

Chapter Five

Present and Future Land Use

Present Land Use

Land use patterns described in general terms within Huron County are consistent with typical rural counties in the Midwestern part of the United States. There are cities, in the case of Huron County there are two and a portion of a third, and a number of villages within the county that are located along major highway corridors. Most residential, commercial and industrial development is located within these communities. The higher density development is located along the highway corridors within the communities. Scattered residential and some commercial development occurs along highway corridors between cities and villages while agriculture is the major land use in the outlying areas.

Huron County consists of 317,614 acres. According to 2000 U.S. Census data 4, 996 acres of this total is urbanized or used for residential, commercial and industrial development. The vast majority, 249, 784.8 acres is used for agriculture. There is also a significantly large amount, 62,883.3 acres that are considered open space, which includes wooded land, shrub or scrub areas, open water, non-forested wetlands and barren land. A break down of this acreage by various land use categories is provided below:

Table 5-1 Land Cover

Urban	4,996.0
Agriculture	249,784.8
Shrub/scrub	519.7
Wooded	56,874.4
Open Water	1,418.8
Non-forested Wetlands	3,934.7
Barren	85.7
Total	317,614.1

From a different perspective, over 78 percent of the total land area is utilized for agricultural purposes in Huron County. Only 1.6 percent of the land area is developed while almost 20 percent is considered open space.

Residential

Residential development has maintained a steady pace of growth over the past ten years. This growth is primarily being influenced by the desire of many more people moving from surrounding urban areas outside of the county into the smaller communities in comparison that are located in Huron County. Residents of Huron County have been able to maintain an

affordable life style in a rural setting with good school environments and reasonable housing costs. Huron County is also reasonably close to metropolitan areas which enable residents to enjoy the amenities of a more urban environment within as short as an hour in some cases from home. This is an attraction to those wanting to move into a more rural setting. As a result, almost every community within Huron County has experienced some increase in housing development over the past five to ten years. Just about every community has seen an expansion or renovation of education facilities due mainly because of the aging and conditions of existing school facilities but also because of the influx of new students into community school systems.

The City of Norwalk appears to be experiencing the most significant increase of residential development with several new subdivisions under construction, one of which is a mixed use 600 plus unit housing development on the north west side of the city. This new subdivision is also in close proximity to the major U.S. 250 retail and service corridor. Every community in the County currently has an active subdivision. On average a total of 200 new housing units are being constructed within the cities and villages throughout the county over the past three years.

Housing development in the rural townships within the county presents another significant trend that is occurring in most rural areas of not only Ohio but most parts of the Midwest. That is the construction of large lot single-family homes that are in previously undeveloped and in most cases previously farmed areas. Although not occurring at as alarming of a pace in Huron County as in other parts of the state, there continues to be an average of 200 new homes constructed in this manner each year throughout the county according to Huron County Health District records. Taking the amount of acreage that is being converted from open space, forest or agricultural uses into consideration, there appears to be an alarming loss of more passive, pristine land uses at the expense of single family housing that is occurring in the rural areas of the county.

If you take into consideration the fact that each of these large lot single family homes are utilizing from 3 to 5 acres of land, the total amount of land taken from open space, forest and farm production is averaging approximately 300 to 500 acres each year. This is an alarming trend that will have significant impacts in the future of the county. It is perhaps the most significant trend that is impacting land use issues in the county.

Commercial

Huron County has historically been an underserved community when looking at retail and other commercial or professional services development. Through the years many people living in the northern part of the county would travel to the Sandusky Mall area for these needs while southern county residents would travel to the Richland Mall area in Ontario, Richland County. This trend started to change over the last decade with commercial investment and development of additional retail and service establishments occurring in Huron County. Most of this activity is located along major highway corridors particularly in the Norwalk and Willard area. Other similar types of establishments have located throughout the county but not to as great an extent.

This trend is expected to continue over the next 25 years. One reason is that the retail and service market is far from being saturated in the Norwalk and Willard area. Another reason is that the high transportation costs which are expected to continue to rise are keeping more and more travelers closer to home in their quests for goods and services. A third reason is that there will continue to be opportunities for commercial and service oriented real estate investment due to reason one. The market has yet to be saturated.

The commercial growth corridors include, in decreasing size and significance:

- U.S. 250 in Norwalk, north from League Street to Milan. This area will continue to be developed as property is marketed for commercial use. The roadway has been upgraded on several occasions to accommodate additional traffic.
- U.S. 224 through Willard. This route has also witnessed significant growth through the years. This corridor has emerged as the commercial center for the southwestern portion of the county.
- U.S. 20 between Bellevue and Monroeville. This corridor has not experienced the degree of commercial growth similar to the previously mentioned corridors but continues to offer potential, and some commercial and service type of investment. One of the reasons for this potential is the north-south State Route 4 intersection with U.S. 20 and the recently upgraded and developed interchange of the Ohio Turnpike just to the north. The seasonal traffic to the Lake Erie resort areas also adds to this potential.
- The Village corridors which include: U.S. Route 224 through Greenwich, State Routes 162 and 60 through New London, U.S. Route 20 through Monroeville and Wakeman and State Route 61 through Plymouth.

Industrial

Huron County has been fortunate through the years to have most of its industrial development located within the municipalities that exist within the county. There is also the opportunity within these municipalities for significant industrial expansion. This has been accomplished by local public officials designating land for industrial parks and implementing industrial zoning regulations that apply to these areas. There are currently 11 industrial parks located within the three cities and eight villages located within Huron County.

A number of these industrial parks are described below:

- In Norwalk, the Firelands Industrial Park, with several remaining lots under control of a single developer.
- Also in Norwalk, the Missler-Gibson Industrial Park on the east side of the city, where several new facilities have been constructed during the past several years.
- In Willard, a new industrial park has been developed on the east side of the city, which was spurred by a private development consortium.

- In Bellevue, industrial properties exist along State Route 269 on the southern end of the city, while a new industrial park was recently developed along Goodrich Road in the Northeast quadrant of the city.
- In Monroeville, the industrial park along U.S. 20 was recently expanded and access improved into the park.
- In New London, acreage remains in a north side industrial park along State Route 60 and in the White Industrial Park along S.R. 162 in the eastern portion of the village.
- The Village of Plymouth continues to pursue development in its two industrial parks in the Northern part of the Village to the east and west of S.R. 61.
- The Village of Greenwich continues to pursue the development of an industrial park along U.S. Route 224 west of the center of town.

Most of the new industrial development throughout Huron County over the next 25 years will more than likely take place within these industrial park areas along with other individual sites that are already designated for industrial development throughout the county. A current inventory of available industrial sites is available through the Huron County Development Council, which is the economic development organization for the county.

Agricultural

Huron County is one of the leading counties in the state in terms of agricultural production and gross receipts from agricultural production. As was previously mentioned almost 80 percent of the land area is designated as agricultural. Most commercial and industrial development is occurring in the cities and villages throughout the county. This is creating minimal impact on the loss of farmland in the county. However, the major threat to the loss of farm land is the previously mentioned large lot single-family housing development that is occurring in the rural areas throughout the county. If the trend of losing 300 to 500 acres a year of farm land as a result of the single-family housing continues throughout the county significant impacts will occur.

More detail related to agricultural land use issues has been provided in the Huron County Farm Land Preservation Plan completed in 1999.

Policy Statements and Recommendations

The following Policy Statements were established by the Huron County Land Use Task Force to address future land use issues in the County:

1. Incorporate a process into land use planning that promises the highest and best use of any given site. At this time the Huron County Planning Commission and the Huron County Soil and Water Conservation District are the two agencies that are involved in addressing land use issues on a countywide basis. Through membership most communities and interest groups are represented. The creation of a future land use map along with these policies will serve as another tool that can be used by these two organizations along with others to address this policy.

2. Preserve prime areas for farming and protect existing farm lands where feasible. The Huron County Commissioners appointed a task force to address farm land preservation issues in 1997. The result was a Farm Land Preservation Plan that was completed in 1999. The recommendations from this plan designate prime area of farm land to be preserved. If the current trends of commercial and industrial development occurring along highway corridors and within incorporated areas continues this policy statement can be accomplished to some degree. The issue of large lot single family home building in unincorporated areas will have negative impacts on preserving prime farmland throughout the county.
3. Continue to emphasize wise land use throughout Huron County. The old adage of Rome not being built in a day is also so true when it comes to developing a land use strategy for a county. The comprehensive land use planning process is one that takes a long-term commitment by not only elected and appointed officials but citizens of a community as well. Consistency of thought and decision-making must occur through time and also through various terms and appointments of elected and appointed positions of government. Hopefully this Comprehensive Land Use Plan for Huron County will serve as a tool for consistency and wise land use decision making into the future.
4. Assist in the development of uniform township zoning throughout the county, where possible. Fifteen of the nineteen townships within Huron County currently utilize zoning regulations as a land use tool. Unfortunately a lot of the development that is occurring in the county is located in several townships that are not zoned. Along with that issue there exist at times inconsistencies with development that is occurring within these un-zoned townships and development that is occurring in the municipalities located nearby. There are not only inconsistencies with the fifteen township zoning resolutions but many are in need of being updated to current standards. There also appears to be inconsistencies with enforcement in addition to a lack of enforcement in some cases. All of these scenarios have created a lack of uniformity, which could lead to further land use conflicts into the future if not addressed. Elected and appointed officials from throughout Huron County should continue to explore various options to avoid these conflicts.
5. Encourage strategies that promote infill and the use of land within and adjacent to municipalities, where services and infrastructure can be provided most efficiently. There are a number of strategies that could be utilized to promote this type of development. Various incentives could be utilized as well. The County Planning Commission and the Huron County Development Council could be excellent conduits to facilitate these strategies.
6. Encourage compatible land uses along planned commercial or business corridors. In efforts to utilize the highest and best use of land along with minimizing conflict in traffic circulation, drainage, water and sewer utilization and basic community services. A pattern of land uses should be created as new development occurs along these corridors. When plans are proposed there should be mechanisms established throughout the county that can provide for a thorough review by not only building officials but fire and safety and transportation officials as well. While looking at various

issues related to their respective authority officials should also look at minimizing the potential conflicts in land use patterns also. When reviewing development in this regard, there should be a smooth transition between single family and multi family development, commercial and industrial and all of the various land use types as to how they relate to each other. Conflicts should be minimized and amenities should be explored to eliminate any potential conflicts.

7. Incorporate flexibility in the planning process, to allow for desired changes in future development patterns. There should always be the ability to amend or appeal the decisions made by public officials that are made related to development patterns. There should also be the ability to make changes that will improve these patterns. A thorough review and amendment process will be an important piece of the implementation stage of this land use plan.
8. Encourage the use of tools that aid coordination between adjacent jurisdictions in minimizing land use conflicts and promoting tax revenue sharing resulting from new development. These tools could be incentives provided by the State of Ohio. Other tools such as development agreements between various political jurisdictions could also be utilized. Agreements related to water and sewer development is yet another example. While looking at these tools the Huron County Planning Commission and the Huron County Development Council can be excellent conduits to facilitate projects through the political process.