



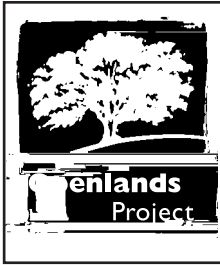
UNDER PRESSURE

Land Consumption in the Chicago Region
1998-2028

January 1999

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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.



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

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 desig-

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.







CHICAGO SUB. COOK DuPAGE GRUNDY K



WHAT'S WRONG WITH SPRAWL?

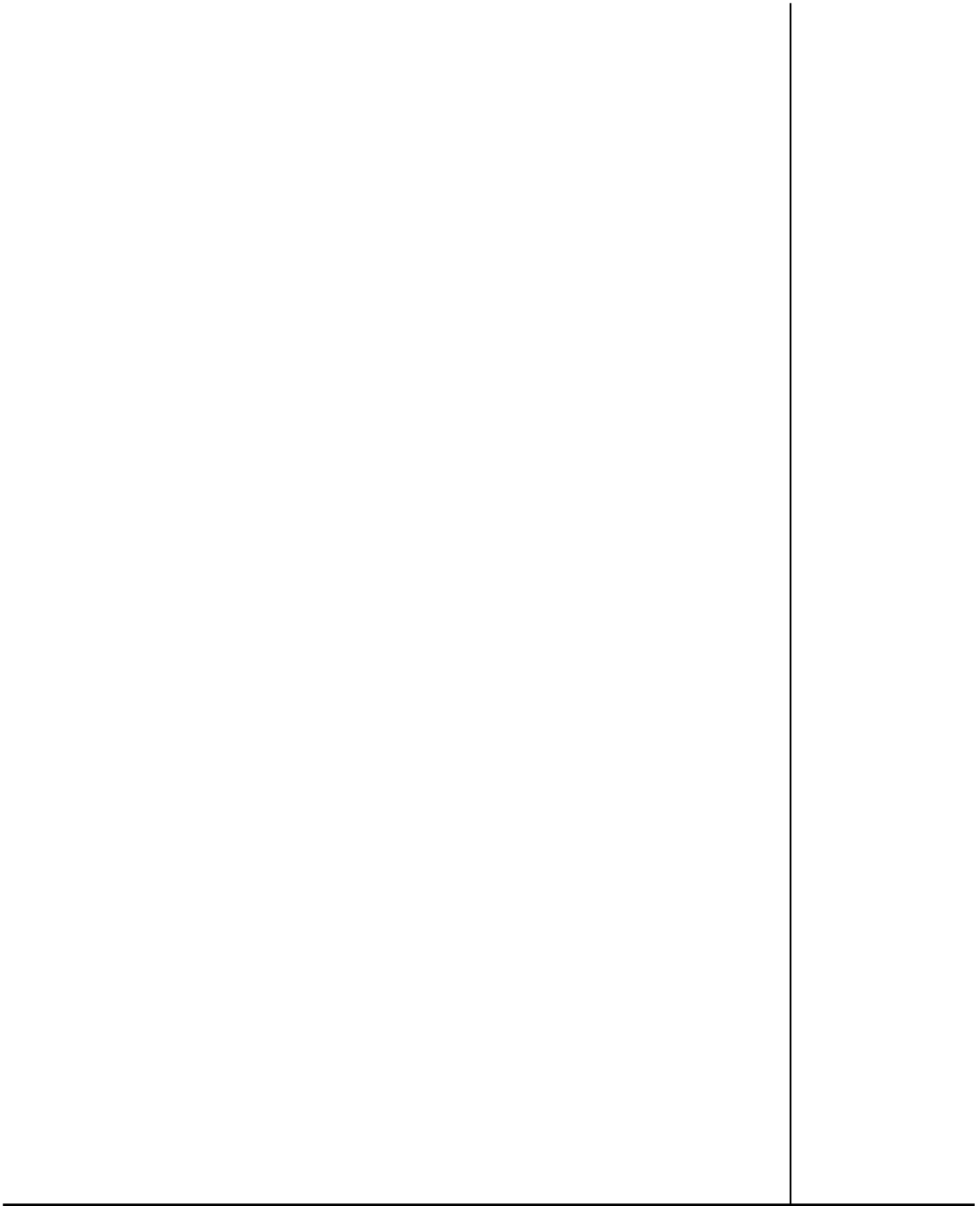
Sprawl, sometimes prefixed by urban or suburban, refers to a pattern of low-density land development reinforced by a strict separation of land uses. (This type of zoning is known as Euclidean zoning, in reference to the landmark Supreme Court case *City of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Company*. The Court 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



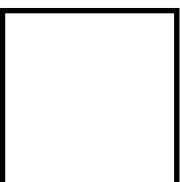
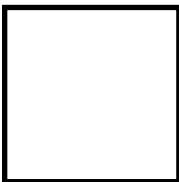
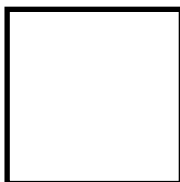
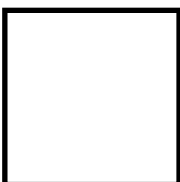
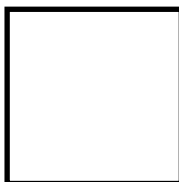
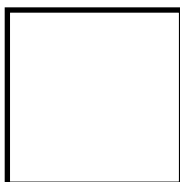
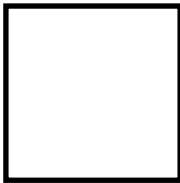
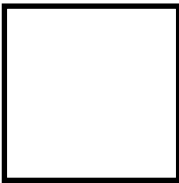
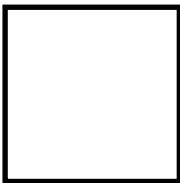
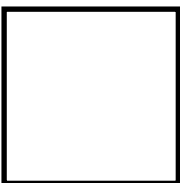
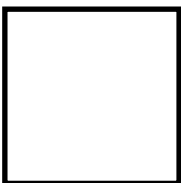
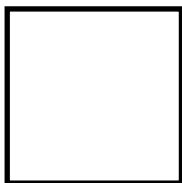
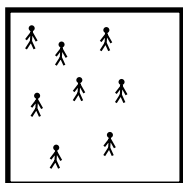
Land Consumption in the Chicago Region 1998-2028



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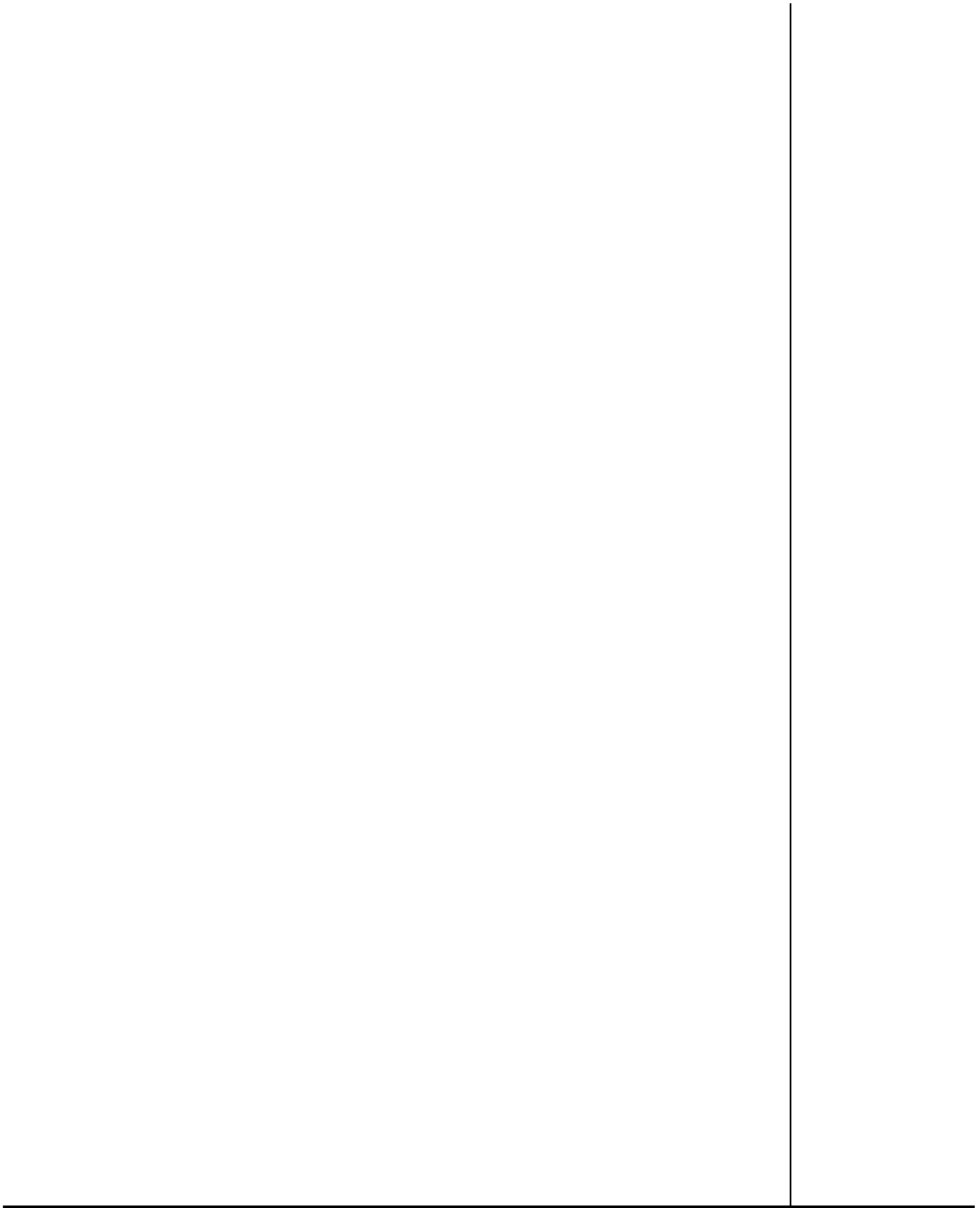
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Land Consumption in the Chicago Region 1998-2028







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.

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 devel-



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

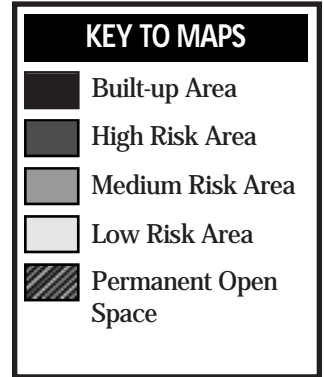
South Cook: As indicated previously, the only sizable amounts of land remaining for development lie in the southern portion of Cook County. Infill opportunities lie throughout the county, but only south Cook faces development issues similar to the other counties of the study area. (Cook County is in 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



Lake County, IN





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

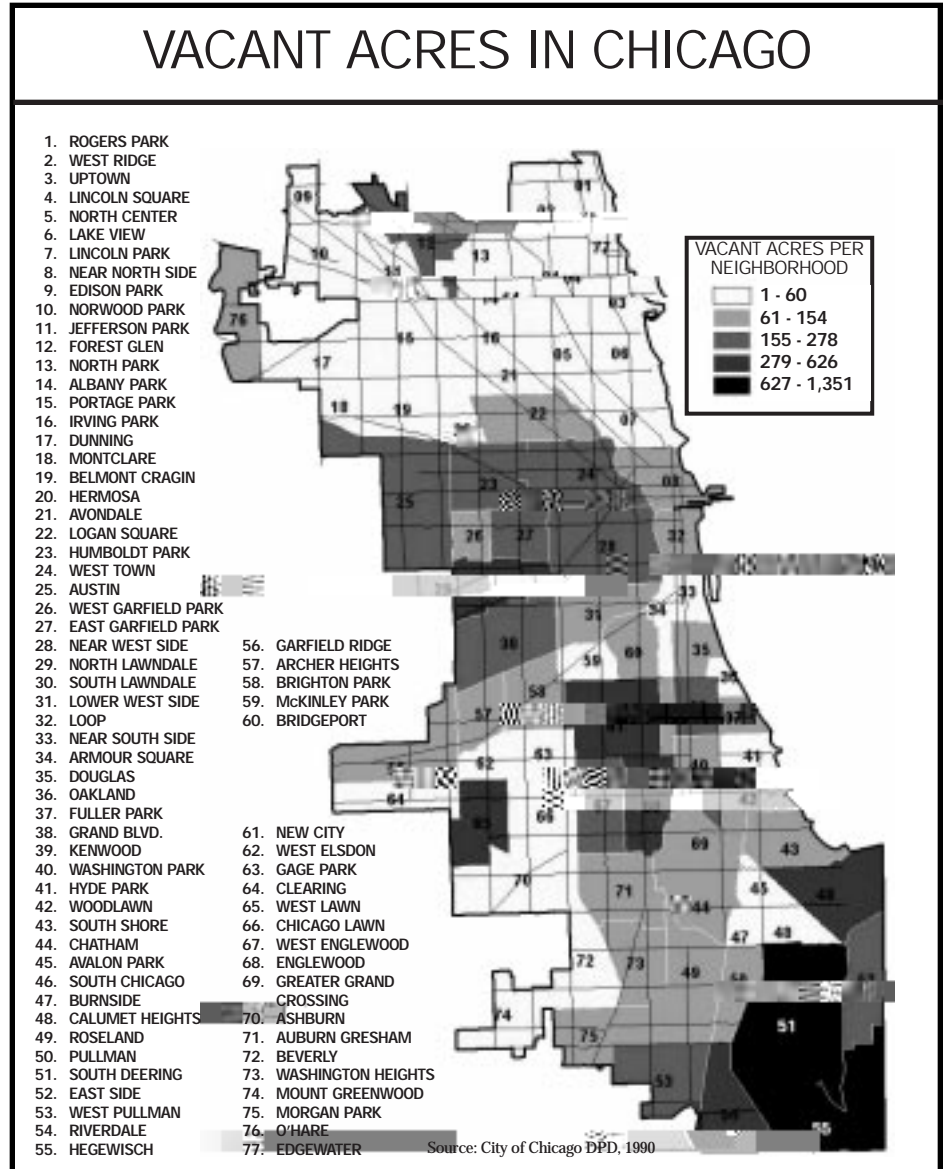


beyond Lincoln Park and Lakeview on the north side into Edgewater and Uptown, and development pressure from Lincoln Park has spread west, spurring redevelopment of the Cabrini-Green public housing project and surrounding blocks. Even neighborhoods long considered dangerous because of high crime rates, 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



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-





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.

cific information about the location of high quality natural resources such as wetlands,

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-



Conclusion

There is no “silver bullet” that can solve the problems

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**Funding for the Strategic Open Lands at Risk Mapping Project
was provided by**

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Chicago Community Trust
Woods Fund of Chicago
Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation
The Joyce Foundation
Liberty Prairie Foundation

SOLAR Project Advisory Group

Environmental Law and Policy Center
Metropolitan Planning Council
Center for Neighborhood Technology
American Lung Association of Metropolitan Chicago
Sierra Club
Lake Forest Open Lands Association
Conservation Foundation
Lake County Conservation Alliance
McHenry County Defenders
Business and Professional People for the Public Interest
Chicagoland Bicycle Federation
The Nature Conservancy
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Openlands Project is a member of the Campaign for Sensible Growth.

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