



The Urban-Rural



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Winter 2008

Living in Harmony with Winter

By: Patrick J. Coleman,

Principal and Town Planner, U.P. Engineers & Architects, Houghton, Michigan

Michigan's unique climate creates a host of benefits. However, it also poses a number of challenges that "winter cities" must overcome in order to best handle the demands of the weather and to fully utilize the winter season as an important community asset. Listed below are some of the positive and negative aspects of winter.

Positive Aspects of Winter

- Outdoor recreational opportunities, including downhill and cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, ice fishing, snow shoeing, ice skating, and hockey.
- Natural beauty, accented by snow and ice.
- Increased appreciation for indoor arts, culture, and social activities.
- Winter tourism, special events, and festivals.
- Using ice and snow for civic art.
- Opportunities for innovation and improvement in services, building, and product design.

Negative Aspects of Winter

- Increased cost for snow management for both the public and private sectors.
- Health costs associated with accidents, both auto-related and pedestrian "slip and fall" incidents.
- Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and psychological depression related to a lack of sunlight.
- Difficult mobility, particularly for seniors and the disabled, either as pedestrians or in automobiles.
- Prolonged cold, snow, and icy conditions.
- Limited outdoor activity for many persons.

- Increased heating costs and energy consumption.
- A visually monotonous environment dominated by white and gray.

Northern communities or "winter cities" must become more competitive than their southern counterparts to find their place in today's global marketplace. Unfortunately, the winter season is often dreaded in the North American culture due to perceived discomfort, inconvenience, and a potential increase in costs.

In order to overcome this attitude, communities must embrace the winter season. By applying creative planning approaches to solving winter-related issues, Michigan's winter cities can mitigate some of the discomfort and inconvenience of winter. This positive approach can also benefit the attitudes of residents, and bolster the community's ability to attract new businesses and residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS & WINTER DESIGN GUIDELINES

Site Design

Building Orientation

- Utilize solar radiation in the orientation of buildings and outdoor spaces and provide a southern exposure to maximize the penetration of heat and sunlight.
- Avoid or minimize development on north facing slopes. Buildings sited on the north-facing slope cast long shadows, significantly reducing the ability to utilize solar radiation for heat. In contrast, buildings on a south-facing slope can be sited more densely due to the shortened length of the shadow.

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

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Community Trail Project Receives Award

We reported to you previously that a group of MSU Urban Planning students completed a study in April 2007. The study looked at the feasibility of developing a trail along Indian Mill Creek, which traverses the GrandWalk area. (GrandWalk refers to the older, industrial area in northwest Grand Rapids and extends into the City of Walker.)

On October 19, the students received the "Outstanding Student Planning Award" from the Michigan Association of Planning at their annual conference. Andrea Dewey, one of the students, accepted the award. She explained, "It was such a good project and demonstrated a win-win situation where we students received valuable, hands-on experience while meeting a community need." (The other students included: Nicole Carson, Bianca Cobarzan, Lisa Ellis, Eric Fazzini, Leonard Powell, and Nathan Powell.)

The proposed Indian Mill Creek trail would provide the needed connection between our two regional trails, the Muskatawa and White Pine trails. The "GrandWalk Trail Planning and Development Study" was coordinated by Rick Chapla from The Right Place, Inc. and Carol Townsend from Kent/MSU Extension. Chapla points out that the economic, transportation, and recreational benefits of such a trail are obvious. "I commend the students for their good work and for moving the concept of a non-motorized trail toward reality. This proposed trail would also provide access to Riverside Park and to the under-utilized Richmond Park - all within one mile of downtown Grand Rapids."

Analyzing and implementing the student recommendations in the study is the next step for the GrandWalk Steering Team. Townsend adds, "We can't let the study just sit on the shelf and gather dust. The

students provided us with a good basis, and now we need to make it happen."

The complete GrandWalk Trail study is available online and can be downloaded for free at: www.spdc.msu.edu/urpp/outreach/upp.htm.



Front row student awardees: Nathan Powell, Nicole Carson and Andrea Dewey. Back row; Rick Chapla, The Right Place Program and Carol Townsend, Kent/MSU Extension.

THINK, SHOP LOCALLY

As the holidays approach, think about how much of your shopping can be done through locally owned businesses. A dollar spent at a locally owned business is circulated in the local economy many times. If a dollar is spent at a business owned by an out-of-town corporation, most of it leaves our community forever. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Shop at the many unique boutiques located in neighborhood commercial districts and owned by neighborhood business people.
- Buy your turkey from Heffron Farms, knowing it was locally raised. (www.heffronfarms.com)
- Select wreathes, greens, and a Christmas tree at the Fulton Street Farmers Market or from a local grower. Look for a list of local growers in the Grand Rapids Press.
- Purchase a gift card from Local First, which can be used at any of its 250 member businesses. (www.localfirst.com)

And Happy Holidays to all!

Kent County Preserved Farmland Tops 1,100 Acres

On Monday, October 29, 2007, a ceremony was held at Bradford Dairy Farms to celebrate the preservation of 80 acres of the Bradford farm and 154 acres of the Robinson farm. Both farms are located along Peach Ridge Avenue in Sparta Township and are the first Ridge farms to be preserved through the Kent County Purchase of Development Rights Program (PDR).

The Kent County PDR Program has now preserved six farms totaling 701 acres and is in the closing process on the seventh farm in Lowell Township.

The Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board sponsored the event, which was emceed by Commissioner Gary Rolls. Commissioner Rolls chairs the Preservation Board. Approximately 75 people attended the event. Speakers included Congressman Pete Hoekstra; Carla Gregory of the USDA NRCS; Rich Harlow with the MI Dept. of Agriculture and Rob Steffens, Sparta Township Trustee.

The Preservation Board also unveiled the new road signs which will be installed on all preserved farmland in Kent County including two farms preserved by the State of Michigan and three farms preserved by Grattan Township. The grand total of preserved farmland in the county is over 1,100 acres!

For a list of financial supporters and more detailed information on the preserved farms, please visit www.accesskent.com/YourGovernment/BOC/PDR



The Bradford and Robinson Families. Both families contributed toward the preservation of their farms.



Congressman Pete Hoekstra



The new "Preserved Farmland" Road signs made possible by the Wege Foundation.



Rich Harlow accepts a check from the USDA NRCS Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program to preserve the Robinson farm.

Out with the (Really) Old, In with the New: Grand Rapids Replaces Zoning Code

*By: Christine Helms-Maletic,
Midtown Neighborhood Association and
United Growth Board Member*

After three years of planning and dozens of meetings with community groups and citizens, the City of Grand Rapids has replaced its nearly forty-year-old zoning code. The new code was adopted by the City Commission on October 23 and was slated to take effect November 5.

Based on the smart growth policies described by the city's Master Plan, which was published in 2003 and is scheduled for review next year, the new code is a unique blend of "form-based" and "use-based" precepts. Whereas the new code takes into consideration the design and context of a building, new designations were needed to replace the former gradations of commercial, residential and industrial zones of the 1969 code. Under the new code, commercial buildings in a "Traditional Business District," for example, may feature multiple uses, with ground-floor retail and upper-story office or residential space. The design of the building, however, must conform to that of its neighbors in relation to its position on the street as well as its height and construction.

Though the new code was long in coming, it is the result of a massive effort by the city's planning staff to incorporate suggestions and feedback from hundreds of citizens, business owners and neighborhood activists. Neighborhood and business associations across Grand Rapids were given the opportunity to develop pattern books and guidelines for future development in their areas. Many took advantage of mini-grants from the Dyer-Ives Foundation to host planning events and to develop reports for the Planning Department.

From the early days of the re-write process, known as Zone GR, United Growth's Revitalizing Neighborhoods Committee has taken a strong role in drafting the new code. Staff and volunteers participated regularly in planning meetings, both at the neighborhood- and city-wide level. In the coming months, the RNC will be working with Suzanne Schulz, GR Planning Department Director, to create informational materials and to distribute them to community groups around the city.

As with any document as extensive and complex as a large city's zoning code, the demand for revision is almost inevitable. While there are provisions that address everything from front porches to garages and from signs to parking, the true test of the code will come in the weeks and months after November 5. Ms. Schulz and her department expect to compile a list of amendments to be submitted to the Commission in the spring to "work out the kinks."

Even in a state of imperfection, the new Code is a welcome change from the antiquated code that Grand Rapids had been laboring under for too long.

Gaines Township Master Citizen Planners Conduct Survey on Farmland Preservation

Eric Fouch, Bill Hirsch and Gabe Hudson conducted a random phone survey of 111 Gaines Township residents as a project to earn their Master Citizen Planner status. Their project report stated that the goal of the survey was to determine support and understanding of land preservation issues. The population of Gaines Township is approximately 17,000. The results of the poll were as follows:

- 93% or 103 residents support the preservation of farmland and open space in Kent County.
- 96% or 107 residents appreciate the rural character of Gaines Township.
- 56% said they do not support extending water and sewer services throughout Gaines Township, while 44% said they do support it.
- 55% or 61 residents said they do not feel the township has done a good job managing land use.
- 84% or 76 residents support the use of township or county funds for the preservation of farmland and open space.

Fouch, Hirsch and Hudson reported that they feel the survey demonstrated an overwhelming desire for land preservation and an appreciation of the rural characteristics of Gaines Township as well as a general lack of understanding of what is necessary for farmland preservation. They do not feel the public understands that lands served by water and sewer are ineligible for Purchase of Development Rights (PDR). They also feel the public does not understand that local funding must be secured before state and federal grant funds for PDR are requested.

Kent/MSU Extension Receives Grant to Host First Citizen Planner Alumni Banquet

The first ever Citizen Planner Alumni Banquet is being planned for March 2008 for participants from Kent County. An award will be given to the top three local units of government in Kent County that have the most number of Citizen Planner participants. Potential keynote speakers are Greg Northrup, President of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance and Senator Patty Birkholz. Various Citizen Planner projects will be highlighted as well as upcoming training opportunities and Master Citizen Planner requirements. Look for more information in early 2008!

Building Prosperity through Talent and Green Infrastructure in the New Economy

By Soji Adelaja, Ph.D.

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

The globalization of the world economy has made prosperity harder to achieve, with many more contestants competing for the limited prosperity space. To win, communities need to be strategic and leverage their unique place-based assets or build new ones—things that can't be taken away.

Times have changed. In the Old Economy, major manufacturers, low wages, low taxes, and such things as sports stadiums were the foundation of success and prosperity. In the New Economy, however, talent—in the form of knowledge workers—drives success in prosperity. Quality of life and green infrastructure are necessary assets to attract talent.

Talent is the currency of the New Economy. Whereas industries were at the heart of job creation in times past, the talented create today's jobs. How do you attract talent and the jobs that follow? Knowledge workers want a high quality of life where they live and work. They want a dynamic environment, diverse housing, transportation options, and social interaction. They want natural amenities, such as parks, thriving farms, waterways, and greenery. More importantly, they want all of those in high doses.

Among locations that are attracting knowledge workers are those with easily accessible outdoor amenities and other green infrastructure, which includes networks of waterways, wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife habitats, as well as greenways, parks, working farms, and other natural open spaces. Many regions with little currency in the Old Economy have recently transformed themselves based on their New Economy assets.

While Michigan is a national leader in the amount and diversity of its natural resources, it is the bottom state in conservation spending among all U.S. states. According to our research at LPI, bridging that gap to reach average conservation spending would cost \$3.16 per person or \$32 million. Joining the nation's conservation spending leaders would take \$59 million.

It's no overstatement that Green Infrastructure can be a major economic development asset in the New Economy. Given the breadth and depth of Michigan's natural spaces, and that the Detroit metropolitan area ranked 197 out of the top 200 metro's in the country in 2007, and the Lansing metro is at the bottom of the list, ranked 200, it's a good place to start.

CITIZENS NEEDED !!!

A democracy requires its citizens to be involved with their government on an ongoing basis. Municipalities provide a local venue for this involvement by having committees, boards, and other opportunities for citizen volunteers. Please give some thought about serving on these committees, or think of neighbors or friends you could encourage to become involved.

Grand Rapids City Commissioner Rosalynn Bliss indicates "Commissions and boards offer an opportunity for residents to get involved in shaping future policy and priorities. Individuals can choose a board that suits their interests and passion, which enables them to bring their expertise and ideas to the table. It is also an opportunity to learn more about the local political process."

Jim Ferro, Planning Director for Ada Township adds, "Service on a governmental board is just like other forms service, whether through a church or non-profit organization. Membership on your local government board or committee benefits the entire population of your community. You can touch a lot of lives, learn a lot about how your community functions and how your community comes to a consensus on its direction."

United Growth wants to keep reminding you of the many ways you can serve your city, township, or county. For the next several issues of this newsletter, we will run a listing from a specific municipality of the opportunities they have available for citizen involvement. If you are a local official and would like your volunteer opportunities to be featured, please contact us at ugkc@unitedgrowth.org and let us know.

Jim Diers, author of *Neighbor Power*, encourages us to rediscover democracy by establishing a deeper involvement with your local government. He says, "I am convinced that people still yearn for a sense of community and want to contribute to the greater good. They also want a voice in their government."

United Growth Survey Results

In September of 2007, United Growth for Kent County asked ListServe members to complete a 10 question survey to help document the organization's impacts. The following is a brief summary of the survey results:

71% of respondents said land use education programming was **very important** given Michigan's limited financial resources. An additional 26% said it was **important**.

26% said MSU Extension in Kent County was the **primary source of education** over the past two years on land use issues. 64% said Kent/MSU Extension provided some education.

Green infrastructure and **farmland preservation** were the two land use issues out of a list of 11 issues where respondents said their knowledge increased most over the past two years.

76% said it was **very important** for the Kent County Purchase of Development Rights Program to have staff support. An additional 14% said it was important.

28% found "The Urban-Rural Connection" newsletter **very valuable**.

56% found it **somewhat valuable**.

2% said it was **not valuable**.

The most liked section of the newsletter was **urban issue articles** with 69%. The **cover story** received the next highest rating with 62%.

54% said they would prefer to receive "The Urban-Rural Connection" **only electronically**. *

30% said **only hard copy**.

15% said **2 electronic and 2 hard copy** per year.

**Please let us know if you want us to keep the hard copy format by sending a quick note to Merry Malfroid, Project Assistant at malfroid@triton.net.*



A lottery drawing of survey participants was completed and a \$50 gift card to Meijer was awarded to **Vern Nauta of Vergennes Township**. Thanks Vern, and the other 45 people, who took the time to complete the online survey. Your responses will help improve the organization.

Living in Harmony with Winter

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- Use buildings to protect outdoor spaces, such as pocket parks, from prevailing winter winds.
- Avoid building orientations which will create a wind tunneling effect.
- Avoid creating public spaces for winter use in areas that are shaded from the sun.

Building Design

- Design building surfaces to help reduce wind speed by incorporating balconies, stepped facades, or irregularities into the building's exterior.
- Cover ramps or stairs to protect them from snow and ice.
- Provide handrails for all public and private walkways that exist on slopes.
- Design roofs to account for snow and ice accumulation and to prevent snow and ice from shedding onto parking areas or pedestrian walkways.
- Create transition areas at building entrances to provide patrons with an area to shed snow prior to entering the building.
- Provide shelters or wind blocks in areas that serve as outdoor gathering spaces.

Density

- Promote a dense, compact development pattern.

Road Design

- Consider snow removal in the design of road improvements. For example, curb extensions should be designed as a series of gentle curves, rather than sharp angles to allow for easy maneuverability of equipment around such areas.
- Design road cross-sections to provide an area for snow storage adjacent to the road to prevent snow from being plowed onto the sidewalks when roads are cleared.
- Bike lanes can serve as additional snow storage areas only in areas that do not experience a significant number of winter bike commuters.

Pedestrian Circulation

- Designate critical pedestrian areas that should receive priority when clearing walkways.
- Ensure that transition areas such as curb-cuts and bus stop platforms are properly plowed to ensure pedestrian safety. These areas are often a collecting point for large mounds of icy snow due to street plowing.
- Particularly hazardous areas, such as steps and ramps, may need to be heated to prevent snow and ice from accumulating.

- Some existing pedestrian trails can be groomed for multi-use such as walking, snow shoeing, or cross-county skiing during the winter season.
- Design crosswalks to be slightly raised in order to prevent water and ice from accumulating in these areas, potentially posing a hazard to pedestrians.
- Separate sidewalks and other pedestrian pathways from the roadway. This separation protects pedestrians from the spray of slush and water from passing cars.

Snow Management and Storage

- Ensure adequate storage space for snow. An enlarged terrace area adjacent to roadways can provide such a storage area.
- Evaluate the impacts of winter winds and drifting snow on city streets and walking paths. Redesign areas where wind is problematic to use earth forms and vegetation to reduce wind and drifting snow.
- Consider installing snowmelt systems for high-traffic walkways and sloped areas.
- Investigate the use of new equipment or innovative technology for snow removal.
- Store snow in a number of smaller sites, rather than one large area in order to speed up the melting process.

Vegetation

- Plant deciduous trees on the southern face of a building or outdoor area. Such vegetation will provide cooling in the summer (when leaves are present), while still allowing sunlight to filter in during the winter (when leaves have fallen). Coniferous vegetation should be used on the north and west sides to protect the area from prevailing winter winds.
- Use berms and vegetation to direct snow drifts away from building entrances.
- Select appropriate landscaping for snow storage areas.
- Consider using living snow fences to protect open roadways and other areas from prevailing winter winds.
- Create "outdoor rooms" using trees and vegetation to shelter exposed areas from prevailing winds. The use of dense coniferous vegetation on the park's north-west side help block wind, while the space's southern exposure will maximize heat from solar-radiation.
- Species should be selected that offer attractive or useful winter characteristics such as twig color, fruit, or salt-tolerance.

Materials / Aesthetics

- Design municipal facilities to function and look good in all seasons.

- Consider color and lighting treatments when designing buildings and landscapes in order to offset the darkness and monotony of the winter season.
- Balance the need for efficient snow removal with other considerations such as walkability, aesthetics, and parking.
- Use technology and materials appropriate for a "winter city". Outdoor furniture should be constructed using appropriate materials such as wood, polyethylene, or vinyl-coated metal.
- Items such as public art or seasonal light displays provide winter interest and offset the muted tones prevalent in a winter landscape.

Addressing winter issues and these ideas into your community's planning framework will benefit Michigan's winter cities by:

- Improving the quality of life in wintertime.
- Emphasizing those factors that make your community's climate unique.
- Lead to enhanced winter lifestyles and a "winter culture".
- Improve citizen attitudes about winter.
- Bolster efforts to attract business, economic development and new residents.
- Generate local pride in the community by rejecting negative thinking about winter, and instead focus on its potential and the opportunities winter offers.

FREE Citizen Planner Online Training

For a limited time, the Citizen Planner Online program is offering [free training](#) designed for new planning commissioners on the following topics:

Introducing the Planning Official – a short introduction to the role of a planning official.

Looking Back to Look Forward: Michigan Land Use Trends – A historical view of Michigan land use patterns and the potential need for change. A historical perspective is important when it comes to changing the present and shaping the future.

How Does Zoning Work? – The basics of zoning, what zoning tools are available and how they can be used to their best advantage.

For more information or to register, visit www.citizenplanner.msu.edu/online or call (517) 432-7600.

2007 Program Highlights

Awarded Peter M. Wege with the 2007 Land Use Stewardship Award for his commitment to Green Building, farmland preservation, water quality and public transit in our community at the United Growth Land Use Luncheon that 50 people attended.

Participated in a press conference on the link between land use and climate change with the City of Grand Rapids, West Michigan Environmental Action Council and Michigan Environmental Council.

Supported the adoption of the City of Grand Rapids new zoning ordinance, which is based on form-based code concepts and supports traditional neighborhoods.

Launched a land preservation education project targeting Ada, Alpine, Sparta and Vergennes Townships and secured support from the Frey Foundation and Lowell Area Community Fund.

Co-sponsored Michigan State University's Land Use Summit, South West Area Neighbors Community Builders Conference and the Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council's Local Food Guide.

Secured an MSU Urban Planning Practicum Class for the Grand-Walk Trail Project, which received the Outstanding Student Planning Award by the Michigan Association of Planning.

Sponsored the 2007 West Michigan Challenge Citizen Planner Program at Kent MSUE and awarded \$600 in scholarship funds to six participants. Three of these participants became Master Citizen Planners.

Provided technical assistance to United Growth replication efforts in Hillsdale and St. Joseph Counties.

Organized a membership development workshop with Carole Pence and a Brown Bag Lunch with Rich Jelner from GVSU explaining the report he co-authored, "State of Michigan Cities".



United Growth for Kent County Membership Form

Membership Term: Through April 30, 2008

Name: _____ Position: _____

Organization / Local Unit of Government: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ Web Site: _____

Tel: _____ Fax: _____

Membership Benefits:

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

Membership Level: _____ Individual Membership (Suggested minimum dues is \$25.00)

Organization Membership Levels:

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

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

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

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