

A Sustainable County

These objectives relate to creating stable and convivial neighborhoods, using natural resources including prime farmland efficiently and wisely, minimizing waste and pollution, and restoring the ecological integrity of the natural environment.

- Urban Growth and Farmland Preservation
- Parks and Natural Areas
- Groundwater Supply
- Energy Use
- Waste Reduction
- Alternative Transportation
- Mixed Use Development
- Urban Redevelopment

Urban Growth & Farmland Resources

"The wealth of Illinois is in her soil, and her strength lies in its intelligent development."

Andrew Sloan Draper, President, University of Illinois, 1894-1904

Champaign County is blessed with uniquely productive and irreplaceable soils in a setting that is extraordinarily well suited in terms of climate, topography and geography to the pursuit of agriculture. Similarly productive regions with such mollisols (prairie soils) constitute less than 1% of the world's agricultural land. They are found only here, in the American Corn Belt, and in two other areas, neither of which have an agricultural infrastructure as highly developed as that found here. This is a resource of global importance.

Growth is the foundation of economic opportunity for Champaign County communities and we are fortunate to have experienced steady moderate growth in recent decades. The county is also home to the state's premier research university. The university serves as an engine for growth and if the community is to provide the opportunities and amenities that make the institution globally competitive growth is required. Growth, however, requires that new offices, homes, shops and employment be provided in a timely and cost competitive way that meets consumer demands as well as community goals.

Farmland is also a financial resource for landowners. Farmers, landowners, developers, homebuyers and the community as a whole have a stake in the way this resource is used.

Growth, unavoidably, will result in the conversion of more farmland. At issue is how much and where.

More efficient use of land conserves the soil resource while addressing the varied concerns of different stakeholders. Judicious and carefully designed measures can achieve more efficient use of land and help preserve agricultural and natural areas for future generations while providing opportunities for growth and development of the community and respecting the interests of all stakeholders.

Objective

By 2030 a significantly larger share of new development will be built at higher densities and will be contiguous to or within existing built-up areas.

Starting Point

Establish a panel of stakeholders to develop specific sets of strategies that will increase infill development, and produce more compact and contiguous development patterns to conserve soil resources while recognizing market forces. The panel would consider, among other approaches, the following:

- a. removing regulatory barriers to infill and more compact development patterns;**
- b. creating or refocusing incentives (existing and new) to target compact and/or infill development;**
- c. supporting a county-wide plan for land use and development; and**
- d. formulating appropriate zoning, subdivision and other regulations to be used by the County and municipalities to achieve more efficient use of land and more compact and contiguous forms of development.**

The panel could be tasked by the bodies that create it to consider an array of techniques including: revised parking, stormwater and other regulatory requirements; land assembly and write down, tax abatements and other incentives; and transfer of development rights programs. The panel would also evaluate the impact of various means of financing infrastructure. Much effort would be required to work out the details of concrete proposals.

Such a panel could be established as a non-governmental initiative perhaps by organizations representing the key stakeholders, particularly the agriculture and real estate development industries. It could report on topics individually in accord with the ease of reaching agreement on them. The panel would require some technical assistance which could come from trade associations, local professional volunteers, the University or local governments.

Other Actions

- Appoint a representative from the unincorporated 1.5-mile extra-territorial jurisdiction area (ETJ), nominated by appropriate townships, to each municipal planning & zoning commission.
- Bring the County and municipalities together to negotiate agreements to ensure measured and coordinated municipal annexation policies.



- Investigate county-wide use of a uniform impact model and/or assessment system that might incorporate all or part of one or more standard models or systems, such as the Land Transformation Model (LTM), the Land Use Evolution and Impact Assessment Model (LEAM), the NAHB Housing Benefits Model, FISCALS GIS™ system, etc.
- Create a program to promote the advantages of compact design approaches to design professionals, the development industry, local governments and consumers.

Parks and Natural Areas

The availability of parks, preserves and outdoor recreation opportunities is an important element of the attractiveness and competitiveness of the community. This is especially important for young adults. The remaining natural areas in the county continue to be lost to development and opportunities to expand park acreage in those areas are dissipating.



Objective

The acreage of urban and county parks and protected natural areas will at least double, the ecological integrity of their natural areas will be restored, and the sites will be protected from disturbance by neighboring land uses.

Starting Point

Protect, enhance and increase the acreage of parks, public green space, and natural areas.

This initiative would begin by identifying potential public and private means for financing the acquisition and development of parks and preserves. It would also go on to address priority needs and opportunities, perhaps through development of a county-wide park and recreation plan.

A central organization of professionals and advocates, with the support of community leaders and the participation of key interests, can develop a list of attractive and feasible funding options together with a targeted list of projects.

Other Actions

- Increase educational opportunities for citizens of Champaign County to learn about the importance of enhancing, restoring, and creating habitat reflective of the natural history of Champaign County.
- Consider the development of land dedication ordinances.
- Create new and improve existing environmental education programs and opportunities in public schools, at all grade levels, to ensure that every student is exposed to nature.
- Implement recommendations from the Champaign County Board Environmental Advisory Panel Blue Ribbon Report (November 2004) that specifically address the lack of public green space and natural areas.
- Provide educational opportunities and incentives to homeowners to develop more wildlife-friendly backyard habitats utilizing native plant materials.

Groundwater Supply

An abundant safe water supply is a key and increasingly important asset to the county. This supply is critical to business, agriculture, domestic use, and for maintenance of streamflow.



Objective

Policies will be in place that protect the county's groundwater resources and ensure a safe sustainable water supply for humans and wildlife.

Starting Point

Determine the sustainable maximum annual yield for the Mahomet Aquifer, limit withdrawals accordingly, and set policies to ensure cost effective allocation among cities, industry, and irrigation.

Identify means to fund and support the Mahomet Aquifer Consortium so that it can continue to study the Mahomet Aquifer to determine the aquifer's sustainable maximum annual yield.

The County and its municipalities will adopt policies from the Consortium's recommendations to ensure cost effective allocation among cities, industry, and irrigation.

Other Actions

- Accelerate the participation of all municipal and county governments and affected businesses in the cooperative funding of the Comprehensive Mahomet Aquifer Model.
- Guard the Mahomet Aquifer from contamination and overuse.
- Implement a program that requires wells to be tested before property is sold, in order to inform homebuyers of the presence of agrichemicals or other contaminants.

Energy Use

Non-renewable energy supplies are finite and increasing in cost. Renewable energy use depletes fewer resources and can be cost effective. Increasing use of renewable energy sources reduces the nation's reliance on insecure foreign energy sources, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Objective

Champaign County will significantly reduce non-renewable energy use.

Starting Point

Increase use of regionally available renewable energy sources, such as biofuels, geothermal, wind, and solar energies, to support 25 percent of our energy needs within 30 years.

Identify opportunities to expand the use of renewable energy by public and private entities, and the means to encourage greater use in buildings and operations.

A panel of advocates and professionals can undertake the assessment and work with various public and private entities to implement key initiatives.

Other Actions

- Require government buildings in Champaign County to exceed established energy standards.
- Create incentives, expand technical assistance and develop policies to induce private developments to meet the same ambitious energy standards as those proposed for government buildings.
- Expand energy conservation programs such as those funded by the clean energy technology fee at the University of Illinois and establish similar programs in other institutions.

Waste Reduction

Waste reduction through increased efficiency, reuse, and recycling reduces the consumption of natural resources and energy, reduces pollution, and conserves available landfill capacity. It also offers opportunities to reduce costs associated with waste collection, transport and disposal.

Objective

Champaign County will significantly reduce the tonnage of waste disposed of in landfills and increase the volume and type of materials that are reused or recycled.

Starting Point

Develop comprehensive, county-wide recycling and reuse programs with the ultimate goal of zero waste.

Revamp solid waste plans with attention to expanding reuse and recycling programs throughout the community and in expanding the range of materials handled. Revive public education programs on waste reduction and recycling.

The County, municipalities and major institutions can act jointly or separately. This initiative would include the involvement of stakeholders and technical expertise from local sources including the University.

Other Actions

- Implement recycling best practices and cutting edge technology policies at the local level.
- Implement expanded hazardous waste separation programs to separate oils and fluids, batteries, cleaning fluids, paints, etc. from general waste.
- Reduce casual waste disposal (littering as well as unregulated dumping and burning) to negligible levels through regulation, educational programs, and convenient pickup and disposal options.

Alternative Transportation

Increased use of alternative modes of transportation will reduce dependence on foreign energy sources, reduce pollution, lessen traffic congestion, reduce the need for street and parking infrastructure, and contribute to more active and healthier life styles. Wider availability of alternatives can expand consumer choice and increase the mobility of those who cannot or who prefer not to drive.



Objective

Land use patterns, infrastructure investments, programs, and policies will provide most people with convenient and safe transportation choices and encourage walking, biking, and public transit.

Starting Point

A county-wide coalition of interests would organize to work, on an ongoing basis, to support:

- a. inclusion of alternative transportation options in relevant plans and policies,**
- b. ensure that those elements of specific plans are implemented,**
- c. educate officials and the general public about the advantages of expanding alternative transportation options, and**
- d. develop new policies and programs.**

Many of the specific action proposals that have been identified are already included in various public plans including the urbanized area Long Range Transportation Plan and the county-wide Greenways and Trails Plan. What is needed, then, is to see to it that alternative transportation initiatives are implemented and to have them included in other plans and policies. An organized coalition with its own expertise and resources would be an effective advocate in the various forums in which related decisions are made.

Such a coalition could include bicyclists, environmental organizations, neighborhood and school groups, and public health advocates among other interested parties.

Other Actions

- Work with major employers and public agencies to develop programs that create opportunities and provide incentives to employees so that more of them can live within walking distance of work. Employers can also promote carpools, provide bike parking and employee shower facilities, and subsidize employee transit use.
- Conduct a market study, explore financing options, and otherwise facilitate establishment of commercial or non-profit car and bike sharing enterprises.
- Work with public and private entities to construct park and ride / walk facilities in new and existing development.

- Review existing development regulations to relax parking requirements for walkable and transit served development, develop public policies to create incentives for transit oriented developments, and review parking policies to control parking in key areas.
- Develop and implement policies that provide parking preferences and incentives for people who carpool or use low-emission or fuel-efficient vehicles.

Mixed Use Development

Mixed use neighborhoods permit people to meet more of their day-to-day needs by walking, allowing healthier and more convivial lifestyles as well as lessening the need to drive and to provide additional street and parking infrastructure. Mixing uses can create more compact forms of development, thereby reducing the consumption of natural resources and generation of pollution.



Objective

Public and private initiatives will significantly increase the development and redevelopment of mixed use neighborhoods that include strong local businesses.

Starting Point

Develop policies to encourage mixed use communities and quality urban design through incentives and revised development regulations that incorporate best planning practices to allow higher density mixed use developments both as infill and as greenfield development.

This could be done by reviewing state-of-the-art practices and the experiences of similar communities. Measures would include the use of incentives, regulatory relief and streamlining, flexible zoning techniques, and zoning overlay districts.

The initiative could be undertaken jointly in the form of model policy and code provisions or individually by various municipal governments. In either case it would best be done in consultation with affected stakeholders. Technical assistance may be available from trade or professional organizations, professional volunteers, and/or the University.

Other Actions

- Educate the general public, public officials and the development community on what successful mixed use communities look like.
- Compile information on the market forces that support or prevent mixed use development and identify potential sites and conditions where mixed use projects could succeed.
- Establish an ongoing forum where innovative and creative development ideas can be considered by public officials and the development community for potential incorporation into local projects, plans, and policies.

Urban Redevelopment

Existing neighborhoods represent substantial sunk investment in private buildings and public infrastructure. Reinvestment and redevelopment in existing neighborhoods captures more value from these investments, preserves historic structures and neighborhoods, fosters more compact growth patterns, and makes for more lively and convivial communities.



Objective

Existing neighborhoods and downtowns will see significant new investment and become desirable locations where older buildings are preserved and complemented by new development.

Starting Point

Integrate, expand and intensify marketing of existing programs that help fund home repair and building renovation.

Local governments and agencies operate numerous programs that help fund home repair and building renovation including home weatherization, residential rehabilitation loan programs, façade grants, etc. These are operated by several different agencies and are funded from a variety of sources.

The agencies operating existing programs can review the scope of existing programs and mechanisms for streamlining and coordinating administration, obtaining additional funds, and broadening and strengthening marketing efforts.

Other Actions

- Identify existing and devise new financial incentives (tax credits, grants, funds, etc.) for the restoration and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.
- Clean up neighborhoods and communities in the county through volunteer programs such as “adopt a block”, “Christmas in October”, etc.
- Create a county-wide advisory commission to: (1) promote historic preservation; and (2) develop recommendations regarding beautification and development for all downtown areas in the county.
- Find better ways to accumulate and consolidate lots in areas where fragmented land holdings are an impediment to redevelopment, eg. development of a land bank.
- Inventory the existing historic buildings of Champaign County and document their current condition and uses.
- Develop programs to support neighborhood beautification efforts including murals, monuments, public art, and gardens.

