

VI Regional Coordination

Regional growth is being discussed often at all levels of government in the states, including New York State. Terms used in the discussion include “Smart Growth,” “Urban Sprawl,” “Sustainable Development,” “Open Space Planning,” “Regional Cooperation,” “Home Rule,” “Neo-Traditional Development,” and others. The degree to which Brighton is impacted by the outcomes of these discussions will depend upon 1) the form taken by decisions or outcomes of discussion (e.g., legislation or cooperative agreement), 2) the level of government at which decisions are made, and 3) Brighton’s involvement in the discussions and actions.

The Language of Growth

Smart Growth — “Growth that is economically sound, environmentally friendly, and supportive of community livability - growth that enhances our quality of life” (Urban Land Use Institute). *Smart Growth* is a general term that can encompass many concepts. It encourages: re-development over new development; mixed-use development (residential and commercial/office) with compact, open space recreation areas (e.g., town squares); less dependence on private cars and new infrastructure; and farmland/open space preservation.

Urban Sprawl — Haphazard growth or outward extension of a city resulting from uncontrolled or poorly managed development. Sprawl was made possible by the construction of the interstate highway system in the 1950s and was spurred by the “subdivision” concept of housing development, which made houses affordable through the use of “cookie-cutter” design and standardized development. As greater numbers of people moved away from cities, business centers followed, and sometimes led, leading to the development of pockets of population scattered throughout a region. Infrastructure - better roads, sanitary sewers and other services - were then extended to these developments, encouraging further development and the inefficient use of infrastructure.

Sustainable Development — “Sustainable development is a strategy by which communities seek economic development approaches that also benefit the local environment and quality of life. It has become an important guide to many communities that have discovered that traditional approaches to planning and development are creating, rather than solving, societal and environmental problems. Where traditional approaches can lead to congestion, sprawl, pollution, and resource over-consumption, sustainable development offers real, lasting solutions that will strengthen our future.

Sustainable development provides a framework under which communities can use resources efficiently, create efficient infrastructures, protect and enhance quality of life, and create new businesses to strengthen their economies. It can help us create healthy communities that can

sustain our generation, as well as those that follow us. “ (Center of Excellence for Sustainable Development - US Dept. of Energy)

Neo-Traditional Development — An approach to land use planning and urban design that promotes the building of neighborhoods with a mix of uses and housing types, architectural variety, a central public gathering place, interconnecting streets and alleys, and edges defined by greenbelts or boulevards. The basic goal is integration of the activities of potential residents with work, shopping, recreation, and transit all within walking distance.

Open Space Planning — Open space planning can take numerous forms and can take place at any level of government. Regionally and locally, it involves determining the need for, importance of, and threats to natural open spaces and farms, as well as devising mechanisms for open space preservation, both within and separate from development projects. Mechanisms used can involve zoning, acquisition of land, acquisition of development rights, and others.

Regional Cooperation — Agreements or contracts between municipalities and other municipalities, governments or government authorities. Agreements often take the form of joint planning by neighboring municipalities. Service contracts (e.g., for the provision of police service) can be made between municipalities (e.g., town/village), between municipalities and higher government (e.g., town/county) or between municipalities and authorities (e.g., town/water authority).

Rochester Region — Often not defined in discussion, “Rochester Region” generally implies an area surrounding Rochester larger than Monroe County. The Rochester Metropolitan Statistical Area is a US Office of Management and Budget designation that includes six (6) counties surrounding Rochester - Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans and Wayne. Another definition of the Rochester Region is that used by the Genesee Transportation Council (GTC), the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization in the Rochester area. GTC defines their 9 county planning region as encompassing Orleans, Genesee, Wyoming, Monroe, Livingston, Wayne, Ontario, Yates and Seneca counties. GTC also defines a smaller area - the Rochester Urban Area, containing the bulk of the regions population.

Home Rule — Cities, towns and villages in New York are given broad powers by the state to enact laws and regulations for their self-governance. Because of this “Home Rule,” any comprehensive regional planning is dependent on the cooperation of all of the involved municipalities, each of which must take individual action to implement regional strategies.

Regional Planning — As a “Home Rule” state, NY has no formal, comprehensive regional planning bodies. However, numerous governments, public agencies, and private organizations create plans that have regional or sub-regional scope. In the Rochester region, plans and programs are developed by (partial list):

- Monroe County - through its Master Plan process, distribution of Community Development Block Grant funds, capital improvements program, operation of the County of Monroe Industrial Development Agency (COMIDA), and other programs. Monroe County also

reviews all development project plans in the county, providing a potential future means of coordinating plans.

- The Genesee Transportation Council (GTC) is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the nine-county Genesee-Finger Lakes region, which includes Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates counties. GTC is responsible for long-range transportation planning and managing several federal transportation funding processes in the region. GTC also provides transportation planning assistance and, in some cases, transportation planning funds through its annual work program to communities and agencies within the nine-county region.
- Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council (G/FLRPC)- Established by joint resolution of its 8 (now 9) member counties - “the primary functions of G/FLRPC include regional planning, regional economic development, strategic planning, program and grant development, surveys, and data, technology and resource center.” (from G/FLRPC www site)

Control of Regional Growth - The Issue of Sprawl

“Sprawl” is a negative term to many groups and those governments negatively impacted by it; this has led to calls for state legislation to control it. Other groups insist that the right of people and businesses to locate where they choose should not be interfered with by government.

Negative impacts often cited as being caused by sprawl are:

- The needless destruction of open space and farm resources.
- The abandonment of housing and commercial structures, resulting in the deterioration of neighborhoods and commercial areas and increased tax burdens on remaining residents and businesses.
- The construction of new infrastructure (roads and utilities) and under-utilization of existing infrastructure, resulting in overly expensive maintenance costs.
- Increasingly long commutes, resulting in unnecessary air pollution, wasted natural resources, and wasted time.

Controlling Sprawl

In general, controlling sprawl involves the determination of areas in a region where development is desirable or acceptable and areas where development should be discouraged, and then the development of the means of directing development. Among the potential mechanisms for controlling regional development are:

- State action — This could take the form of legislation - for instance, mandating regional planning - or policies/programs that provide incentives that promote re-development of abandoned areas and/or discourage the spread of development. Road

construction/reconstruction policies significantly impact the location and density of new development. Wisconsin is reforming its tax code to discourage inter-municipal competition for tax base.

- County action — Counties, too, can impact the location and density of development through road construction/reconstruction policies and other programs. Counties can also act as facilitators of regional cooperation.
- Regional cooperation — The voluntary collaboration of local governments and other involved groups in the development and implementation of regional goals. This could include major actions such as the determination of desired development areas and the development of mechanisms for directing development; or it could be of more limited scope, such as determining services or functions that could be shared, making government more cost-efficient and (ideally) more responsive to communities. Voluntary cooperation is hindered by the responsibility and power of local governments to act in the best interests of their residents; that they are doing so may be difficult to determine and difficult to understand in a regional cooperation scenario.
- Local action — It is not uncommon for municipalities to react to development pressure by taking measures to preserve open space - large lot zoning is a traditional method. A newer strategy is the purchase of development rights. These measures help to limit development in the particular municipality, but might not significantly affect regional development - it will likely move to a more uncontrolled area, probably further from the central city. Two or more municipalities can also enter into cooperative agreements; joint planning of specific areas, joint materials contracts, or shared services, for example.

Recent Actions Related to Regional Development

- Discussions have taken place in the state legislature regarding smart growth legislation. Proposals to date have been called too intrusive by some and not strong enough by others.
- Mayor William Johnson of Rochester has been a vocal advocate of regional planning and smart growth both within the region and in Albany.
- The towns of Brighton and Pittsford and the City of Rochester have begun a joint planning effort for the Monroe Ave. corridor.
- The *Irondequoit Creek Watershed Collaborative* has been formed and is close to producing a report recommending policies and actions for controlling water quality and flooding in the Irondequoit watershed. This is a voluntary effort of the County of Monroe, the Monroe and Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the towns of Brighton, Penfield, Perinton, Pittsford and Victor, and the Villages of East Rochester, Fairport and Pittsford.

- The *Western Erie Canal Heritage Corridor* planning project was begun in July 1999. A planning commission has been appointed by Gov. Pataki, and is charged with preparing a plan to develop, preserve and promote the canal corridor's unique cultural, recreational and natural resources. Representatives from Erie, Monroe, Niagara, Orleans and Wayne counties will be appointed to the commission.

While the three joint planning efforts mentioned above are not examples of comprehensive regional planning, they are examples of the types of discussions and work projects that begin to foster the kind of communication between governments and agencies that is necessary for regional goals to be identified and achieved. They can also, in their own right, create positive impacts of regional scope, and have the benefit of being much easier to organize than are truly regional planning efforts.