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Newsletter of McLean County Regional Planning Commission

Director's Notes

Welcome to the Fall 1998 Issue of VISIONS.

This Annual Report Edition includes a message from our Chairman, Rich Beal, and an outline of the Commission's projects, accomplishments and finances of the past year as well as a glimpse at some of the work in store for the year ahead.

In keeping with the Commission's goal of providing community leaders with information on growth and development related issues that may affect our region, the feature article of this edition focuses on urban revitalization. This is one of the major issues identified in our previous newsletter under the feature article titled, "Growing Sensibly."

While few would argue against the merits of reviving our urban centers, this current article illustrates that some of the more successful approaches being taken around the nation have far reaching implications and can be quite controversial. Nevertheless, successful approaches are worth noting and have been included regardless of the likely degree of controversy.

We appreciate the favorable comments received in response to our first newsletter and we continue to welcome your questions, comments and ideas. Thank you.

PR

Urban Revitalization

The strengthening of downtowns and central city neighborhoods is an important component of sensible growth. This article provides some background on urban revitalization and its importance and identifies some approaches being taken in other areas as well as right here at home.

What's the Problem?

From a historical perspective, the simultaneous "hollowing out" and decline of the traditional downtowns of so many cities across the nation over a fifty year period seems unprecedented. Ancient and even some recent cities maintained the location of their "downtowns" by building over the remains of previously healthy cities. Ruins from Greece, Prague, Tokyo and Mexico City provide evidence that center cities were rebuilt following their deterioration or following major catastrophes such as fires, earthquakes, floods, wars, etc. It has only been since World War II that the world has witnessed the decline of its downtowns and central city neighborhoods simultaneous with high growth on the fringe of the community.

The decline of downtowns and surrounding neigh-

borhoods is associated with the federal freeway building program and the suburban housing boom that followed World War II ("Autos, Transit, and the Sprawl of Los Angeles: The 1920's," Journal of the American Planning Association, Summer 1984, Volume 50, Number 3). The freeways gave families the ability to move out of the city to outlying suburban areas. The economic depression from the late 1920's until the early 1940's, followed by rationing during W.W.II, resulted in the unleashing of pent-up purchasing power after W.W.II. When soldiers returned from the war, they were anxious to buy a new home in the newly developing suburban areas.

Another factor which

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

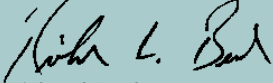
*To Our Planning Partners and
Citizens of McLean County*

The McLean County Regional Planning Commission is pleased to play a role in helping to enhance the quality of life in this region through planning. We thank our planning partners for their continued support and cooperation. These partnerships have made possible another year of significant achievements and offer bright prospects for the year ahead.

This past year has witnessed the completion of a number of important planning projects and the coordination and management of a number of other related programs as outlined on page 7 of this Annual Report Edition of the newsletter. The awards received during the past year attest to the success of the Commission and its partners in producing the high quality planning tools needed to address the challenges presented by this region's growth.

In the year ahead we look forward to continuing our partnerships with local governments and to forming new partnerships with private industry as together we strive to build quality communities.

Respectfully submitted,



*Richard Beal
Chairman*



contributed to urban decline was a transformation in the ownership and subsequent location of banks, department stores, newspapers, retail specialty stores and other businesses. Beginning in the 1960's and 1970's waves of mergers and acquisitions resulted in the relocation of these businesses, which were traditionally managed and owned by residents and local investors and headquartered downtown. (Smart Growth, Economy, Community, Environment, Urban Land Institute, 1998).

The combination of these and other factors has resulted in the dramatic outward growth of America's communities over the last half century and has contributed to the deterioration of downtowns and the older neighborhoods around the downtowns. Cities such as Chicago and Philadelphia have grown by

more than 30 percent in land area but less than 5 percent in population between 1970 and 1990. (Why Smart Growth: A Primer; International City/County Management Association with Geoff Anderson, 1998).

Similar situations exist in urban areas throughout the nation as illustrated by the chart on the following page. In Bloomington-Normal, land consumption rates have exceeded population growth rates by more than two and one-half times--about the same rate as that of Seattle. From a local perspective, this is particularly noteworthy since the Twin Cities have experienced substantial population growth.

Nationwide, this outward growth has consumed valuable land resources, including prime farmland, increased public expenditures on transportation, water and wastewater infra-

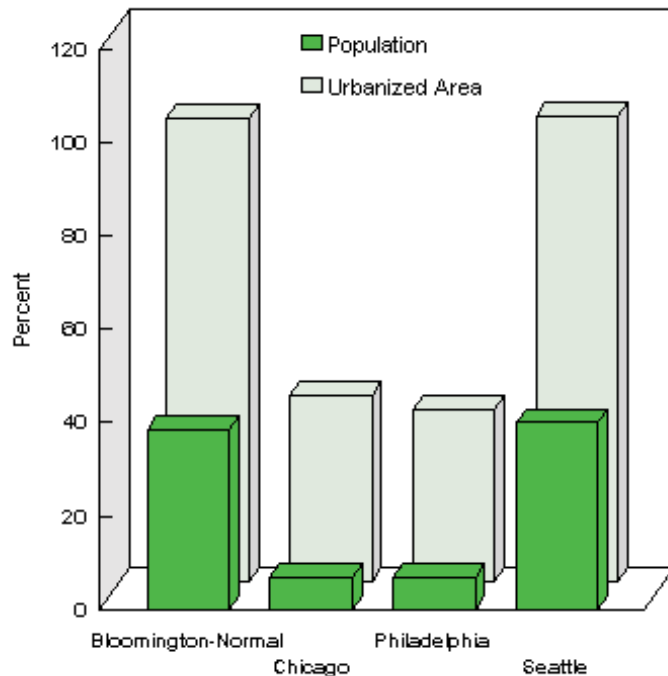
structure, increased traffic and air pollution and contributed to other ailments of modern society. Meanwhile, downtowns and central city neighborhoods face problems with empty storefronts, crime (or a perception of crime), poverty and other symptoms of a deteriorated area. Indeed, the greatest concentrations of low income families and the most deteriorated neighborhoods in McLean County exist in and around downtown Bloomington and its surrounding neighborhoods (U.S. Census Data, 1990 and Building Conditions Report, McLean County Regional Planning Commission, 1998).

In areas of the country where the outward growth began immediately after W.W.II (Chicago and other larger cities), the older suburbs now experience the downward economic cycle once thought to be uniquely urban. Many suburbs now have more in common with their urban counterparts than with new suburbs.

Why Revitalize?

It makes good sense for a community to revitalize its downtown and its central city neighborhoods. Focusing new growth in these areas reduces the need to extend services to growth at the fringe of the community and thereby reduces public spending on infrastructure, reduces pollution by reducing time spent in cars, improves the beauty of the central part of a city and provides an excellent opportunity for new homeowners to experience the strong sense of community

LAND CONSUMPTION EXCEEDS POPULATION GROWTH 1970-1990



Source: Henry Diamond and Patrick Noonan, *Land Use in America*, 1996 and McLean County Regional Planning Commission, *Comprehensive Plan for the Development of the Community of McLean County*, November, 1994.

of the older neighborhoods and downtown. Redeveloping the central part of a city also lessens the pressure to develop "greenfields", including agricultural areas with prime farmland. Today many single adults, childless couples and older residents are looking for homes or townhomes in or near downtowns to lessen their reliance on the automobile and to experience a stronger sense of community (Lockwood, Charles, "Rebuilding a Sense of Community", CUPReport, Spring, 1998, pp 2-5).

From a business point of view, many medium size and high end retailers are beginning to look outside the malls for locations which allow them to create a separate identity for themselves. This is particularly true when anchor stores are

lost. An annual survey of hundreds of real estate developers and institutional lenders have also shown that major commercial real estate developers and investors are attracted to economically healthy and robust center cities. Of the five top-ranked real estate markets, four are also the top-ranked for downtown investment (Petersen, David C., "Smart Growth for Center Cities", ULI on the Future, Smart Growth, Economy, Community, Environment, 1998, pp. 46-56).

Furthermore, the concentration of healthy businesses in downtown locations can result in disproportionately large amounts of tax revenues relative to comparably sized areas outside downtowns. Nationwide statistics indicate

that twenty percent or more of local tax revenues may be produced in five percent or less of its land area (Ibid).

Property taxes generated by downtown Bloomington is approximately three percent of the City's total receipts from property taxes. This figure is significant considering the small land area that downtown occupies in relation to the rest of the City. Additionally, it points to the potential property tax revenues that could be real-

IMAGINE THE DAY

... when downtown and the neighborhoods around downtown contain even more high quality, attractive housing and businesses for all sectors of the population.

... when a young family can buy a reasonably priced home on the fringe of downtown and walk to work, shopping, and entertainment or just sit on their front porch and experience the sense of community that many young people have never known.

... when retired residents looking for a smaller place to live get excited about moving to a new townhome in downtown, rarely having to use their car, and being able to walk to parks and entertainment.

ized from downtown
Bloomington if it reached its
highest economic potential. In
other words, if every building
was occupied with successful
businesses or homes, a very
significant amount of tax rev-
enues could be generated with-
out significant additional
expenditures for infrastructure.

Finally, it should be
noted that enhancing the viabil-
ity of downtowns and having
healthy suburban areas are not
mutually exclusive. Revitalizing
downtowns and their neighbor-
hoods should have a positive
economic impact on a whole
region's economy and image.

How do we do it?

As long as urban centers
have been in decline, cities
have been attempting to renew
their urban areas. In the
process, lessons have been
learned about what works in
urban revitalization. Several
major American cities provide
notable examples of successful
programs and several local
efforts deserve attention for
their progress and success.

Around the Nation

Over the last twenty-five
years Portland, Oregon has
transformed a dying downtown
into a vibrant city center.
Downtown employment
increased from 50,000 to
105,000 jobs since 1975.
During that period, air quality
violations declined from over
100 per year to zero. No
parking spaces have been
added to its downtown, and
over 50 percent of downtown

work trips are accomplished on
transit. The key's to Portland
success have been:

- ◆ focusing the most intensive
development adjacent to tran-
sit;
- ◆ requiring development at a
pedestrian scale with a mix of
uses;
- ◆ limiting commuter parking;
- ◆ investing heavily in transit;
- ◆ creating an urban growth
boundary that defines urban
and rural areas;
- ◆ shaping regional growth by
coordinating transportation
investments with land-use poli-
cies; and
- ◆ broadening public support
for this growth strategy, and
transit in particular.

Portland's efforts are by
no means a blueprint for suc-

cess in any given town. Every
city is different, and different
programs must therefore be
implemented to ensure a suc-
cessful effort. Perhaps the most
useful lesson to note is the
broad public support for these
efforts.

Characteristics common
to most successful downtowns
and central cities include:

- ◆ cleanliness and security;
- ◆ higher densities made pos-
sible by new or revised zoning
codes;
- ◆ business improvement dis-
tricts;
- ◆ mixed and multiple uses,
including housing, retail, hotel,
office, park, and open space;
- ◆ an identifying landmark to
help define the sense of place;
- ◆ programs and places that
appeal to the surrounding com-
munity;



Figure 2. A sidewalk cafe brimming with activity in downtown Portland.
(American Planning Association, *Planning*, August, 1994)

- ◆ pedestrian-scale streetscapes;
- ◆ commitment to historic preservation; and
- ◆ a focus on surrounding neighborhoods (Hudnutt III, William, "Urban is In", Urban Land, July, 1998, pp. 37-41).

In regard to retail development, Nancy Graham, Mayor of West Palm Beach, Florida, feels that local government's role is to provide the urban design standards, infrastructure, services and amenities to help urban retail flourish. Martin Stern, Senior Vice President with U.S. Equities Realty of Chicago added that developers are looking for "simplicity, efficiency, and speedy response from local government, not lots of red tape before a decision can be made (William Hudnut III, Urban Land, July 1998).

Local Efforts

In McLean County there are good examples of efforts to bring new life to downtown and the nearby neighborhoods. The Downtown Bloomington Association has become a strong force in attracting new growth to downtown. The City of Bloomington is considering the recommendations of a downtown development plan. The Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation has created townhomes from older buildings and some new construction on Gridley Street, within walking distance of



Figure 3. Urban revitalization must include not only the redevelopment of downtowns, but also the surrounding neighborhoods. Efforts of the Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation to bring new life to a Bloomington central city neighborhood provides an excellent example of sensible growth.

downtown. Homeowners in the Dimmitts Grove, South Hill and other neighborhoods are making great strides toward improving the quality of life in those areas. Normal's downtown is showcased by attractive landscaping and the successful renovation of the Normal Theater. LeRoy has also taken important steps toward improving its downtown through the

addition of historic street lighting.

In addition to the recent plan for downtown Bloomington, the McLean County Regional Comprehensive Plan will provide another opportunity to devise strategies for bringing new life to McLean County's urban areas. The Regional Planning Commission is begin-



Figure 4. Historic street lighting in downtown LeRoy.

ning work on a Regional Comprehensive Plan that will address issues relevant to growth in McLean County, including urban revitalization. The Historic Preservation and Urban Revitalization Subcommittee will investigate approaches for improving the economic and social strength of McLean County's urban areas. This element of the comprehensive plan will identify trends and characteristics common to urban areas in the County, establish goals, identify issues, evaluate alternatives, and recommend actions and policies for urban revitalization.

Conclusion

In the end, the problems of downtowns and central city neighborhoods are the problems of the whole region. The outlying areas of a city can not be isolated from the downtowns. Metro areas that in the past have ignored the health of

Within the last six years, Bloomington, Normal and McLean County have undertaken citizen visioning efforts. These efforts allowed citizens to create a vision of what they would like their communities to look like in the next century and to make suggestions on how to get there. A few of the many recommendations made relevant to urban revitalization include: *preserve and maintain the character of neighborhoods, develop standards of appearance that protect the charm of downtown areas and neighborhoods, provide for cost and revenue sharing among local governments including smaller municipalities, and provide deteriorating neighborhoods with the necessary tools to change and enhance the neighborhood environment.*

the central cities, such as Detroit and St. Louis, have ultimately suffered greatly (Smart Growth, Economy, Community, Environment, Urban Land Institute, 1998). The health of downtowns and their neighborhoods must therefore be addressed to ensure the ultimate economic, environmental and social success required for sensible growth.

McLean County's downtowns and older neighborhoods

will never return to the past. Our urban areas must redefine themselves and find new roles in the community. In fact they have already begun to do just that. This momentum must be supported and enhanced to bring together the variety of people, services, and amenities which create the unique feeling that one can only experience "downtown." ♦

Additional Resources:

<www.libertynet.org/nol/natl.html>
Neighborhoods Online provides access to information and ideas covering all aspects of neighborhood revitalization.

<www.mainst.org>
The National Trust's National Main Street Center works with communities across the nation to revitalize their historic or traditional commercial areas.

<www.uli.org>
The Urban Land Institute is a nonprofit education and research organization whose mission is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment.



Figure 5. Normal Theater.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

FY 1998 PROJECTS

The Commission's fiscal year 1998 began July 1, 1997 and ended June 30, 1998. During this period work progressed on the following projects:

General Planning

- ◆ Bloomington Comprehensive Plan
- ◆ Bloomington Building Conditions Survey
- ◆ Development Reviews
- ◆ Lexington Codification of Ordinances
- ◆ Route 66 Bikeway
- ◆ Coordination of Ordinance Standardizations
- ◆ Towanda Comprehensive Plan

Transportation Planning

- ◆ Transportation Model
- ◆ Transportation Improvement Program
- ◆ Transit Coordination
- ◆ Transportation Advisory Committee
- ◆ Transportation Technical Assistance

Information Services

- ◆ GIS Coordination
- ◆ Digital Cadastral Mapping
- ◆ Database Management
- ◆ Grant Review & Coordination
- ◆ Census Mapping
- ◆ Information Retrieval

AWARDS RECEIVED IN FY 1998

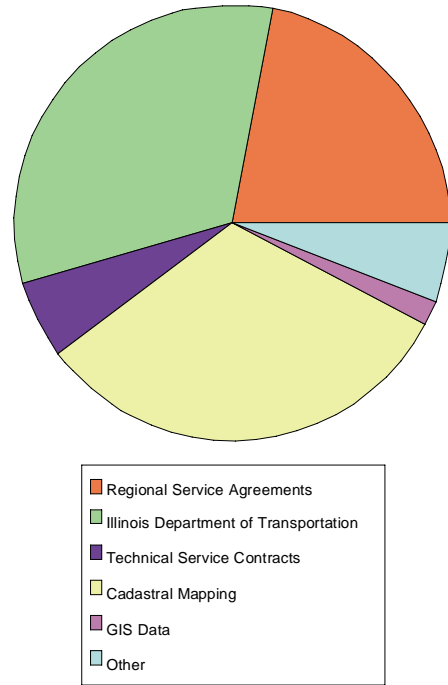
We are pleased to announce that the Commission received the following awards during the past year:

- ◆ Greater Illinois Section APA Award for product excellence for the McLean County Regional Greenways Plan prepared in cooperation with the McLean County Greenways Coalition
- ◆ Environmental Systems Research Institute Award for Special Achievement in GIS for recognition of local intergovernmental cooperation.

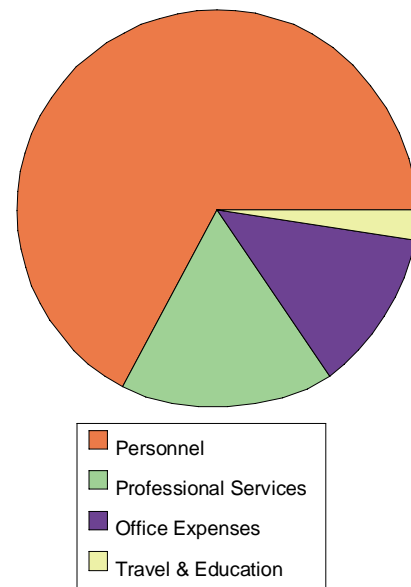
FINANCES

The charts below illustrate the relative distribution of revenues and expenditures for Fiscal Year 1998. Revenues for this period totaled \$455,322. Expenditures for the period totaled \$344,488.

FY 98 RECEIPTS



FY 98 DISBURSEMENTS



THE YEAR AHEAD

This publication presents information on planning and development issues that impact the quality of life in the Community of McLean County. We can be reached by mail at 211 West Jefferson Street, Bloomington, IL 61701 or by phone at (309) 828-4331 or by e-mail at mcrpc@dave-world.net.

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Teresa Casselman
Administrative Assistant

Lydia Reynolds
Planning Intern

With the beginning of Fiscal Year 1999 comes the beginnings of several new and challenging projects to be carried out along with the scheduled completion or continuation of a number of FY 98 projects. The following new projects are included in the Commission's work program for the coming year:

- ◆ McLean County Regional Comprehensive Plan Update
- ◆ Commission newsletter
- ◆ Towanda Subdivision Ordinance
- ◆ Commuter Transit Study
- ◆ Long Range Transportation Plan Update

Future editions will include brief updates on these and other projects, as well as other topics of likely interest to readers.

VISIONS

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