

# Good Planning is

# Good Management



## Planning Communities with Nature, Society and Economy in Mind

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*October, 2004*

# Unplanned Development Causes Economic, Environmental And Social Challenges

Unplanned development and sprawl are a major concern across North America. Each year, new housing and development in rural areas increases, as more people seek to escape the city core in search of greener pastures. Unfortunately as the numbers grow, these green pastures, as well as forests and farms, disappear, to be replaced with blocks of identical houses and straight roads. The bird songs and the sound of trickling creeks become lost in the noise of the commuter and the lawn mower. Soon people are thinking about relocating again, maybe further out so they can recapture the sense of nature. That which they are seeking soon becomes lost because of the search.



Here in New Brunswick we are in an enviable situation. The natural experience is still easily attainable. Poorly planned sprawling development has yet to reach the scale of larger population centres in Canada. However, this may be more as a result of good luck rather than good management. Some of the effects of sprawl are already

being felt around Fredericton, Moncton and Saint John. If we become more pro-active about planning our communities, we can help ensure sustainable communities and natural resources for the future.

When land is developed at a faster rate than the population is growing, this may be an indication of sprawl. The most recent census data for New Brunswick shows that the fastest growing populations are in areas outside cities, while the cities themselves show static or negative population growth. If this trend continues without attention or corrective action, urban and rural sprawl could become a more serious cause of conflict - for land, resources and tax base - in our province.

## What Causes Sprawl?

Sprawl results from a combination of decisions, and its causes and effects are often intertwined. Decisions made every day by individuals, business people, and public officials contribute to the growth trends that can become sprawl. Sprawl sometimes occurs when lower taxes or fewer zoning/planning regulations encourage

people to build homes or businesses outside established development areas. Sprawl is the result of an almost natural process of expansion and space-seeking. It can only be curbed through a conscious decision to direct development toward some locations and away from others.

## So, Why is Sprawl a Problem?

The effects of sprawl can be felt in many ways, some of which may not be obvious at first glance. These include:

- *the loss of wildlife habitat*
- *increased air pollution*
- *higher taxes to pay for the extension of services*
- *contaminated water supplies*
- *less local produce in our grocery stores*
- *less time for involvement in community activities*

For example, think about the safety issues when residences are located next to high speed highways. Consider the challenges that wildlife face if their traditional winter habitat is made into a subdivision. Think about the air quality problems that arise when many people commute long distances to work or school. Situations like these can often be avoided with some cooperative, long-range planning.

In NB, 50% of the land is privately owned, including most of the coastline. Much of the private land is in unincorporated areas where development is not necessarily guided or managed by plans. Where there are no plans, or very limited plans, it is difficult to manage the cumulative impacts of development decisions on natural areas or community values.

In our province, the impacts of unplanned development, sprawl and ribbon development along highways are not always being tracked. Some communities are growing, spreading and taking up more physical space, even though, according to Statistics Canada, our population as a province is not growing substantially. Basically, a similar number of people are taking up more space and resources – space that used to be woodlots, wildlife habitat or farms.

Simply put, sprawl can touch on every aspect of our lives, whether economic, social or physical. Our quality of life depends on our willingness to act, to discourage unplanned development before it causes more problems. **The key to it all is, not discouraging development, but encouraging good development. The solutions aren't that difficult.** In fact, the solutions may actually be cheaper in the long run, and that makes for good management and benefits for all.

# Looking for Solutions: Beginning Downtown

The first area of focus needs to be our town and city cores. An obvious negative aspect to the loss of citizens in a city is the decreased tax base. Even if there are fewer people living downtown, the amount of money which needs to be paid out yearly for maintenance of the infrastructure (such as pipes and roads) does not decrease. As the infrastructure continues to age, upgrading becomes even more important. Cities need to retain their citizens in order to pay for maintenance, upgrades and growth.

It is important to understand why people are leaving cities. In many North American cities, the downtown is often avoided because it appears run down and unattractive. Factories and businesses, which had previously been the main reason for settling in cities, have gone out of business or relocated, leaving behind unsightly buildings or vacant paved lots. Other areas which had been unofficial parks for the neighbourhood youth have been paved over for parking or used for other forms of development. Front lawns and green verges have disappeared as roads were widened to accommodate increased traffic flow. In short, the city isn't as pretty or as comfortable as it once was.



## Walkable Towns and Green Spaces

One step which can be taken is to consider the revitalization of the downtown core, and to do this with the pedestrian in mind. A major problem with many cities is the traffic, as people go to and from work, shopping or recreation. Added to this is the continuing problem of trying to find enough parking spaces for all the cars. All these cars contribute to poor air quality, which can cause serious health problems, as well as make the city seem more dingy and undesirable.

By actively preserving natural areas in and around the city, we can solve a number of problems at once.

Trees, grass and small streams, beyond looking attractive, have the added benefit of being natural filters. To some extent they can help filter pollution out of air and water. Trees, especially along city streets, can provide shade for pedestrians and homes – helping keep the temperature down in the summer and reducing air-conditioning costs. Green areas also provide a place for people to walk, away from cars and somewhat protected from traffic noise.

If we combine these with better forms of public transportation and bicycle paths, then we give citizens an incentive to be downtown without their car. People who walk regularly have generally better health – providing a spin-off benefit of reduced health care costs.

*69% of Canadians are concerned about the impact of sprawl on downtown areas of cities.*

*Enviroics, 2002*

## Business Organizations Recognize the Need to Address the Economic Impacts of Sprawl

*Many economic and business organizations, such as the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Chambers of Commerce, have written about the negative economic, social and environmental impacts of poorly planned development and sprawl. The Fredericton Chamber of Commerce has recommended that provincial and municipal governments work together to plan for responsible growth.*

*“The negative impacts of urban sprawl are well documented. Sprawl is generally unserviced, unplanned, uncontrolled, inconvenient, costly, destroys valuable farm land and woodlots, blocks future development, is haphazard and unattractive. Urban sprawl impacts on the environment in terms of water quality and air emissions.”*

*Municipal Government Affairs Committee of the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce, 2002*

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# Looking for Solutions:

## Where to go when you need to expand

Since space within a city or town is limited, then some expansion may be inevitable with a growth in population. Development is not inherently bad, especially when done carefully and with an eye toward the bigger picture. Although many developments can be justified for approval on a case-by-case basis, each new road, housing development or commercial building could potentially have a negative effect on the community and natural environment, even if only a small one. When multiple developments occur, negative impacts on wildlife habitats, water supplies or working farms can multiply more quickly than one might expect. New projects need to be considered within the context of the total planning region, giving thought to cumulative impacts on towns and surrounding lands and waters.

### Avoid Areas that Are Environmentally Significant or Have Better Economic Uses

Many factors need to be considered when deciding appropriate locations for various types of development. One factor is, "What is on the land in question right now?" In the recent past, large areas of farm lands and woodlots have been converted into subdivisions or highways. It is certainly a landowner's right to dispose of their land as they see fit. However, there may be overriding concerns which will make it appropriate to consider the big picture, because what happens to these lands ultimately can affect everybody.

Take the case of farmland. Farmland has already been cleared, levelled and is often well-drained, making it relatively easy to convert to housing developments. Many family farms are finding it harder to

*59% of Canadians strongly feel agricultural lands should be protected from development.*

*EnviroNics, 2002*



be competitive in the increasingly large-scale agriculture market, leaving farmers more open to offers to buy the farm or subdivide it. By forging partnerships

among farmers organizations, governments, and other non-government organizations, we can find ways to maintain local farm lands and invest in ways to make them a sustainable part of our rural New Brunswick communities. An example of this in action is the



### The Economic Value of Ecosystems

- *Wetland loss to development has been estimated to cost Nova Scotia \$2.3 billion a year in lost ecological services, resulting in costly replacement through waste treatment, water purification, erosion control and prevention and repair of flood damage (socio-economic research organization GPI Atlantic, 2000). The economic value of our wetlands in NB has not yet been researched.*
- *\$116.4 million was spent in New Brunswick on outdoor activities in natural areas in 1996; wildlife viewing added another \$26 million (Environment Canada, 2000).*
- *Recreational fishing added another \$44 million to New Brunswick communities, hunting \$32 million (Environment Canada, 2000).*

Rural Planning Committee of the Northwest, a group that is working on integrated planning approaches to ensure social, economic and environmental vitality for farmers, woodlot owners and residents in the Madawaska and Grand Falls regions.

Then there is the case of woodlots and natural areas. One of the leading problems for wildlife populations is the loss of habitat, and many wildlife habitats are located near urban or developed areas. Again, although losing a few hectares of woods or marsh may not seem drastic, if the same thing is happening everywhere, the risk of an environmental problem increases. Many wildlife species are very sensitive to fragmentation of their habitats.

The importance of wildlife to a region's economy can be seen in the continued growth of bird and wildlife watching and accompanying economic activity that has arisen in New Brunswick communities. For example, hundreds of thousands of New Brunswickers and visitors are attracted each year to such events and destinations as the Gagetown Festival of Birds, Dorchester Sandpiper Festival, Cape Jourimain Conservation Centre, Bouctouche Dune, and Le Centre écologique de la Péninsule acadienne. This economic activity is proving to be a valuable way to sustainably diversify local economies.

Natural areas provide us with the air we breathe and the water we

*Continued on page 5*

drink. Maintaining healthy forested areas around our communities has the added benefit of protecting the watershed from contamination and degradation. Keeping healthy natural buffers around rivers and streams can decrease the need for building or enhancing water purification systems for a community's drinking water. Wetlands are natural water filters, and help regulate water levels and reduce the risk of flooding, by acting as "sponges" that absorb excess water. As well, protecting the natural areas within a watershed can help make sure that groundwater continues to be recharged naturally, decreasing the likelihood of engaging in an expensive exercise of looking for more water sources for our communities.

A final consideration of the natural environment is of its intrinsic value. People appreciate nature: whether they go to natural areas and green spaces to seek an outdoor experience or not, they simply like to know that it is there. The natural environment is one that is sometimes used when promoting a town, but is not always thought of as being highly important. However, this can be a major factor when pursuing companies and businesses from other areas. Many major corporations now consider quality of life issues when searching for new locations, and conserving natural areas in or near your community can prove to be a significant lure.

### Ways to Decrease Pressure on Nature and Save Money at the Same Time

**Solution:** *Change subdivision design so each subdivision is a small community in its own right, allowing people to live close to places of employment, recreation and shopping.*

- Rather than the current model of row upon row of single-unit houses, consider including a variety of building types, including apartment buildings
- A certain amount of each subdivision should be put aside for business purposes, including stores, small businesses, office buildings and recreational facilities. Incentives could be offered for businesses to locate there, or business partners could be included in the design phase.
- Include the conservation of natural areas, habitats and parks
- Focus new development in areas that are already serviced by water, sewage, fire and police

#### Results:

- Less need for new or wider roads, which are expensive to build and maintain
- Less removal or fragmentation of natural habitats
- The intrinsic value of nature is maintained
- More contentment for residents who decide to stay and contribute to the community

*A 1995 study by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation showed that by increasing the compactness of new developments, capital and infrastructure costs could be cut by 16%.*



### Compact Development is Less Expensive

When seeking areas for new development, a good place to start is in areas where there is already development. It is much cheaper to provide electricity, water and sewage services from existing infrastructure as opposed to building new. When new pipes or electrical corridors have to be installed, the cost of this is shared by all citizens, not just those requiring the additions. This results in an added cost to the city, and a likely increase in local taxes. By encouraging development within established serviced zones, the costs for everyone can be kept down.

A similar argument can be made for other forms of service, including fire, health and police. The more compact a region that these agencies need to service, the lower the cost can be. One only needs to consider the high price of gasoline to realize that smaller patrol areas or smaller distances required to respond to emergencies can lead to savings in municipal budgets. A further incentive for the resident comes in the form of savings on home insurance due to proximity to fire departments and hydrants, and a greater chance of survival if urgent medical care is needed.

When development occurs in areas not currently serviced by water and sewage, the option is often drilling for new water sources and installing individual septic tanks on each lot. The financial cost of these may be shared by the new residents, but there are other costs which everyone may have to cover. If there are problems with the septic tanks, whether through malfunction or lack of servicing, there may be spillage which will seep into the local water supply. As well, without proper drainage for new roads and driveways, the risk of groundwater contamination from oil and refuse increases. The remediation costs are shared by all, and the environmental effects can be long-lasting.



# Keeping the Rural Truly Rural

According to government sources, approximately 50% of our population lives in rural areas. Rural sprawl is a bit different from suburban sprawl. While suburban sprawl often happens in clusters of subdivision development, rural sprawl is the result of piecemeal development – many landowners and developers each deciding to develop their own parcel in a spread-out pattern, especially along roads. A few instances of rural development may not be a cause for concern, but the cumulative impacts of many such buildings can have impacts on rivers and streams, ground water and wildlife habitat.

Rural sprawl affects the social character of rural areas if there becomes less focus on rural village life. Families who move into the area are not always accustomed to living so far from neighbours, and may spend more time going to and from work – leaving less time for taking part in community activities.

Residential development in rural areas can cost more to service than it generates in tax revenue, especially when compared to farms or woodlots. This results in government either reducing services, or raising taxes to help solve the problem.

The solutions are fairly simple – encourage new development in serviced areas. Find ways to provide incentives for people to build in existing serviced communities – make them more appealing to live in from a property tax perspective, and more liveable from a social and environmental perspective. Support long-term rural community planning, which encourages people to develop their own land in ways that maintains its rural character, and conserves or restores native habitats.

## Suburbs – A Commuter Lifestyle

*Living in the suburbs has been a dream for many people for decades. Living in communities that are less urban in nature can be very appealing. However, as the suburbs become larger or more distant from existing services, economic and environmental problems begin to set in.*

**Per cent of average Canadian family's annual budget:**

11%	food
13%	cars and transportation
19%	shelter

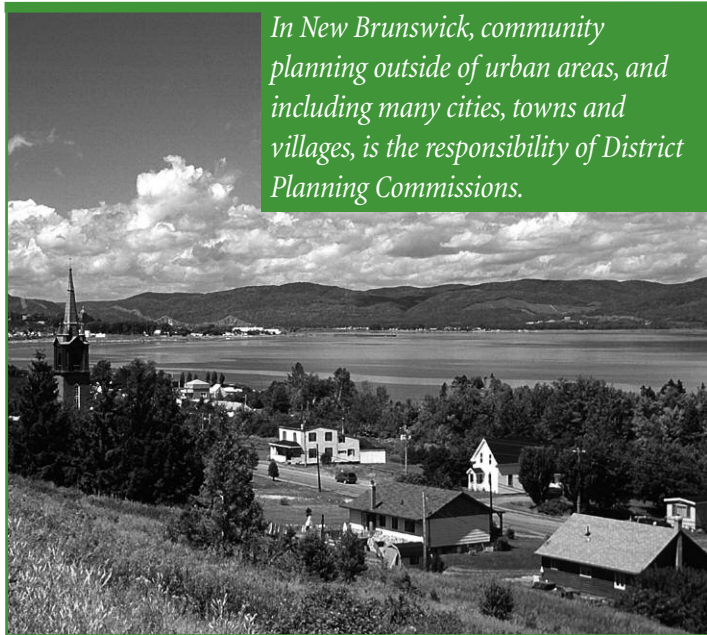
StatsCan, 2001

*Compared to the early and mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century, residents now live farther away from the areas in which they work, shop or play. This lifestyle is both caused by and results in the increased availability and use of motor vehicles. The suburban lifestyle of today requires at least one car, and sometimes two or three. For people living in suburbs, a walk to the nearest store could take more than an hour, so it just isn't considered. More cars result in increased environmental costs such as air pollution and fragmentation or loss of habitats to more and wider roads. They also cause increased maintenance costs for those extra roads – payable by the municipality or the province. Solutions include more comprehensive inter-community public transportation systems and planning communities to be more compact.*



# How Can You Help?

## Community Planning In New Brunswick



*In New Brunswick, community planning outside of urban areas, and including many cities, towns and villages, is the responsibility of District Planning Commissions.*

In New Brunswick, community planning outside of urban areas, and including many cities, towns and villages, is mainly done by District Planning Commissions. Fredericton and Saint John have planning departments. The planning commissions are staffed by competent professionals whose job it is to ensure that development occurs in the best place and the best way. The planners recognize the need to balance the needs of both humans and the natural world – a complicated task that works best with the involvement of citizens from all walks of life.

Rural and municipal plans guide development and land use into the future. They can encourage cost-effective growth and prevent sprawl in the planning area.

### ***Planners need help from at least two sources to create good plans:***

- ①** *They need the participation of citizens from a wide range of backgrounds and interests to contribute their ideas and feedback through planning committees. If you are interested in how and where your community grows, you can make a valuable contribution by sharing your ideas with your local planning committee.*
- ②** *They need the approval of politicians and decision-makers who recognize the value of plans that balance growth and development with protection of community values and the natural environment.*

### **Steps Forward**

Governments, Councils, Local Service Districts and planning commissions can contribute to good planning by:

- ▶ fostering dialogue among citizens, planners, municipal councillors, boards of trade, developers and others to determine the balanced planning features that suit each community;
- ▶ adopting policy statements that encourage the development of plans that balance growth with conservation;
- ▶ approving the development of municipal and rural community plans that strongly incorporate the conservation of natural areas, such as wildlife habitat corridors, forests, fresh and saltwater wetlands, rivers and coastal dunes and islands;
- ▶ approving the development of plans that identify existing development centres and encourage development (residential and commercial) toward these centres;
- ▶ encouraging the involvement of citizens from a wide variety of fields and interests, through planning committees and other informal mechanisms;
- ▶ helping planners and citizens identify areas of conservation or cultural interest in and around the community;
- ▶ encouraging cooperative community planning at regional and provincial levels, and within ecologically related areas, such as watersheds;
- ▶ adopting innovative solutions for subdivision design, storm water management, street layout, natural areas conservation, and other aspects that lead to more liveable, compact communities. A current pilot project on sustainable community design with a subdivision in Dieppe will provide ideas for how this could work in our province.

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## Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the financial contribution made by the *New Brunswick Environmental Trust Fund*.



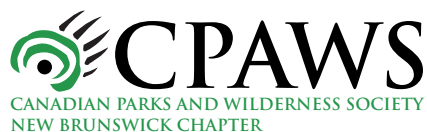
CPAWS NB would like to thank our external review committee for donating their valuable time to provide thoughtful comments on this booklet. We would also like to thank our translator, Ron Fournier, for his diligent work.

The opinions expressed in this booklet are those of the authors, and are not necessarily shared by funding agencies.

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Graphic design:  
 Stacy Howroyd, Imprint Communications



For more information about CPAWS NB's work to conserve natural areas and encourage sustainable communities, please contact us.

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