not be far behind.



COUNTY-BY-COUNTY FINDINGS



Kenosha County, WI

Kenosha: Kenosha County has the highest percentage of its land at risk of near-term development—27 percent during the next ten years—and another 13 percent in the twenty years after that. If such trends bear out, Kenosha County may see its urbanized area increase four-fold in thirty years. This potential development frenzy would be possible if the State of Wisconsin adopts legislation allowing more residential construction outside of sewer service boundaries.

Participants noted the influence of Lake County, Illinois, on development trends, especially with respect to employment growth and land prices, and expressed concern that population forecasters seem to ignore what takes place south of the county line. Lake County represents the largest single employment site for Kenosha County residents. But while much of the growth can be attributed to movement from Chicago and Lake County, participants indicated that 50 percent is coming from outside Wisconsin and Illinois. The resurgence of the local economy appears to be supporting residential growth.

Participants noted that sewer and water availability play a greater role in determining growth areas than do incorporation and annexation. Development is taking place inside and outside of cities at the same rate. However, while SWRPC included a range of recommended lot sizes when it established sewer service areas,

many towns chose the upper end of the size range. Such decisions foreclose the chance of compact development in many locales even under current regulations requiring sewers. Further, town officials choose large lot zoning in an attempt to limit the number of school children they may have to educate.

Informants indicated that much information has been produced identifying sensitive natural areas—stream corridors, wetlands, unsuitable soils—but there appears to be a gap between information produced and getting it to the local decision makers. I-94 divides the eastern, urban portion of the county from the western, rural section. Developers have tended to avoid western areas, but there will likely be growth pressure as farmers wish to sell their land for development. The somewhat informal county policy will prove difficult to maintain, if market demands persist.

Walworth: Participants in Walworth County noted that strong county leadership has withstood requests to convert farmland and other open land to development by denying rezoning petitions. The 1974 comprehensive zoning ordinance, adopted by the towns (the equivalent of townships in Illinois) in 1982, requires 35-acre agricultural zoning outside of community growth areas. Walworth County maintains a farmland preservation program, and has roughly 600 farms enrolled. Yet, this strong stance in favor of farmland preservation is under constant pressure from farmers who wish to sell their land. Increasing land prices (along with declining crop prices) encourages their desire.

Growth is taking place in Delavan because it is located between Rockford and Milwaukee, yet is still close to Chicago. A new Motorola plant is responsible for some growth, while the restoration of Lake Delavan has made the area more attractive. Elkhorn, situated at the crossroads of Routes 12 and 43, has established a new industrial park, which has fomented additional growth. Lake Geneva has experienced growth pressure since the opening of Geneva National Golf Club and is considering a moratorium on new development while it revises its plans.

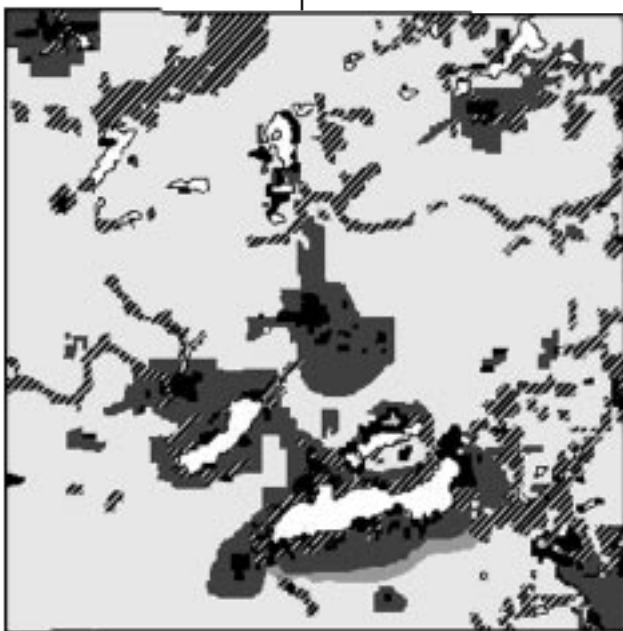
The map depicts considerable acreage at imminent risk of development: nearly 45,568 acres of land, compared with only 16,614 currently built up. On the positive side, most of the 10-year risk area surrounds existing urbanized areas. While new development may take place at much lower densities than historically, it is likely to be concentrated around those historic communities.

KEY TO MAPS

- Built-up Area
- High Risk Area
- Medium Risk Area
- Low Risk Area
- Permanent Open Space

see page 17 for details

Walworth County, WI





Lake (Illinois): Only two large areas remain undeveloped—the north-central segment, and the west-central area. Neither of these areas is yet served by sanitary sewers, and each has limited development opportunities. However, recent completion of a new sewer plant south of Old Mill Creek will open up development possibilities and drive up land prices.

The prime growth catalyst for Lake County would be completion of the northern extension of Route 53 in the central area, although participants thought the pressure would come after ten years. Much of the remaining undeveloped land in Lake County consists of wetlands and woodlands. These environmentally sensitive features require special protection as development occurs.

Residents have long been concerned about the disappearance of the rural environment that once surrounded cities and towns throughout Lake County. Many communities adopted development codes seeking to preserve some of this rural character by calling for large lots and low densities, but this resulted instead in a patchwork of disconnected greenways and sprawl. A renewed recognition of the loss of natural areas has led to concern about the character and quality of community design.

Conservation design, which calls for compact community development while more systematically preserving natural features and open space, has been demonstrated at Prairie Crossing near Grayslake. Policy makers should be looking to replicate this meshing of community building with resource conservation in other locations.

Participants noted that infill development is taking place in desirable communities such as Highland Park and Deerfield. Waukegan's vacant land and under-used parcels also present possibilities for infill growth, but market demand is not there. Also, completion of Route 53 may further shift development away from the lakefront towards the new road.

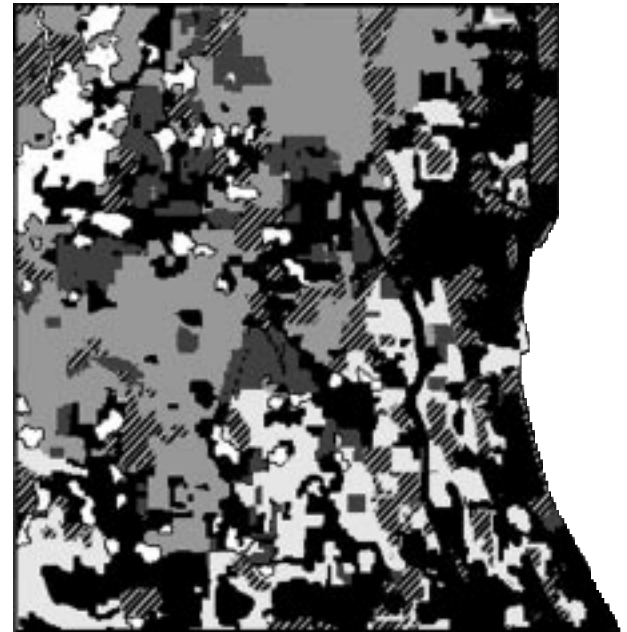
The south-central and southwestern portions of Lake County include many large estates, and municipal zoning requires lots of five acres and larger in some communities. While these areas may eventually experience pressure to resubdivide estates into smaller parcels, participants do not expect this to occur within the next 30 years.

McHenry: McHenry County has experienced one of the highest growth rates in the country in recent years, expanding its population from 147,897 in 1980 to 183,241 in 1990 for a 24 % increase, and another 23 % just between 1990 and 1995.

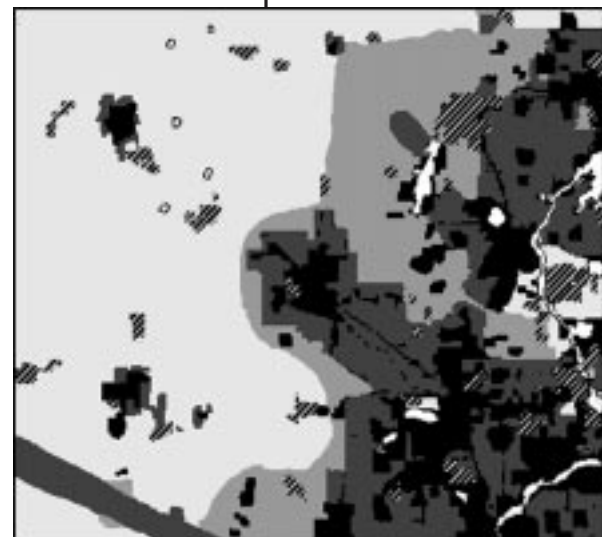
Development has concentrated mostly in the southeastern corner, but it has not occurred in a concentrated form. Most communities maintain large-lot zoning requirements that promote sprawl. Woodstock appears as one of the region's bright spots, however, with its vigilant protection of the village's historic character and adoption of a rural protection zone on its periphery. Even so, development pressure around it will likely continue, placing that land at risk of short term build-out.

One of the greatest inducements to further sprawl along the southern edge of the county was the completion of a four-way interchange at Route 47 on I-90 in Kane County, just south of McHenry County. This new interchange has increased development pressure in Kane County, as well as McHenry. Further, development pressure is mounting all along the I-90 corridor as more commuting takes place between Rockford and the northwest suburbs and points in between.

McHenry County presents a picture of contrasts. On one side, many residents are avid conservationists who wish to maintain the rural character they initially sought in moving there. (The McHenry County Defenders, a local conservation group, produced its own comprehensive plan in the early 1990s, hoping to influence county and municipal decision-making.) On the other side are municipal governments with aggressive annexation policies and development standards that practically mandate sprawl. In contrast with Kane and Lake Counties, McHenry offers little coordination of policies among the communities. The planning department has suffered from funding cuts, leaving little time to plan while processing building permits.



Lake County, IL



McHenry County, IL

continued on page 19



UNDER PRESSURE

Chicago Regional Areas At Risk, 1998-2028

COUNTY	TOTAL AREA		BUILT-UP AREA		HIGH RISK AREA		MODERATE RISK AREA		LOW RISK AREA		PERM. OPEN SPACE	
	ACRES	PERCENT	ACRES	PERCENT	ACRES	PERCENT	ACRES	PERCENT	ACRES	PERCENT	ACRES	PERCENT
Cook, IL	613,910		479,073	78.03%	29,106	4.74%	337	0.05%	7,554	1.23%	89,301	14.54%
DuPage, IL	216,227		145,583	67.32%	25,954	12.00%	0	0.00%	11,451	5.29%	31,680	14.65%
Grundys, IL	275,943		23,999	8.69%	21,037	7.62%	30,064	10.89%	191,743	69.48%	3,665	1.32%
Kane, IL	335,579		55,247	16.46%	84,923	25.30%	37,844	11.27%	141,753	42.24%	13,630	4.06%
Kendall, IL	205,865		8,729	4.24%	42,063	20.43%	44,036	21.39%	106,231	51.60%	3,496	1.69%
Lake, IL	300,991		119,145	39.58%	26,082	8.66%	72,053	23.93%	34,482	11.45%	35,119	11.66%
McHenry, IL	390,698		53,534	13.70%	79,856	20.43%	60,525	15.49%	178,514	45.69%	13,766	3.52%
Will, IL	544,180		70,175	12.89%	103,836	19.08%	170,883	31.40%	143,619	26.39%	47,871	8.79%
LaPorte, IN	388,524		18,572	4.78%	47,986	12.35%	66,743	17.17%	241,180	62.07%	10,577	2.72%
Lake, IN	320,230		93,931	29.33%	70,007	21.86%	60,738	18.96%	84,715	26.45%	7,698	2.40%
Porter, IN	269,060		33,836	12.57%	38,085	14.15%	37,980	14.11%	144,386	59.66%	13,603	5.05%
Kenosha, WI	179,019		18,285	10.21%	48,389	7.03%	20,087	12.89%	58,863	32.88%	26,308	14.69%
Walworth, WI	369,530		16,614	4.12%	45,568	12.33%	2,284	0.61%	251,841	68.15%	39,670	10.73%
TOTAL	4,409,757		1,136,730	25.70%	662,899	15.03%	606,580	13.16%	1,596,992	36.20%	336,385	7.62%

Note: percentages do not add up to 100 due to the exclusion of water.

Source: SOLAR-Under Pressure map and map sources



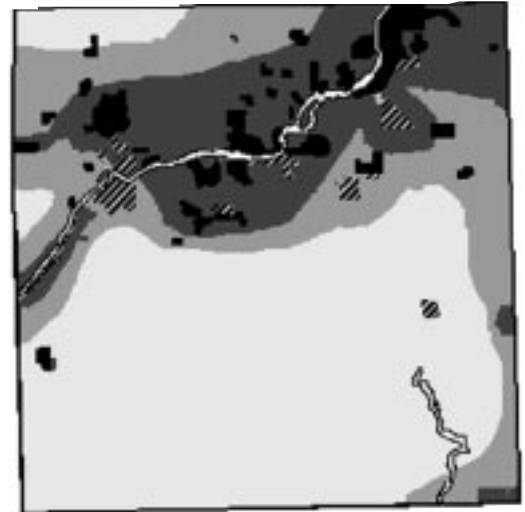
McHenry County had adopted farmland protection zoning that at one time required a minimum of 160 acres per lot. Although the zoning standard was reduced to a minimum of 40 acres, the policy has helped forestall sprawl. Focus Group participants expressed concern that the County's commitment to maintaining a rural landscape may be diminishing.

Participants in McHenry County's focus group seemed reluctant to identify areas under development pressure. However, Openlands staff indicated that virtually all land east of the Fox River could develop within ten years. Route 47 would likely function as the 30-year boundary.

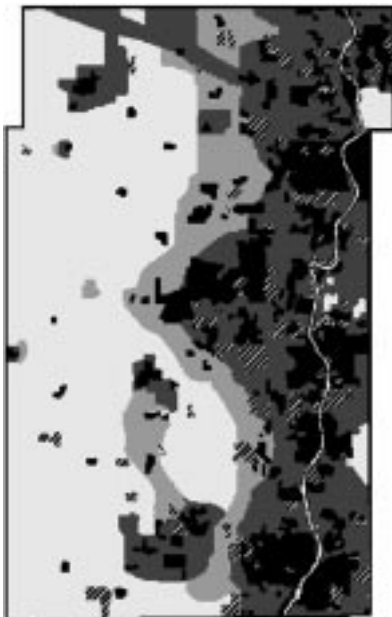
ties have entered into boundary agreements with one another, helping avert annexation battles. Several communities are in the process of updating their comprehensive plans to make them consistent with the County's; the Village of Sugar Grove has completed its plan update.

On the downside, if development occurs as indicated throughout the high risk areas, the Fox River corridor could be one continuous urban area. Cities along the Fox River should guard against local development controls that foster sprawl within municipal boundaries. These cities and towns have done much to maintain their historic scale within their downtowns; they should consider planning to replicate that scale in their newly developing areas as well.

Kendall: Historically, Kendall County comprised part of the agricultural belt surrounding the Chicago area and remained outside of what was considered the Chicago region. Apart from agriculture, economic development has lagged behind population growth, with Kendall serving as a bedroom community for the I-88 high-tech corridor. Municipalities want to promote growth, especially if it will lead to a higher tax base to relieve the burden on residents.



Kendall County, IL








Kane County, IL

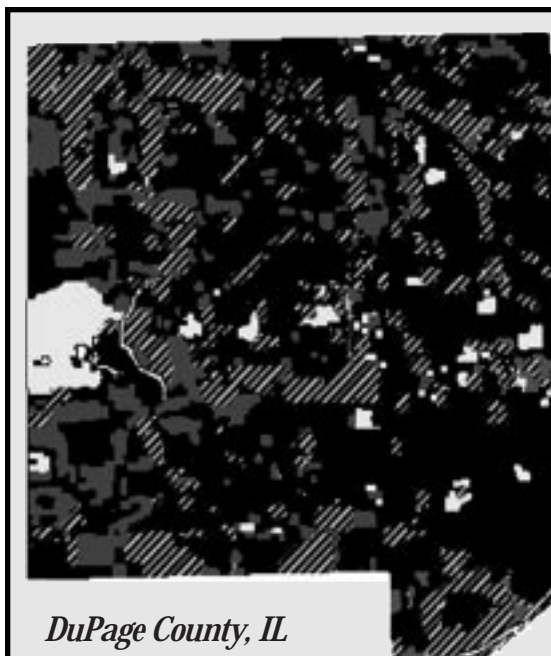
Kane: Kane County, while certainly an area under development pressure, also represents one of the bright spots in the region. Kane County's land resource management plan, which has received awards from the American Planning Association, directs most development to its eastern, urbanized sector. The plan allows for carefully planned development within its central managed-growth corridor, allowing densities based on watershed carrying capacities. Construction in this corridor takes into account the potential effects on drainage and runoff, and limits land coverage to a percentage of the watershed area. The western half of the county remains designated for agriculture.

Through outreach and ongoing assistance to its municipalities, Kane County appears to be achieving some success in moderating sprawl from the county-wide perspective. A number of municipali-

KEY TO MAPS

-  Built-up Area
-  High Risk Area
-  Medium Risk Area
-  Low Risk Area
-  Permanent Open Space

see page 17 for details



DuPage County, IL

DuPage: DuPage County conducted its own analysis of vacant land in 1996. The county's Department of Development and Planning provided the SOLAR project with complete map files of land coverage.

Development pressure in DuPage is so strong that if land is not acquired for permanent open space, it is under pressure to develop soon.



The county planning department has worked actively with municipalities to try to direct growth to the existing communities. However, the amount of land at risk of development in both the short term and within the 30-year horizon appears to far outpace any population or job projections. If the 10-year forecast bears out, the urbanized area will increase nearly four-fold. While the projected pattern would isolate development from the southern tier, permitting agriculture there to continue undisturbed, it would still result in sprawl. Focus group participants noted that surveys indicate support

for community preservation; however, local development policies appear to undermine preservation efforts.

Kendall County has the fewest acres of permanent open space in the SOLAR project area: 3,497 acres, representing 1.3 percent of its land area. (In contrast, DuPage County has protected nearly 15 percent of its land area.) Historically, the county's land has been devoted to agriculture, and its population has been small. With a high residential tax rate and small population base, public land acquisition has not yet become a priority for county officials. Informants indicated a need to pursue public land acquisition more aggressively.

Grundy: Like Kendall, Grundy County has not been considered part of the Chicago region in the past. However, it is being drawn into the region by commuter patterns as well as new development. Half of its labor pool commutes to jobs elsewhere, primarily in Will and DuPage Counties, while its employers attract a significant number of commuters from Will County. Focus group participants indicated that the county is trying to avoid "stand-alone subdivisions," but its large lot zoning requirements lead to sprawling developments.

Infrastructure expansion and availability will guide much of the anticipated

growth. Although the county has discouraged development south of the Illinois River, the planned upgrade of a bridge will lead to growth pressures. Both Minooka and Channahon have sewerage plants at capacity and have requests to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to expand their facility planning area boundaries (FPAs). Other towns with similar limitations include Coal City, Bracewell, and South Wellington.

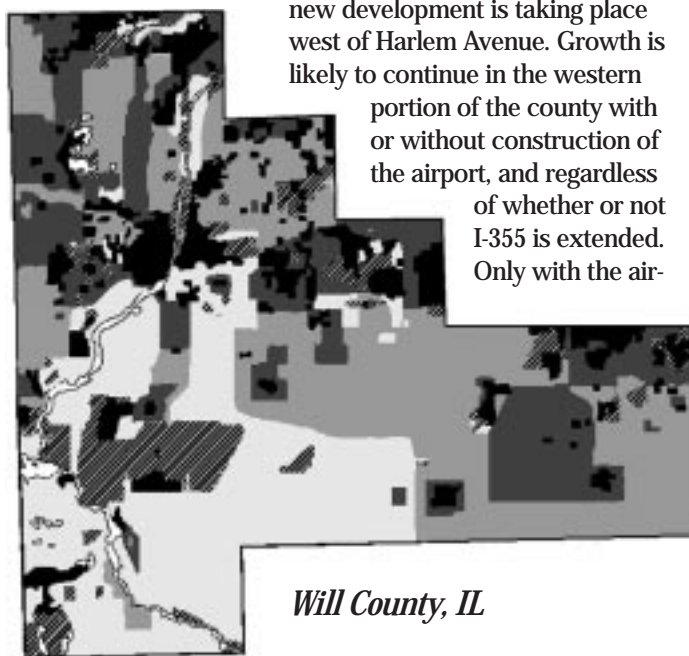
Unlike Kendall County, where much of the growth pressure is for residential development, Grundy's is industrial, according to informants. Route 47 serves as a primary corridor to Wisconsin, and I-55 extends southwest from Chicago. Grundy County's growth may take the unusual pattern of relatively compact residential development in its existing communities, with industrial development consuming large amounts of land between towns.

Will: Will County is poised for growth, and many county leaders welcome that growth. After an economic slowdown during the 1980s, the anticipation of the southern extension of I-355 and hopes for an airport at Peotone have led some officials to take offense at regional efforts to contain sprawl and foster more compact development. (Some officials have even suggested that the county withdraw from NIPC.) Joliet has taken an especially aggressive approach to annexation, extending west into Kendall County.

According to focus group participants, most new development is taking place west of Harlem Avenue. Growth is likely to continue in the western portion of the county with or without construction of the airport, and regardless of whether or not I-355 is extended. Only with the air-



Grundy County, IL



Will County, IL

port do participants believe the eastern portion will grow, especially during the 10- to 30-year horizon. Further, they expect the airport issue to be resolved after the November 1998 elections.

Informants questioned why Kankakee County was not part of the study area, suggesting that airport employment would likely draw from Kankakee, not the south side of Chicago. There are indications that former south suburban residents are moving yet farther south into Kankakee County, in search of a more rural existence. I-57 makes the commute easy and serves as a feeder for yet more development. In addition, METRA, the commuter rail service, is conducting a feasibility study to consider extending rail service on the Metra Electric line to Kankakee.

The high-risk portion of Will County encompasses 104,000 acres or 162.5 square miles, representing an area 50 percent larger than the presently built-up portions of the county. If developed, Will County's land coverage would exceed that of Chicago's by 48 square miles, with only about one-quarter the population.



Southern Cook County, IL

South Cook: As indicated previously, the only sizable amounts of land remaining for development lie in the southern portion of Cook County. Infill opportunities lie throughout the county, but only south Cook faces development issues similar to the other counties of the study area. (Cook County is in the process of considering for adoption a new comprehensive plan, the first in over 20

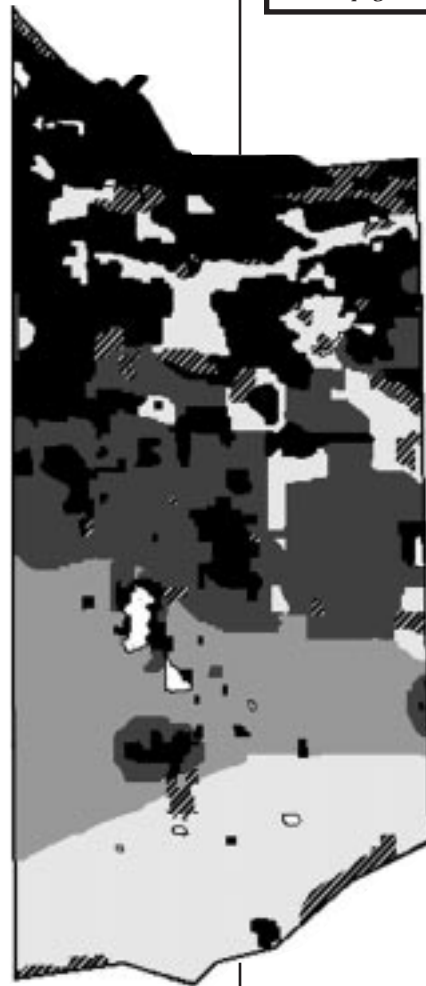
years. The plan would address development adjacent to existing communities in the northwest and in the larger southern portions.) Unlike many newly developing areas, south Cook County is well served by public infrastructure. Participants commented that unless the airport were built at Peotone, development would only take place in select locations, such as Orland and Lemont Townships. Participants commented that developers bypass opportunities for projects in South Cook in favor of northwest Indiana, where the tax structure is more favorable. Informants noted that several private golf courses are experiencing financial problems and could be sold for development. Farmland preservation is not an issue; development is assumed.

Lake (Indiana): Northwest Indiana experienced population and job losses during the 1980s, but is beginning to show recovery. However, participants noted that the county's population is still shifting from Gary and other urban areas to communities such as St. John and Schererville. The US 30 and I-65 corridors are under tremendous pressure as "everything" moves south.

Participants suggested that northwest Indiana is attractive to northeastern Illinois residents because of the lower cost of living (especially land costs and property taxes), the proximity to downtown Chicago, and commuter rail availability. The number of northwest Indiana residents working in northeastern Illinois doubled between 1980 and 1996, from 24,000 to 50,000.

Informants noted that infrastructure expansion into rural areas made possible through State of Indiana grants is affecting land consumption and urbanization. The effects include municipal expansion outward and county subdivision permits. With one-third of new building permits being issued by the county, growth is clearly taking place outside municipal boundaries. Further, the county grants

KEY TO MAPS	
	Built-up Area
	High Risk Area
	Medium Risk Area
	Low Risk Area
	Permanent Open Space
<i>see page 17 for details</i>	



Lake County, IN



Porter County, IN

zoning variances that facilitate development in rural areas. The 2020 transportation plan, with its new arterial roads and new interchanges on I-94, could also open new areas for development. However, fiscal constraints could prevent implementation of many roadway improvements. Regardless of infrastructure improvements, participants and other informants see continued southward development pressures.

While farmland preservation has not been a county policy, a new state task force has been established to examine ways to counteract loss of farmland.

Participants identified vast amounts of land under threat of development in both the 10- and 30-year categories. The 10-year lands represent an area nearly three-quarters of the already built-up portions of the county. The 30-year area is similar in size. These forecasts assume continued exodus from the historic urban areas and development at very low densities.

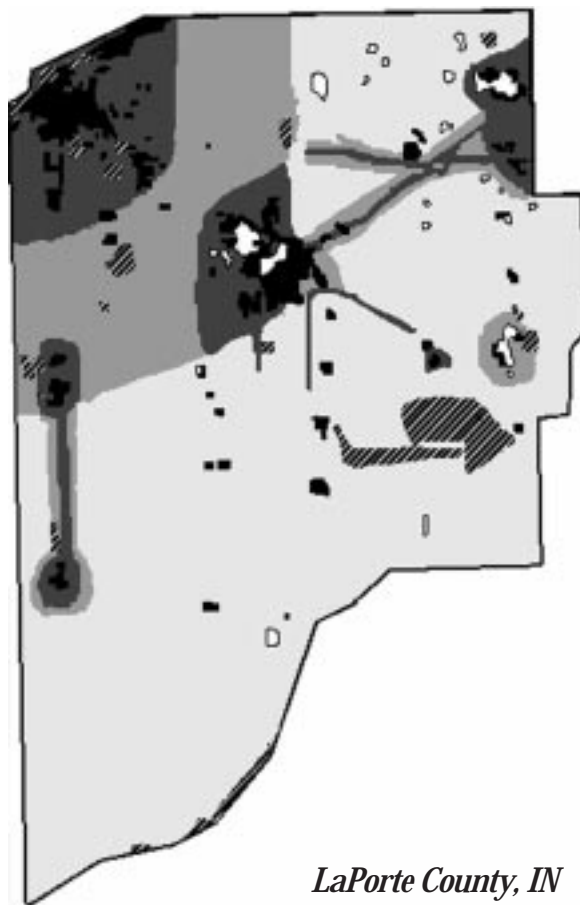
Porter: Porter County represents one of the bright spots for recognizing the need to prepare for and manage growth. NIPSCO, the major electric utility serving the northern part of the county, wants to foster development to counter sprawl. The Lake Erie Land Company, a subsidiary, is planning a 640-acre environmentally sustainable development in Chesterton with 240 acres dedicated as permanent open space.

Participants consider the area part of the Chicago region, especially as businesses from south Cook and Chicago move east into Lake and Porter Counties. However, some expressed frustration that a series of environmental initiatives coming to northwest Indiana have been initiated by Chicagoans. Some feel that they have been included “after the fact” and are seen as less than equal partners.

Informants did note that not all the growth is coming from Chicago—some is resulting from white flight from Lake County. The north end of Portage is now home to many businesses that were previously located in Gary. Further, Portage, Chesterton, and Valparaiso are growing together.

LaPorte: The county lost population between 1980 and 1990, but saw a modest increase of 3 percent by 1995. Participants rejected the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission’s (NIRPC) no-growth forecast, although they noted that much of the new development is dispersing the existing population. They were highly critical of county policy (or lack thereof), noting the county master plan has not been updated since 1964 (a newer edition was voted down). The board routinely grants variances and approves wastewater service/septic service extensions. As in Lake County, participants noted the state’s role in promoting sprawl. In assisting Wanatah for sewer service improvements, the State required the system be expanded by 20 percent even though no growth forecasts warranted it. “Developers like LaPorte County because there are no rules and everything is negotiable.”

The amount of land at risk of development within ten years appears almost preposterous, except that it represents scattered development on large parcels. While future development will probably occur at extremely low densities, it illustrates the helter-skelter land pattern that emerges when no plan guides growth.



LaPorte County, IN

KEY TO MAPS	
	Built-up Area
	High Risk Area
	Medium Risk Area
	Low Risk Area
	Permanent Open Space

see page 17 for details

NATURAL AREAS AT RISK

The Chicago region is the most populous region of the Midwest and at the same time is home to some of the rarest and most biologically diverse natural communities in the world. The region's landscape includes unique natural communities ranging from dunes complexes along the shores of Lake Michigan to wooded communities along major waterways to scattered remnant prairies and savannas. Its rivers and lakes support one of the most diverse collections of wetlands on this continent. These unique communities include:

- More than 35 colonial nesting sites for great blue herons, double breasted cormorants, black-crowned night herons, great egrets, and cattle egrets.
- A collection of the last remaining known communities of the rare and endangered Hines emerald dragonfly.
- Nineteen of 21 of Illinois' remaining populations of the federally threatened prairie white-fringed orchid; and
- Over 100 prairie remnants that represent the region's vanishing natural heritage.



This collection of rare natural features has made the Chicago region the center of several national efforts to recover rare endangered and threatened natural communities. At the center of these efforts is Chicago Wilderness, an unprecedented partnership of private conservation organizations, cultural and scientific research institutions, and federal, state, and local conservation agencies. The partnership is built around a common goal to protect, restore, and manage the natural lands and the plants and animals within the Chicago region. However, many of the region's natural resources are at risk of being lost to development.

Status of Public Ownership of Significant Natural Areas

- The Illinois Department of Natural Resources has identified 256 Natural Area Inventory Sites in the eight-county Illinois portion of the region. Of these sites, 146 are not protected.
- The Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission has identified 139 Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitats for public acquisition in Walworth and Kenosha Counties. Of these sites, only 21 are entirely protected by public ownership, portions of another 55 sites are in public ownership, and 63 sites remain entirely unprotected by public ownership.
- The Indiana Department of Natural Resources has identified 113 significant natural area sites in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties. Of these sites, 66 are not protected by public ownership.
- In the 13-county region, 319 of the region's identified significant natural areas remain totally or partially unprotected.

Examples of Resource-Rich Areas at Risk

- The Fox River watershed represents the largest area of natural resources threatened by development. Development pressure begins at the northern stretch of the watershed in Kenosha County, and surrounds the Fox River Chain O' Lakes in Lake County, Illinois. The high-quality Nippersink Creek sub-watershed and rare fen communities along the Fox River are under development pressure in McHenry County. With 72 Natural Area Inventory Sites, this part of the Chain O' Lakes-Fox River watershed has the highest concentration of natural areas in all of Illinois. In addition, there are several high-quality savannas, fens, and meadows worthy of protection in the developing areas of northern and central Lake County.
- The rapidly urbanizing area of eastern Kane County and northern Kendall County lie farther south along the river. Development in this part of the watershed is likely to dramatically increase stormwater runoff and discharge into the river and result in a need for a proliferation of sewage treatment plants along the Fox River.
- Lakes Geneva, Como, and Delavan, in the southern part of Walworth County, are under imminent pressure for additional residential and resort development. While development has nearly surrounded the immediate shorelines of these lakes, development pressure now extends throughout the watershed. The few remaining undeveloped wooded areas are under the greatest immediate threat, while there is mounting pressure to develop farmland, especially in the southern portion of the Lake Geneva watershed.
- High quality tributaries of the Kankakee River will be under tremendous development pressure if plans for a third regional airport in eastern Will County move forward. In addition, the headwaters of high-quality watersheds of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie are on a collision course with development pressure in central Will County. Finally, the sustainability of the Lake Renwick Heron Rookery is threatened by loss of habitat and foraging areas in the northwestern part of Will County, especially in areas along the DuPage River, Rock Run Creek, and Lower Spring Creek.
- Several resource-rich natural areas are under development pressure in the Indiana portion of the study area. Among the most significant communities under threat are the dune and swale communities along the shore of Lake Michigan, the rare flat woods area of northern LaPorte County, the Hobart Marsh complex in central Lake County, and the wooded and wet areas of the Valparaiso Moraine, which extend from eastern Lake County into north central Porter County.



THE CASE FOR URBAN INFILL

One of the questions the SOLAR project hoped to address is the extent to which infill development could accommodate some of the predicted 25 percent increase in regional population. Infill refers to the reuse of land that is vacant because of demolition of previous structures or construction that takes place on individual parcels of land that have been passed over for other sites. Once-developed land lies vacant for a number of reasons, including: 1) possible soil contamination (brownfield sites); 2) scattered parcels, which make site assembly difficult; and 3) depressed market conditions due to local demographics (race, income).

Redevelopment is occurring in many communities throughout the region, especially those suburban towns well situated along commuter railroads. Infill construction has been taking place in sub-

urbs such as Hinsdale, Wilmette, and Park Ridge, where incomes are high, property is well maintained, and school districts produce high achievement scores. But such communities also share other features, such as compact town centers with train stations and convenient shopping, neighborhoods with sidewalks, numerous city parks, and lots of street trees.

But the infill phenomenon seems to be bypassing many of the region's older communities, especially the central districts of the satellite cities of Waukegan, Aurora, Elgin, and Joliet. These satellite cities, while always connected to Chicago through markets and transportation systems, developed as independent cities. Only in recent decades have they been considered part of the suburban "commuter-shed." Now, as illustrated by the *Losing Ground* map, they no longer define the outer reaches of the metropolitan area. Project staff contacted redevelopment officials in each of these cities to gather data, preferably maps, identifying vacant land. Staff found that none maintained parcel files that would supply information sufficient to illustrate or evaluate the amount of vacant land for infill development. Rather, redevelopment offices identified only those sites specifically targeted for infill construction or redevelopment. Further, some offices included newly annexed sites, not just central city parcels, as infill sites. Maps showing only those sites would provide misleading and incomplete information for the purpose of determining how much population growth these cities could absorb. Based on observation, there are significant numbers of vacant parcels as well as under-used or vacant structures within the central areas of each of the satellite cities that could offer infill development opportunities.

Meanwhile, the satellite cities have adopted aggressive annexation policies, extending their borders into far-reaching rural territory. Waukegan, for instance, has expanded into Libertyville Township, where new residents can enjoy the benefits of a Libertyville address as well as its schools. Joliet has embarked on a westward expansion that extends into rural Kendall County. Aurora has annexed land in Kendall County as well. These cities have become some of the residential "hot spots" during the past few years.

Chicago is the hottest among the region's residential hot spots, with more building permits issued from 1995-97 than any of the suburbs. (See map on page 26.) Gentrification is spreading



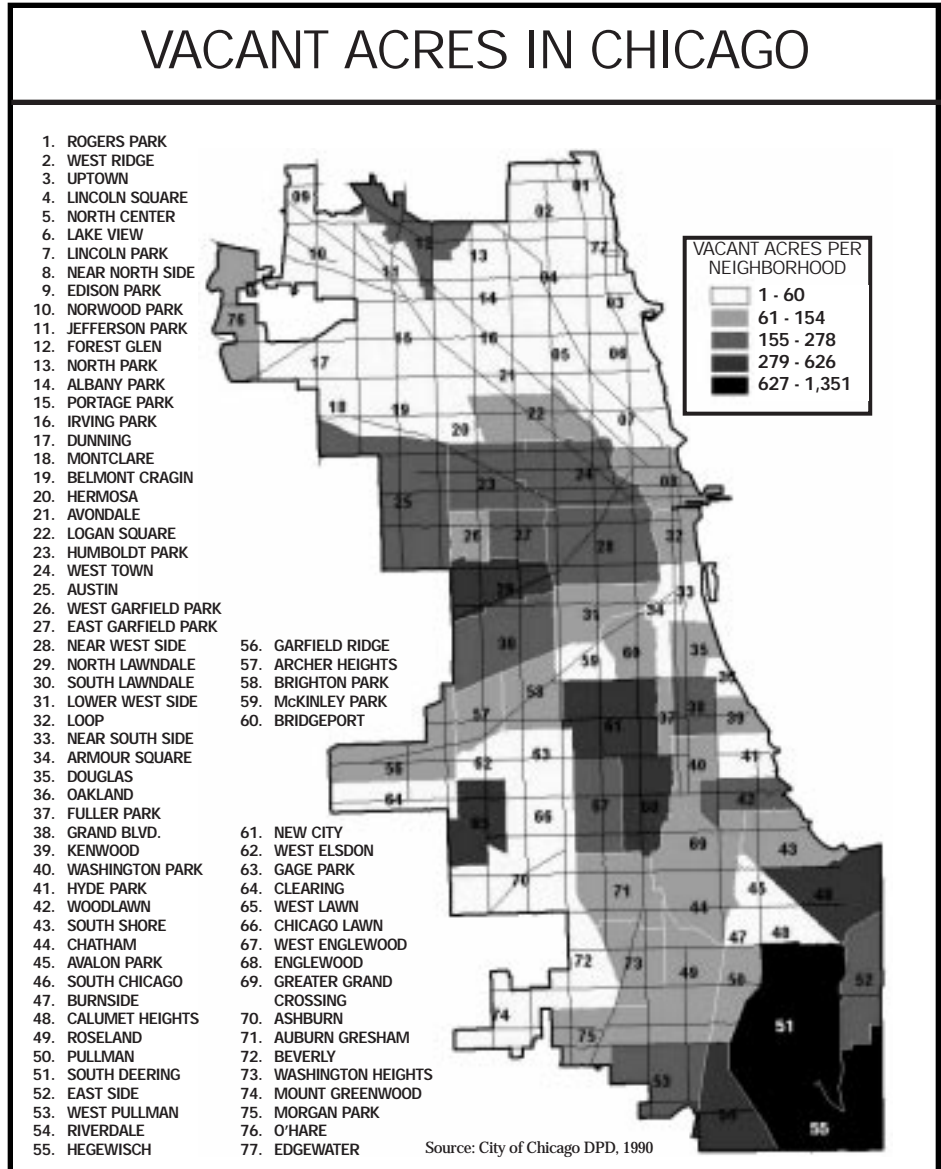
New affordable housing in Chicago follows the pattern and scale of many of Chicago's older neighborhoods.

beyond Lincoln Park and Lakeview on the north side into Edgewater and Uptown, and development pressure from Lincoln Park has spread west, spurring redevelopment of the Cabrini-Green public housing project and surrounding blocks. Even neighborhoods long considered dangerous because of high crime rates, drug abuse, and housing abandonment show some signs of rejuvenation. Parts of the near West Side, North Kenwood/Oakland and Woodlawn on the South Side, and even parts of North Lawndale have seen new housing constructed over the past few years.

However, Chicago still has a large inventory of potential infill sites—10 percent of once-developed land now lies vacant. The City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is now assembling a vacant parcel data file that will be geocoded to produce maps delineating actual vacant sites. Although this map has not yet been completed, the Department was able to provide a database identifying vacant parcels of one-half acre or larger by community planning area. The map at right illustrates a range of vacant acreage by Chicago community planning area.

These data and maps confirm that Chicago can accommodate additional population. According to the DPD database, Chicago has over 9,800 acres of vacant land. If only two-thirds of that land were redeveloped for housing, at a relatively low urban density of 12 units per acre, assuming 2.6 persons per household (NIPC's projected household size in 2020), it would enable an additional 203,636 people to live in Chicago. This would account for more than the additional 196,000 people anticipated to live in Chicago by 2020. (See the *population table on page 9*.) Other sites could also be made available for redevelopment. However, under no scenario could the city of Chicago absorb all or most of the anticipated regional growth.

Chicago's population peaked in 1950 at 3,620,962 persons. If the 2020 projection of 2,917,196 proves accurate, it would comprise about 81 percent of the 1950 peak. Many things have changed since 1950, and no one would suggest that we return to the standard of living of that era. Among the many changes is household size. In 1950, Chicago's household size was 3.19 and living conditions were crowded. It is highly unlikely that Chicago's population will return to the 1950 number, given both smaller household size and a market preference for townhouse and mid-rise, not high-rise housing. With smaller households than in the past, Chicago



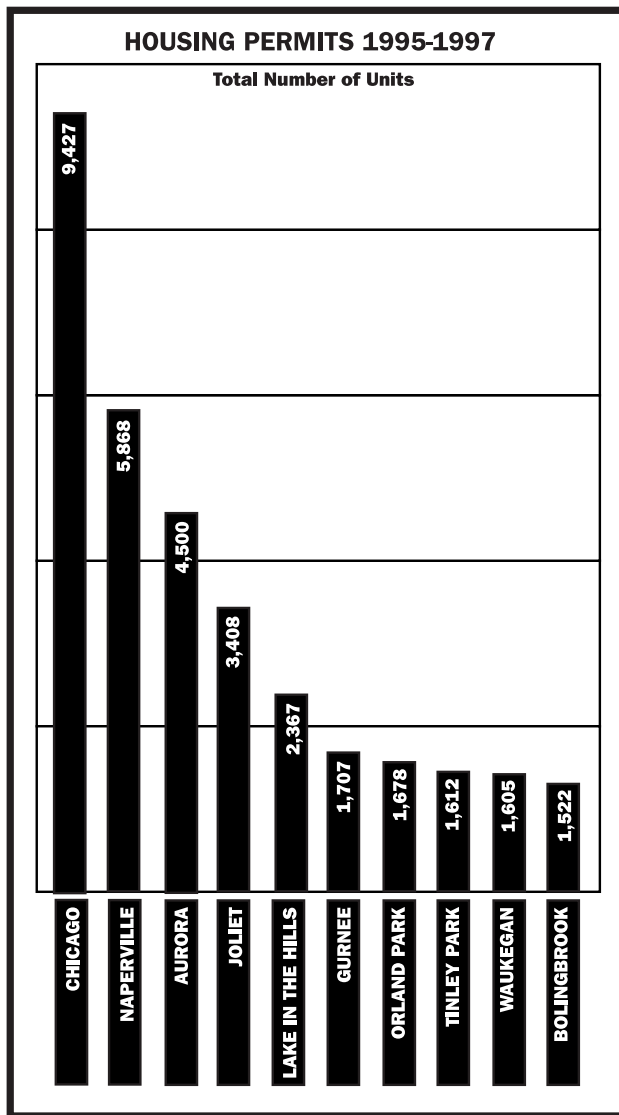
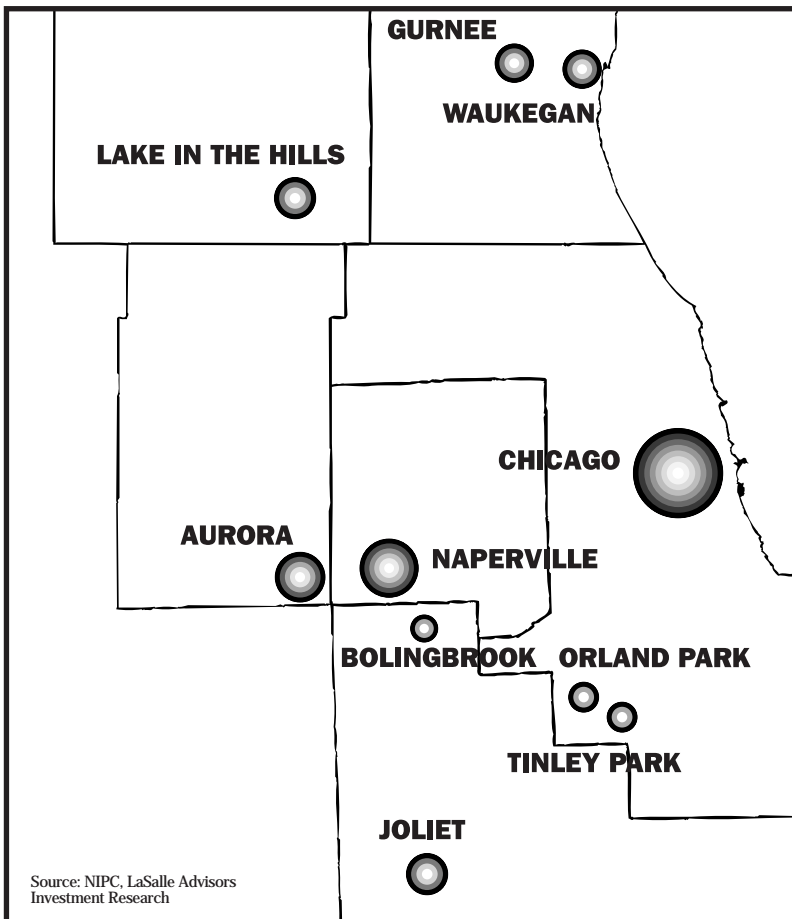
would require roughly the same number of housing units in 2020 as it had in 1950 to house a population projected to be 20 percent smaller. For it to accommodate more people would require redevelopment at higher replacement densities, an unlikely scenario under current standards.

Chicago's renewal should not and will not be limited to residential growth. The 2020 forecast estimates that population growth in Chicago would account for seven and-a-half percent of the six-county region's growth since 1990, along with 15 percent employment growth. However, NIPC's 2020 forecast, which assumes construction of a third regional airport, shows Chicago's share of both population and employment within the six-county area declining from 38 percent to 32 percent, indicating the bulk of growth will occur in the collar



Residential Hot Spots in the Chicago Region

Chicago's residential construction led the region from 1995-97, and three of the four satellite cities were also in the top ten. But new construction in Aurora, Joliet, and Waukegan has been mostly in the newly annexed areas, bypassing older neighborhoods with vacant land.



counties. This portends a continuation of recent trends in which the Chicago region continues to decentralize. (It does not even begin to address the region's housing imbalance, where low-income residents remain concentrated in Chicago and first-ring suburbs, while job growth occurs in the outlying communities. Nor does it address the competition for jobs and tax base between the region's many municipal governments, which has led to growing disparities between tax base-rich and tax base-poor communities. These factors contribute to the land consumption pattern illustrated by the SOLAR map, but require attention far beyond this project's primary focus.)

Continued renewal of Chicago and the satellite cities is vital to the region's health; certainly, continuing the pattern of abandonment that ensued from the 1950s through much of the 1990s would be a prescription for even more sprawl than that depicted by the map. But reining in sprawl development requires numerous changes to our now-typical practices. It requires county and municipal efforts to promote sensible growth where new development is needed to accommodate population and employment growth. It also requires state governments to provide leadership, coordination, and incentives to manage growth and change. The following section offers policy recommendations toward that end.

Shaping Regional Growth

The sprawl that characterizes much of northeastern Illinois, southeastern Wisconsin, and northwestern Indiana emerged from the convergence of federal, state, and local tax and development policies, as well as personal preferences and market forces. The playing field laid out by state planning and zoning enabling laws, by infrastructure funding requirements, and by regional agencies whose allocations favor developing communities over established ones, is an uneven one that makes sprawl all but inevitable. Further, this playing field requires municipalities to compete with one another for land uses that generate tax base, and allows many to avoid accommodating undesirable land uses. (It has even generated its own slang, with NIMBY, or “not in my backyard,” and LULU, “locally unwanted land use,” becoming part of the lexicon.)

Public policy has had a profound effect on both the pace and direction of land consumption in the Chicago region over the past 50 years. During this time our region has effectively promoted urban growth in rural areas, where state and federal highway construction, housing policies, and financing have made inexpensive land at the urban fringe both accessible and affordable. At the same time that money has been available for infrastructure at the

urban fringe, it has been unavailable for rehabilitating existing infrastructure or financing older housing.

The balkanized approach to governance requires municipalities to compete for fiscal resources, with growing communities and declining ones vying for the same tax-generating land uses. While municipalities became skilled at attracting development and annexing lands to accommodate revenue-driven urban growth, preserving open space, farmland, and natural resources took the back seat. The result has been 50 years of rapid land consumption with little attention paid to natural resource protection and growth management.

The phenomena of rapid urban growth, land consumption, and other growth related problems are not unique to the Chicago region. However, the lack of coordinated planning and state leadership in resource protection, land use, and urban growth policy is notable. Local control in decision-making, the proliferation of local governments and other taxing bodies, and competition for property tax dollars in Illinois have made coordinated planning difficult, at best. The State of Illinois has no statewide policy on land use or formal role in coordinating local land use planning. Furthermore, it lacks procedures to coordinate activities among state agencies that affect devel-





opment. Individual state agencies pursue narrowly defined programs and consider the effect of their actions on land use only as an afterthought, if at all.

A number of states have taken a leadership role in developing statewide land use goals that shape urban growth and protect natural resources. New state planning legislation has introduced a variety of new opportunities for states, including: 1) adopting statewide land use and planning goals; 2) creating a review process for developments of regional impact; 3) linking provision of public services to land use goals; 4) focusing state capital expenditures on targeted growth areas; 5) defining urban growth boundaries; 6) coordinating state agency decisions and other land use related actions; and 7) requiring local planning and establishment of standards and a review process for local planning.

Maryland's Smart Growth and Neighborhood Conservation Act of 1997 has received much attention since its passage. The Smart Growth Act aims to manage future growth by focusing state funding in designated growth areas, and refusing to allocate state funds to pay for growth related infrastructure outside of "priority funding areas." Priority funding areas include designated growth areas in existing communities and areas where economic development is a state goal. At the same time Maryland has dramatically increased funding for the state's two land acquisition programs, Project Open Space and the Rural Legacy

Program.

In 1973, the State of Oregon passed statewide planning legislation that established the Land Conservation and Development Department and Commission (LCDC) to develop and implement statewide planning goals. Local plans must conform to the statewide planning goals and are subject to review and approval by the LCDC. Perhaps most notably, local plans must designate 20-year urban growth

boundaries. Lands outside of the urban growth boundaries are placed in an exclusive agricultural zone where neither urban development nor infrastructure extensions are allowed.

In the spring of 1998, Tennessee enacted a comprehensive state growth policy that calls for designation of urban growth boundaries for municipalities. Not as stringent as Oregon's, the legislation allows some growth in unincorporated areas. The law calls for the establishment of coordinating committees in each county that will develop county-wide growth plan. These plans will include urban growth boundaries for each municipality. Other states that have enacted notable and innovative land-use programs include Florida, Washington, Vermont, Rhode Island, Georgia, and Hawaii.

Florida, Vermont, Delaware, and Georgia have established procedures for reviewing developments of regional impact (DRIs). DRIs typically consist of large-scale developments that affect more than one unit of government, such as multi-building office parks, hotel complexes, and so forth. Both Florida and Vermont have significant state authority to modify, appeal, or even reject proposals for such developments. In Delaware and Georgia, DRIs are subject to state and regional review.

Finally, New Jersey created a state planning commission in 1986 to establish a statewide "development and redevelopment plan," which designated conservation lands and identified areas where development and redevelopment should be encouraged. New Jersey's "cross acceptance" provision establishes a process for coordinating statewide goals with local plans. In November of 1998, voters in New Jersey passed a constitutional amendment that will dedicate \$98 million a year to finance open space acquisition, farmland preservation, historic preservation, and recreational development.

Just as public policy has been influential in promoting damaging land-use practices, loss of open space and community decline, new land-use and regional-growth policies can help to shape growth, protect open space and build community. The Chicago region can benefit from policies and initiatives similar to those launched in other states and regions across the country. However, these new policies for managing and directing redevelopment and growth must be adapted to address the specific conditions and challenges of the Chicago metropolitan region.



Conservation developments, like Prarie Crossing in Lake County, IL, preserve natural areas by clustering houses.

photo: Terry Evans

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY CHANGE

While there is no single solution to the problems associated with sprawl, the experience of other states suggests that an array of tools exists for shaping the way the region grows. The policy changes recommended in this document are not intended to be comprehensive. They attempt to address primarily the land use issues that are associated with a sprawl pattern of development. While capable of having significant impact, these recommendations do not directly address such related issues as education, economic development, and air quality.

I. Establish Programs and Provide More Funding to Protect Resource Rich Lands

The states of Illinois and Indiana should establish state land preservation programs similar to the Green Acres Program in New Jersey or Maryland's Project Open Space and Rural Legacy Program. In Wisconsin, the State Stewardship Program should be permanently funded beyond 2000 when current funding ends. The mission of the land preservation programs should be to acquire or otherwise protect significant land resources under development pressure. State land preservation programs should target critical natural areas under development pressure. They should also facilitate the acquisition of lands to implement regional and local open space plans as well as lands to meet the growing outdoor recreation needs of the region's residents.

Forest preserve district and conservation district budgets should be funded to the fullest extent possible under Illinois' current tax cap restrictions and, where necessary, referenda should be held to secure additional funding for land acquisition. Illinois counties where no conservation or forest preserve districts exist should establish such districts to protect open space. Regardless of the governmental structure, adequate funding for open space acquisition should be a priority of county government. A variety of land preservation strategies should be pursued including fee-simple acquisition, purchase of conservation easements, and acceptance of qualified conservation easements. In addition, federal, state and local governments should support private efforts to preserve open space, such as conservation developments and the donation of conservation easements.

To guide land acquisition decisions, each county should develop a comprehensive map and inventory of critical natural, scenic and cultural resources. Such an inventory should include detailed site spe-

cific information about the location of high quality natural resources such as wetlands, prairies, woodlands, streams and stream corridors, and shorelines. It should also identify significant viewsheds and cultural resources.

II. Establish a State Office of Planning and Land Conservation

Recognizing that urban/suburban sprawl is not a problem unique to the Chicago metropolitan area but is of concern to cities throughout

Illinois, the governor's office should establish an office of planning and land conservation. Its function would be to develop and implement state land use goals and strategies, coordinate state agency policies and actions that affect land use, and conduct research to inform and support the planning process. This office should include a citizens advisory committee composed of appointed citizens and representatives of regional advocacy organizations to advise on issues relating to urban growth. At a minimum, the land use policy should:

- 1) Identify and establish resource protection areas or areas of critical state concern where state activities, policies, and resources should be focused on protecting significant natural resources such as wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, shorelines, stream corridors, habitat of endangered and threatened species, and prime and important farmland. State policies and programs should discourage urban growth in these areas.

- 2) Establish priorities for capital expenditures that affect land use similar to the approach taken by the Maryland Smart Growth and Neighborhood Conservation Act. Capital programming priorities should focus state resources on maintaining existing public investments in established communities and should prohibit growth-related capital expenditures in resource protection areas or areas of critical state concern. A state community development grant program should be established to encourage infill and redevelopment projects in existing urban areas.





Capital programming should otherwise be consistent with goals of the State Land Preservation Program, Agriculture Areas Conservation and Protection Act, the Farmland Protection Act, and established statewide land use goals.

3) Provide incentives to local governments with zoning authority to develop and adopt comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances that are consistent with statewide goals. Similar efforts should be undertaken in Indiana and Wisconsin to coordinate land-use planning and establish statewide land-use goals and capital programming priorities.

III. Establish a New Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Chicago Region

A new regional planning organization should be established that combines the functions and goals of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) and the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS). This new agency would be designated the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for federal transportation funding purposes. It would ensure coordination between land use and transportation plans and would give priority to transportation improvement projects that encourage transit-oriented development and land conservation. Goals should be established to reduce regional vehicle miles traveled and the MPO should provide greater funding to maintain and improve the region's public transit system to reach this goal. Current regional transportation plans simply reflect the collection of transportation system improvements proposed by counties, municipalities, state agencies and transportation providers. Future regional transportation plans should be developed to achieve statewide land use goals, and should be consistent with the goals of the state land preservation program, Agriculture Areas Protection Act, and the Illinois Farmland Protection Act.

IV. Create a Tri-State Regional Task Force to Coordinate Growth Management Efforts

A tri-state regional task force should be established by the governors of Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin to examine ways to better coordinate growth management efforts, policies and actions between the three states. The task force should

include citizens, elected officials, and representatives from state agencies, county planning commissions and regional planning commissions.

Growing Greener at the County and Municipal Level

The recommendations in the preceding section call for action at the state and/or federal level, but counties and municipalities also play a significant role in shaping growth. Growing communities should re-think their current comprehensive plans to promote sustainable development. This type of development seeks to concentrate new growth around existing centers and limit development in outlying areas. By encouraging more compact growth, communities can protect sensitive natural areas, preserve open space between towns, and create pedestrian friendly communities.

Plans and development regulations should offer incentives to encourage compact, mixed-use development. Impediments to infill development, redevelopment and higher density traditional neighborhood development should be identified and removed. Incentives could include density bonuses for conservation design and cluster development.

Municipalities should update comprehensive plans and zoning and subdivision ordinances to require open space and resource protection as a first step in site design. Municipalities should require donations of land for recreation purposes, or fees in lieu thereof, as part of the subdivision approval process. County and municipal governments should protect proposed regional greenway corridors and include implementation of the Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways Plan in county and local land use plans. Efforts should be made to link the Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways Plan to greenways in neighboring Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin counties.

County and municipal officials should adopt exclusive agricultural zoning and, where currently in place, aggressively uphold it to protect high quality farmland. Minimum lot sizes in agricultural zones should be consistent with the typical size of farming operations in that county. Variances to zoning requirements should be granted rarely.

Conclusion

There is no “silver bullet” that can solve the problems resulting from urban sprawl. The problem is complex and will require solutions on a number of different fronts. The SOLAR map illustrates just how much more land could be consumed by sprawling development over the next decades. Recent trends show revitalization taking place in parts of Chicago that many considered hopelessly abandoned. Yet, many other previously developed urban areas

continue to lie fallow. A healthy region will emerge as under-used urban land is reclaimed, and when newly developing communities adopt policies and plans that encourage compact town centers and preservation of natural areas at their perimeters. The policy recommendations provide a working agenda for regional leaders to begin reshaping the ground rules that have fostered sprawl over the past half-century.

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McHenry County Defenders
Business and Professional People for the Public Interest
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