

WISCONSIN LANDSCAPES

Citizens United for Responsible Land Use

A Quarterly Newsletter of 1000 Friends of Wisconsin
& 1000 Friends of Wisconsin Land Use Institute

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In 1950 there were 24 million acres of farmland in production in Wisconsin. Today, there are about 16 million. Dane County loses farmland at the rate of an area the size of Lake Monona every year. Southeast Wisconsin loses about ten square miles of farmland each year. If farmland conversions continue at the same pace, we will be out of farmland in our state by the end of this century.

More than two decades ago, the Wisconsin Legislature tried to do something about the problem by enacting the Farmland Preservation Program. The program made millions of dollars available for tax relief, but farmers could only get tax credits if the county they lived in adopted an agricultural preservation plan and implemented exclusive agriculture zoning. If their county governments didn't act, farmers could still get the credits if they entered into preservation contracts with the state Department of Agriculture.

Over the past two decades about a half billion dollars have been invested in this program. This year about \$16 million in tax relief will be distributed to over 20,000 farm households.

The program has done some good. Seventy of seventy-two counties have an agricultural preservation plan and most have adopted exclusive agricultural zoning. The program has also leveraged soil conservation work by farmers. But while the rate of farmland loss has slowed somewhat since the program was enacted, it is not clear how much of that is due to the program and how much is because of other factors, such as fluctuations in the real estate market.

Farmland Preservation Program Needs An Overhaul

There is widespread agreement that the program has fallen short of expectations and that the half billion dollars invested so far could have been better spent.

No Strings Attached

In recent years, the Legislature has enacted millions of dollars in new property tax relief programs for farmers. These programs come with virtually no strings attached. The lottery tax credit provides farmers with \$11 million in tax relief each year. While use value assessment requires that farms be assessed for their value as farmland, rather than for their potential development value. In rapidly growing areas, this has resulted in dramatic tax cuts for farmers, but it has also benefited developers who are leasing farmland while they hold it for development.

These new programs dilute the impact of the Farmland Preservation Program because the preservation program represents a smaller amount of farmers' complete tax relief package.

Where To Go From Here

1000 Friends is exploring a seven point reform agenda for the Farmland Preservation Program. After it is refined we will ask the Legislature to make these changes:

- *Simplify the program.* The program is a confusing jumble of multiple objectives. Our change would make it a simple per-acre tax credit aimed at keeping land out of development
- *Target the program to areas where it is most needed.* The program currently provides equal benefits to

both fast *and* slow growing parts of the state. Our change would focus benefits where they can do the most good.

- *Provide more permanent protection for farmland.* The current program provides no permanent protections; our change would create a purchase of conservation easements program, which would buy permanent protections on carefully targeted farms.
- *Use some resources for farm business planning.* We agree with the American Farmland Trust that we can't save farmland if we can't save the farmer as a businessperson. They have suggested innovative programs that we support to help farmers stay in farming.
- *Enforce the payback provisions.* The program lacks teeth because stiff penalties for developing enrolled farmland have never been enforced. We would simplify the enforcement mechanism, collect paybacks and use these funds for purchase of conservation easements.
- *Integrate the program with the new Smart Growth Law.* We will work to coordinate agricultural preservation plans with new comprehensive planning requirements under Smart Growth.
- *Establish overall density standards.* Because of an ill-considered change made late last year, counties can now establish any minimum lot size under exclusive agricultural zoning ordinances. Our change will require that overall density in exclusive agricultural zones cannot exceed one lot per 35 acres, while allowing for cluster developments that preserve

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Darkness on the Edge of Town

As I write this, the early November election is dragging on into mid November and there's no apparent end in sight. For some of us, election day is maybe the only day each year that we step foot in city hall or the local elementary school or the firehouse. It's cause for some reflection on our public buildings and how those buildings reflect our values as a society.

In Lodi a mayor struggles to build a new city hall downtown. He wants to use plans drawn up early in the 20th century by a local architect. It would be a beautiful building, built in the heart of the city, reflecting the city's unique heritage. At a public meeting someone gets up to denounce the mayor's plan, claiming that a converted bowling alley on the edge of town should be "good enough."

In Rice Lake, two mothers of elementary school children fight to keep their historic neighborhood schools alive. The school board would rather abandon them for a big new school built in a cornfield. Most of the kids walk to their neighborhood schools, but every one of them would have to be driven to the new site.

These are just two examples of a troubling trend in Wisconsin: the steady decline in the architectural quality of public buildings and their migration to the urban fringe.

A good public building should reflect something back to its community about that community's history, its own sense of place and its pride in itself. A good public building in the heart of a community is a statement to its citizens, to visitors and to private investors that the public sector is committed to its downtown. How can local officials lament the decline of their central business district only to abandon it themselves? To suggest that a city hall be tossed into some abandoned bowling alley in a strip mall is to show disregard for the entire community.

Sometimes local governments choose to build cheap buildings on cheap land because it's, well, cheaper. Sometimes they do it because they want more space, usually for a parking lot. But there are things in this world that are more important than lower taxes and ample free parking. An investment in a quality building contributes to the community in ways that can't be reckoned in price per square-foot calculations.

It's time we stopped being so cheap with ourselves. It's time we demand better architecture and better siting of our schools, libraries, post offices, city halls --- every public building. We all own these buildings. They are a reflection of our values. Do you like what you see?

David Cieslewicz

Welcome New 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, Inc. Members!

We would like to thank those who have joined **Friends (\$100 to \$249)** our fight to promote land use reform in Stearns-Raith, Carlin, 1882 Wisconsin. Wuest, Mimi, 1886

We also thank those members who have increased their investment in our organization's work.

Thank You and Welcome.

Picture This

In September of this year, 1000 Friends unveiled its new web site — **www.1kfriends.org** — created to offer comprehensive information about “Smart Growth,” the state’s new land use legislation, and *smart growth*, ideas and information about the responsible growth and development of the communities we call home.

One of the site’s features that has generated a lot of interest is “Picture Smart Growth.” This part of the site is intended to show visitors images of positive development, as contrasted with the kinds of development we have all become too accustomed to witnessing across Wisconsin and the rest of the country. We showcase well-designed developments that protect the cultural, natural and economic integrity of their neighborhoods. We offer these images as examples of how we could be choosing to develop, along with information on the developments for those web site visitors who want more details.

“Picture Smart Growth” is a work-in-progress. Currently, we have pages on conservation subdivisions and density. But as we look for more good examples, we hope that our members across the state will join us in the search for developments we can all be proud of. If your village or city has a main street that gives you a sense of pride, send us a picture (preferably color) and background information for our “Picture Main Streets” page. If your community has said “No!” to the big box retailers, or has asked them to conform to local design guidelines, send us a picture and background information for our “Picture Attractive Retail” page.

Right now, the categories we include are: Picture DENSITY, Picture AFFORDABLE HOUSING, Picture ATTRACTIVE RETAIL, Picture MAIN STREETS, Picture TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS, and Picture “SMART” TRANSPORTATION (street designs that help control speeding and accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists).

If you have examples that illustrate good design, smart planning and a sense of place in any of these categories, please send them to: Picture Smart Growth, c/o 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, 16 North Carroll Street, Suite 810, Madison, WI 53703. I know there is responsible, attractive development we are proud of across the state. I look forward to seeing these images through your photos.

Andrea J. Dearlove

Director, 1000 Friends Land Use Institute

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Welcome New 1000 Friends Institute Members!

We would like to thank those who have joined our efforts to promote sound land use decision making in Wisconsin.

We also thank those who have increased their investment in our work.

Thank You and Welcome.

Friends Circle (\$1000 and greater)

Lubig, Harold N, 1883

Friends (\$100 to \$249)

Cheeseman, Rosanne, 1887

Regular Membership (\$35 to \$99)

City of Amery, 1885

Meling, Galen R., 1884

In My Neighborhood — Celebrating Wisconsin Cities

The Land Use Institute's second anthology evaluates what's good about our urban landscapes

This year, the 1000 Friends Land Use Institute initiated its Cities Project to evaluate the vital contribution healthy cities make toward a healthy overall environment, and to change the dialogue about our urban areas from criticism to celebration. Our second anthology, *In My Neighborhood*, looks at the cities of Wisconsin from this more optimistic point of view. Its essays celebrate the opportunities and experiences available to us only in our cities and villages while they also address the many challenges our cities face.

On the following pages are excerpts and images from the anthology. If you are interested in reading more, please find an order form on page 6. (The book would make a great gift for the holidays!)

At 8 a.m. on any weekday, the corner of 68th and Lloyd is a whirlpool of stop-and-go activity. Moms and dads fall into rank as they march their children to school. Compulsive morning joggers crisscross paths. Cars and trucks stop and stammer, then bolt through the intersection, the daily chore of getting to work etched across the faces of the drivers. ...

There are hundreds of these gateways in the city – none of them the same, yet all of them allied in a reflection of community. Impaired by our tunnel-visioned routines, rarely do we notice them. But if we pause and pay attention on our come-and-go routes, these crossroads can provide traces of our identity, hints of who we are and how we live.

— From “A Sense of Place” by Kurt Chandler

Monday morning. The Packers lost a heartbreaking game to the Panthers yesterday. Fog permeates the area. School delays are broadcast over local radio stations. Shower with the radio announcer analyzing the game. Have breakfast and discuss lousy game with spouse. Stop at convenience store to grab a coffee for the ride in. Pat, Glen, Rod, Jim, all have an idea of what's wrong. Everyone is cranky. Get to the office. Nobody smiles. By noon the mood is more critical. “Why did the players play like that? Why didn't they try this? What about the time out?” Stop on the way home. “What ya gonna do about those Packers?” Get home. Dog quietly greets you. Spend quiet evening watching Monday Night Football with dog. It's this way all over the City. We live and die with, but love, our Pack.

The most unique franchise in the history of professional sports evolved from a marriage of interests between a group of football loving and playing individuals and the citizens of the city of Green Bay. When E.L. “Curly” Lambeau and George Calhoun took a fledgling group of enthusiastic young lads and created the “Packers” with the sponsorship of the Indian Packing Company in 1919, the citizens of Green Bay embraced the venture with an unparalleled commitment to its ongoing success. The Packers joined the NFL in 1921. In 1923, the first public stock offering was made, which tied the community to the Packers forever.

— From “Tittletown and its Packers” by Tom Olejniczak

Old-time Cedarburg residents bristle at the suggestion that their town is a suburb of Milwaukee. Its history proves otherwise. From its beginning, Cedarburg was a self-contained settlement, a milling, industrial and retail center that predates Wisconsin statehood.

Like a glacier, sprawl, with its isolated houses in cornfields, has advanced to Cedarburg's southern border. Now the glacier is splitting and moving around us on both sides, swallowing dairy farms and surrounding us with formless development. But in its midst stands a tight little island of tradition whose inhabitants work hard at maintaining an illusion.

Entering the 21st century, Cedarburg citizens strive for the rhythm and appearance of American life about 1900, a place and time wherein neighbors know each other and where most chores can be accomplished in a morning's walk.

— From “The Cedarburg Illusion” by Paul G. Hayes



Downtown Edgerton, by Zane Williams



Al's Run by Henry H. Smith

My entire family has taken up residence in a depression-era office building downtown and now roam the gray halls, sleeping on wool couches, dreaming in low fog off the great lake. Now they speak to each other through an elaborate network of pneumatic tubes hidden behind the walls. Finally a place to catalog the ghosts, handwritten lists, and a congress of stuffed chairs. The most fragile inheritance: a thousand mirrored windows, my small reflection in each. Tonight I approach the city through an interchange of horn blast and brake light, the sun draining pink over coal barges and mountains of salt. The air thickly sweet with hops and chocolate. In the distance, the first silhouettes are already waving.

— From “The Commute” by Brent Goodman

Soon the willow thickets grew too thick to breach. Mounds of moss and clumps of marsh marigolds formed islands on a sea of black muck. Mats of watercress clogged the flowing rivulets. I had to cross a swamp: neither water nor land. I balanced on brittle bridges of shrubs; searched for footing on rotting tree stumps, mounds of bog plants, abandoned beaver dams. When I misjudged the depth of vegetation, or could not stretch my stride far enough, the muck oozed over my boot tops, sucked me in. Grabbing at branches for balance, I crossed another stream, pushed through some willows, and found a walk made of planks and two-by-fours. I had entered the Arboretum. A couple in tennis shoes eyed my boots, the mud-streaked cuffs of my jeans. "Taking the hard way?" they laughed.

I shook my head. "Circumnavigating Lake Wingra." Surrounded by city, deep in the wild, buoyed by the skin of the earth. — From “Urban Cool and the City Wild: Three Vignettes” by Judith Strasser

So, if the new world being built at the furthest edge of today's metropolitan area isn't working for us socially; and it is defying the laws of capitalist economics; and it is environmentally irrational to continue to lay out new oceans of asphalt and labyrinths of cul de sacs; then why do we do it?

Zoning is one answer. Force of habit is another. The US tax code is another. Race is a potent shaper of the human landscape. Fear of crime and fear of public schools are part of it. And the tempting possibilities of responsibility and cost-free waste closes the sale. It is the tragedy of the commons writ large...what is smart for me isn't great for everybody. If we move to cut down on automobile dependence for commuting, the big winner is the guy who's going to keep on driving no matter what, all we'll succeed in is making that guy's commute happier and shorter. His individual utility is served by everyone else's sacrifices.

I am, ultimately, an optimist. I hope that we can get away from defining these issues in a partisan or left-right way. Wanting to live in community is not a left-wing issue. Some of the hardest right right-wingers in America have gone off into the interior of the country to build towns and counties where they can live lives that make sense to them, where they can live according to their beliefs.

— From the Epilogue by Ray Suarez



Cross-country skiers, by Mary Jo Walicki

Please come to the first reading of “In My Neighborhood, Celebrating Wisconsin Cities” on Tuesday, December 12, 2000 at 7:30 p.m. at Canterbury Booksellers (315 West Gorham St., Madison, 258-9911). Meet the contributing authors and poets from the Madison area, have your books signed and join us for a discussion about the important role Wisconsin's cities play.

If you can't join us in Madison, not to worry, we will be hosting more reading events in Milwaukee and Eau Claire next year.

Books are \$24.95 each and will be available for purchase at all book readings. For more information, please call the office at 608/259-1000.



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In My Neighborhood - Celebrating Wisconsin Cities

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Please Consider an End of the Year Gift

As the year comes to a close, we hope you will consider a special end-of-the-year gift to 1000 Friends of Wisconsin. Whether you choose to support our public education efforts through the Land Use Institute or our advocacy work through 1000 Friends, Inc., your special gift will increase our ability to protect the quality of life in Wisconsin.

You can use the envelope enclosed in this newsletter to make your contribution.

And if you're thinking about tax deductibility, please remember that a gift to the Land Use Institute is deductible as allowed by law. Also, gifts of appreciated stock can have significant tax advantages.

You might also want to consider giving the gift of conservation by giving a 1000 Friends membership to a relative or friend. For information on either gift memberships or gifts of appreciated stock, please contact our office at (608) 259-1000.

Have a Happy Holiday Season!

Faith in the City: Report on our Second Wingspread Conference

- As people flee city cores for a perceived “simpler life” in the countryside, our cities, as well as the agricultural and natural areas that once surrounded them, are suffering the consequences. Our nation’s sprawling settlement patterns — due in large part to urban flight and the federal and state policies that encourage this mass migration from city to suburb — draw investment away from our cities, raising fundamental questions of justice.
- On September 20-21, 2000, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin and the Johnson Foundation sponsored a lecture and conference at the nationally renowned Wingspread Conference Center to investigate creative ways of addressing these concerns. For this conference we chose to look at the issue from the perspective of the faith community.

In late September of this year, 1000 Friends brought together representatives from Southeast Wisconsin’s faith-based organizations to learn about efforts underway in Cleveland, Ohio, to address the impacts of sprawl on inner-city communities.

Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist welcomed Sister Rita Mary Harwood and Mr. Len Calabrese from the Diocese of Cleveland, and spoke about the impact sprawl in the Milwaukee Metro area has had on the



Sister Rita Mary Harwood and Mr. Len Calabrese talk about Cleveland’s innovative approach to sprawl.

inner-city. Then Sister Harwood and Mr. Calabrese introduced *The Church in the City* project — initiated by Cleveland’s Bishop Anthony Pilla in 1994 — which identified sprawl as a primary contributor to the decline of the city. The project uses the strengths of the church — communication, empathy, and

stewardship — to address the city-suburb relationship in a non-confrontational and inclusive manner. *The Church in the City* project has gained national attention and to date nearly 1,000,000 Catholics in the Cleveland diocese, as well as people from many other religious and secular organizations have joined together to strengthen their commitment to the inner-city.

Some of the project’s greatest successes have included the partnerships formed between inner-city and suburban churches and the Church in the City Land Use Task Force.

“*The Church in the City* project is not about charity,” Sister Harwood explained, “it is about people breaking down barriers of communication and realizing they have more in common than they might think.” In one particularly successful city-suburb partnership, an inner city home was renovated for refugees from the war in Bosnia. Each church conducted its

own fundraising campaign for that effort; although the amounts of money each church raised were significantly different, they both achieved satisfaction in knowing that they contributed and collaborated to help those less fortunate.

Another important component of the *Church in the City* project is the creation of the Land Use Task Force. This task force studies the federal, state and local land use policies that either contribute to or rein in sprawl. They then make sure their voices are heard when developments are proposed. (Please see the sidebar that lists the questions the task force uses to evaluate development proposals.)

The Church in the City project, after six years, has now become part of the fabric of organizations in Cleveland working to address the challenges of sprawl. It provides an excellent

Church in the City Land Use Task Force Criteria for Development

- q Does the proposed development (and the well-established trend of scattered regional development) represent good stewardship of our valuable agricultural lands?
- q Does it lead to a cleaner environment?
- q Does it make cohesive, vibrant family life easier?
- q Does it wisely utilize our fiscal resources?
- q Does it increase our regional economic competitiveness nationally and in the global economy?
- q Does it further a healthy appreciation of multi-cultural diversity?
- q Do our development patterns better ground our young people in a rooted, meaningful sense of identity marked by solid values?
- q Do they help break down the isolation of people by race, income and culture?
- q Do they help bridge the widening gaps that separate rich, poor and middle class?
- q Finally, does what has come to be known as sprawl advance social justice and the common good?

—

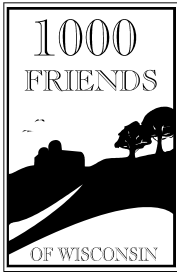
“What makes the book so engaging is not one particular piece but an accumulation of insights. Like the streets urban dwellers share, there is power in the communal experience.”

“I’ve just been paging through *In My Neighborhood - Celebrating Wisconsin Cities*, a new book published by Prairie Oak Press and 1000 Friends of Wisconsin. Reading these short essays and poems is like opening a stack of letters from good friends who share their personal experiences of urban life ... Words that spark images, ignite memory, connect us to the fabric of life lived in cities. The book helps support this environmental and land use group, but you’ll find no preaching, just eloquent voices holding up a mirror to city life...

Review from Milwaukee Magazine:



**Your 1000 Friends of Wisconsin
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and
Our second anthology, “In My Neighborhood - Celebrating Wisconsin Cities”
has arrived just in time for the holidays!
(Order form inside)**



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