During the past decade, many of our towns and cities have expanded at a breakneck pace, leading to haphazard, wasteful development. We are seeing our communities change in more ways than we ever bargained for. New sprawl tends to sit atop what once was forests, farmland, floodplains and scenic landscapes. While investments pour into the metro fringes to build new roads, sewers and schools, cities struggle to find revenues to sustain basic services. Areas of fastest job growth are disconnected from places where job seekers live, generating an excess of traffic.

Far from just a suburban or rural concern, poorly planned development is also threatening the quality of life in urban communities. As subsidies for sprawl fuel a migration away from cities, many urban neighborhoods and their residents have been left behind. Even as the economy has boomed, opportunities in low-income neighborhoods remain scarce.

As people strive to improve the livability of their neighborhoods and towns, we are getting fed up with traffic, limited access to quality jobs, the loss of open space, and the lack of affordable housing. More and more, we’re looking for alternatives that will deliver growth that is smarter and more fair.

This newsletter features a variety of examples of how Leagues—state, local and ILO—are making a difference in their communities on smart growth. League members are forming coalitions, crafting education campaigns, raising money, and advocating for policy changes at the local, state and federal levels. Some of the Leagues have just started working on these issues, while others have a longer history. This newsletter connects some of these efforts together, so that Leagues can learn from one another and share strategies and tactics.

**Choices for Our Communities**

Smart Growth must be Fair Growth

1. Encourage citizen and stakeholder participation in development decisions
2. Strengthen and encourage growth in existing communities
3. Create housing choices
4. Improve modes of transportation
5. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
6. Increase availability of and access to quality jobs
7. Create walkable, compact neighborhoods
8. Promote distinctive, attractive communities
9. Make development decisions transparent and accountable
10. Mix land uses
What is Smart Growth?

Smart growth is growth that serves the economy, community, and the environment, by providing a responsive framework for communities to make informed decisions about how and where they grow. Smart growth allows communities to grow in fair ways that support economic development and good-paying jobs; create strong neighborhoods with a range of housing, commercial and transportation options; and develop vibrant communities that provide families with a clean environment.

Smart Growth has three goals:

 genomaiu dlhfevm duvowg lheufd odgud ufd苁 ngudosf eugud 1. To save natural resources, preserve historic and culturally important places and conserve open space and environmentally sensitive areas.

 genomaiu dlhfevm duvowg lheufd odgud 2. To support existing communities and neighborhoods by targeting resources to support development in areas where the infrastructure is already in place.

 genomaiu dlhfevm duvowg lheufd odgud 3. To foster engaged citizens and transparent decision making processes.

What’s New in the Field of Smart Growth?

The following are some recent publications—download them, read them, discuss them, and share them with friends.


The authors of this report reveal that Wal-Mart’s success in the US rests largely upon the enormous tax subsidies—over one billion dollars—that it has received from state and local governments.

www.goodjobsfirst.org

Smart Growth Is Smart Business

This report follows sixteen businesses and business groups that are addressing the threat of sprawl, and are finding an economic advantage in doing so. The conclusion?

Smart growth is always smart business, no matter whether the economy is up or down.

http://www.sgli.org/sgbp.html

Investing in a Better Future: A Review of the Fiscal and Competitive Advantages of Smarter Growth Development Patterns

This paper demonstrates that more compact development patterns, as well as increased investment in existing urban areas, will save taxpayers money and will also improve overall regional economic performance.

www.brookings.edu/urban/publications/200403_smartgrowth.htm

Better Models for Commercial Development: Ideas for Improving the Design and Siting of Chain Stores and Franchises

In a lively, engaging style with a feast of photographs, this guidebook explains how communities can create a greater sense of place by improving the appearance, design, and siting of chain stores, franchises, and big box retailers.

http://www.conservationfund.org/?article=2864&back=true

Getting to Smart Growth II: 100 More Policies for Implementation

Volume 2 of this ongoing series describes techniques for putting into practice the ten smart growth principles delineated in the first volume. This is a great resource for anyone who has said, “smart growth is a great idea... but how do we make it happen?”

http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/publications.htm
What Can You Do? Case Studies from Leagues Around the Country

League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara: the Educational Campaign on Sprawl

While most of the country is experiencing enormous population booms and housing shortages, the Buffalo/Niagara region of New York is experiencing both a rapid population decline and an enormous new house surplus. From 1970 to 2000, the area’s population fell by 180,000 people, according to national census data, but developers continued to build, farther and farther from city centers.

As local land was consumed by new building, local governments faced mounting costs with a shrinking tax base. Sprawling development gobbled up 27% of farmland in Erie and Niagara counties between 1965 and 1995, and even more has been lost in the ten years since. It is forcing people to drive farther and farther each day to work: the number of car miles traveled each day has increased 58% between 1982 and 1999. This overly rapid development, even in the face of massive population decline, is compounded by the fact that control of planning and zoning in New York state rests with each individual municipality, rather than with the counties or with the state as a whole. Such fragmented authority makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the sixty-four separate municipalities of the region to coordinate their development.

Alarmed by these three factors—population losses, a house-building explosion, and lack of regional planning—the Buffalo/Niagara LWV decided it was time to act. The chapter decided to address the land use problems of the region by launching a large-scale campaign to educate citizens, lawmakers, planners and students on the environmental, economic and social costs of sprawl.

The chapter launched its campaign in June 2000, after raising over $100,000 in seven months. The main component of the campaign was a 25 minute PowerPoint presentation, which included an overview of the costs of sprawl in the Buffalo/Niagara region, the techniques other areas have used to address sprawl and the options available to New York State to contain it. The chapter sent over 160 letters and over 10,800 brochures to organizations, businesses, schools and groups in the region, announcing the campaign and inviting them to request a presentation. In all, over 100 presentations were given in Niagara and Erie Counties, and over 2500 people have seen it. The presentation was also available online at www.lwvbn.org, in conjunction with a “sprawl quiz” to test people’s knowledge about sprawl in the upstate New York region in an entertaining way. Many CD versions of the presentation have been distributed.

In addition to the presentation, the Educational Campaign held three public meetings with speakers on sprawl like Thomas Hylton (author), Bill Johnson (Mayor of Rochester, NY), and Dr. Robert Bullard (professor). The League also produced an hour-long prime-time televised program on the local public television station, which featured a panel of experts discussing sprawl in Western New York.

A downloadable color report on the broadcast is available in PDF format, and has been distributed to local high schools and colleges, along with a teacher’s guide. The television broadcast was a resounding success, with positive feedback from people around the country and in Canada.

The campaign was prepared and executed by a large committee of volunteer members of the League, a part-time paid coordinator and a staff of consultants who produced the presentation. In addition, the League coordinated a diverse coalition of campaign supporters, including local...
League of Women Voters of California: Coalition Work and State-wide Dialogue

In 1999, the California LWV looked at the positions it had already adopted on a variety of issues, and realized that sustainability was frequently their key component. With this in mind, the League drafted The Sustainable Communities Action Policy, which calls for integrating the goals of the different League programs in a light of sustainability. After deciding to make sustainability an issue for emphasis, the CA League was able to obtain funding from the Hewlett Foundation to develop tools and resources, and was able to join together in a coalition—the CA Futures Network—of organizations that had all received Hewlett and Irvine grants.

The CA LWV used its grant to encourage local Leagues to address sustainability issues within their individual communities, by distributing tool kits and resources to these local leagues, and by hosting a series of forums around the state. The forums set the stage for discussions on sustainability in California, by bringing together local business leaders, elected officials, community leaders, and occasionally members of the public. The ultimate goal of each of these forums was to create a dialogue that would lead to action, when the diverse forum groups identified a goal to move towards in the following months and meetings.

Concurrent with its forums, the League published a guidebook, “Choices for a Vital Community,” to encourage discussion and thought by individuals in communities just beginning to think about smart growth. “Choices” outlines four different ways of thinking about the sustainability of communities, and was designed to foster discussion among the diverse groups of people who might be attending the League-sponsored forums in California. In addition, the League

continued to do advocacy work with the CA Futures Network, supporting smart growth measures at the state and local levels.

At the local level, work on smart growth issues varies by community—some have pressing fights over water rights, while others have building code laws that need to be addressed immediately. The Bay Area LWV continues to fight the good fight on many smart growth issues, especially transportation, and through the publication of a joint newsletter that examines smart growth-related issues in the Bay Area. The Santa Barbara League has fought for land preservation, especially along the region’s coastline, and has even sued the developers of a luxury time share/hotel complex that was not adequately planned. In addition, the Santa Barbara League has advocated for Transfer-of-Development Rights, conservation easements, and land swap projects, and has also been involved in education work. All in all, California Leagues are leading the way in eco-advocacy with a smart growth twist.

The Sustainable Communities Action Policy is available online at http://ca.lwv.org/lwvc/issues/suscomm/suscomm.html.

For more information, contact Linda Phillips at 805-967-0922, or lindakp5@cox.net.
League of Women Voters of Portland (OR): Framing the Debate

Over forty years ago, downtown Portland, Oregon, was named as an Urban Renewal Area (URA) by the city’s council. This designation required that all property taxes collected from the downtown area must be spent within that same area, on improvements and modifications that would make it more livable and more attractive to individuals and businesses. In 2000, the area’s designation as an Urban Renewal Area was again about to expire, and was again up for another ten year extension. Although URA designation is an important component in helping underappreciated urban areas spring back to life, the Portland League no longer felt that it was necessary for their city’s downtown, which was now thriving. Instead, the League judged that the city would be better served by the expiration of the downtown’s URA status, and the redrawing of the boundaries to incorporate some of the more blighted areas of the old URA into the newer and more successful districts. In this way, the struggling river and Chinatown districts would become beneficiaries of the more successful district, without the URA designation.

In reaching this creative solution, the League undertook a great deal of research on urban policy and finance, worked with contacts in the local press to spread their ideas to the public, and lobbied with city council members to accept their position. Members of the League wrote a detailed position paper that addressed the city council’s questions and objections. Although it took time for the League to establish itself as a stakeholder in this issue, and as a credible source for information and ideas, eventually the League came to be seen as an important voice in the process. In the end, the city council voted to extend the URA designation for another four years, as opposed to ten, and agreed to study the League’s proposal before issuing any further extensions.

For more information, contact Heather Drake at (503) 228-1675 or lwvpdx@aracnet.com

League of Women Voters of Colorado: Supporting the Local Leagues

Like many of the nation’s landlocked and largely open states, Colorado has a fairly decentralized government, with no state-wide land use planning. As many as thirty years ago, the CO League recognized that state-wide planning was a necessity, and a state land use commission was formed at that time. However, the lack of state-wide mandates, funding, or even control made the commission nothing more than a nice idea. In 1994, the state’s governor convened a state-wide smart growth summit, which resulted in an increase in conservation easements. Despite this gain, it was clear that smart growth battles would be fought at the local level.

As a result, the Colorado League decided that its most helpful role would be as a resource-provider and supporter for the local leagues. Since land use is left to each county and municipality, rather than the state, it is the local Leagues who can grapple on this level to fight for what they think is important. The state League provides positions to local leagues, and encourages them to review their local comprehensive plans to find out if they mesh with possible new development. In many areas, the intrusion of “big-box” stores (like Walmart) is becoming an issue, and the local leagues are encouraged to ask whether these stores will fit with the comprehensive plans, and fit with the communities.

In short, the state League provides ammunition, and local Leagues act by asking questions at public hearings, requesting comprehensive plans from their town officials, and monitoring adherence to those plans.

For more information, please contact Jeanette Hillery at 303-494-7718 or jmhillery915@comcast.net
Local League Highlights

Although just starting up in its smart growth efforts, the LWVs in Michigan is already making substantial headway. LWVMI has established a brand new land use listserv and local leagues are active on smart growth: the Grand Traverse League organized a March 2004 forum of legislators and public officials concerned with land use and planning and the Ann Arbor league is working on greenbelt preservation. Contact Cathy Wood at lwvmi@voyager.net for more into.

In Washington, the WA State League worked with a veritable army of volunteers and other organizations in order to defeat the 1995 “Property Rights Initiative,” by an almost 20% margin. The entire exercise was an excellent chance to energize the local Leagues, to develop smart growth messages that resonated with voters, and to educate the public on managing growth wisely. Contact Lucy Steers at lbsteers@comcast.net to hear more.

The Snohomish County (WA) League is currently monitoring the county’s update of its comprehensive plan, as well as the siting process for the area’s new sewage treatment facility. Leaguers have also joined a community coalition focused on keeping new development off a particular parcel of agricultural/flood plain land, adjacent to an interstate highway. We await the results from the latest round of litigation. Contact Julie Langabeer at LangabeerJ@aol.com.

The LWV of Missouri hosted a League of Women Voters Forum on Smart Growth, which featured a panel of experts from the environmental, planning, economic development, and transportation fields. For more information, contact Nancy Ulman at lwvmo@yahoo.com.

In Ohio, the Cuyahoga Regional chapter partnered with the local Oxford chapter to produce a high school study unit (Sprawl Gets Personal), a book (Land Use and Transportation Policy in Cuyahoga County: A Close Relationship), and other educational materials. Contact Steve Dana (Oxford League) at sdana@who.rr.com or Carol Gibson (Cuyahoga League) at carolgibson65@hotmail.com for more information.

When the Portland city council began to re-examine the designation of its downtown as an Urban Renewal Area, the Portland League took the opportunity to step into the decision-making process. After becoming experts on the nitty-gritty details, and after performing extensive research, involved League members presented their creative positions to the city council, which incorporated the League’s ideas into their decision on the downtown area. Contact Debbie Aiona at lwvpdx@aracnet.com for further details.

In 2000, the Buffalo/Niagara LWV launched what became a terrifically successful Educational Campaign on Sprawl. With over one hundred thousand dollars in grant money, the League created a PowerPoint presentation, which it delivered to over one hundred different audiences around the two-county area. The campaign also included a television appearance, a panel of smart growth speakers, a website for the public, and educational tools about sprawl for local teachers. The League received one of the American Planning Association’s highest awards for their extensive efforts. Contact Katherine Tarbell at ktarbell@adelphia.net.
Klamath County, Oregon leads the way in thinking sustainably—in terms of land use, resources, recycling, and more. The Klamath League and Audubon Society together form Klamath Sustainable Communities—a coalition involved in land use and other issues related to sustainability. The KSC puts out frequent e-newsletters and quarterly snail mail newsletters (funded by the recycling of old office equipment in the area!), weighs in on local land use issues, and tries to keep political awareness alive through the use of a listserv and more broad-reaching public awareness campaigns. Contact Leslie Lowe at inharmony45@charter.net for information on their efforts, or to receive a copy of their newsletter.

The LWV of Minneapolis is sponsoring a Neighborhood Leadership Breakfast Series with the Center for Neighborhoods and is hosting an Affordable Housing Tour in June. This tour will visit a house built by Habitat for Humanity, an emergency shelter, a community and children’s center, and a low-income apartment building. Contact the Minneapolis LWV office at 612.333.6319.

Like many leagues, the LWV of Auburn, AL has developed a position on sprawl and density and is using this position statement to advocate for better land use planning. Email them at lwvauburn@bellsouth.net.

LWV Torrance, CA has done extensive research and is currently interviewing Councilpersons & Planning Commissioners about the City’s once-praised “balanced community.” Future plans include a League General Meeting, a meeting with homeowner associations & professionals, and finally, making recommendations to the City Council. Contact Lola Ungar at (310) 375-7410 skyhawk172@socal.rr.com

The League of Women Voters-Chicago has been devotedly involved in smart growth issues in the state of Illinois for several years now, both independently and as part of networks of local leagues, local organizations, and national nonprofits. Just a few highlights from their many great activities: the separate smart growth task force (LWV4SG) studied land use, transportation, and housing challenges for the Illinois state senate, and make subsequent recommendations from their findings. The LWV4SG also partnered with two Chicago groups to execute a series of workshops on Safe Routes to Schools best practices, and to encourage communities to implement the “Safe Routes” programs. In addition, the LWV4SG and LWV-Illinois worked with a local television station to create a documentary on the misalignment of job opportunities and affordable housing. Contact Alba Alexander at aalex@uic.edu for more details on these and their many other smart growth programs.
Buffalo/Niagara Case Study Continued

environmental, agricultural, homeowner, preservationist and other groups. As recognition for their campaign, the Buffalo/Niagara League received the 2003 Public Education Award from the American Planning Association—an outstanding honor at the national level, for their incredible hard work and effectiveness.

The Buffalo/Niagara League carried the momentum from its educational campaign into other ventures in the arena of land use. It has performed studies on population decline and tax revenues, has supported the extension of Buffalo’s light rail system, has lobbied the state to contain sprawl and protect open lands and will soon be releasing a publication on the ways governments subsidize sprawl in the Buffalo/Niagara region.

This report is targeted at policy makers and legislators in the local two-county area. Because there is no regional planning above the municipal level, it is critical to get county and state-wide legislators thinking about land use issues, and instituting policies that can create coherence between municipalities.

In addition, the Buffalo/Niagara League acts as a reference and resource provider for the state League and for many other chapters, many of which have adopted its positions on smart growth related issues. In fact, the state League is now a part of a working group dedicated to smart growth and the elimination of sprawl. This group is funded and staffed professionally by Audubon New York, and supports bills up for vote in the state legislature. The group is currently promoting a bill in the state senate that would require state agencies to give priority funding to projects consistent with principles of smart growth. The group is also pushing, along with the state land conservancy, for a bill that would allow local municipalities to raise real estate transfer taxes by an additional 2%, in order to fund local open space preservation.

For further information, please contact: Katherine Tarbell at 716-688-3519 or ktarbell@adelphia.net.
Select Smart Growth Resources

Smart Growth America website
Smart Growth America is a national coalition of advocacy groups. The website provides tons of information on smart growth as well as frequent news updates and current information about the state of smart growth in the news. Their coalition list is a great place to start to find smart growth partners and additional resources. www.smartgrowthamerica.org

National Neighborhood Coalition
The NNC works with community-based organizations involved in community development, housing and a wide range of other neighborhood issues. They have also done extensive work on affordable housing and smart growth. www.neighborhoodcoalition.org

Growth Management Leadership Alliance
GMLA is a network of almost forty organizations from around the country that support smart growth policies at the state and local levels. Contact these folks to find out what is happening in your state or community. www.gmla.org

Funders’ Network for Smart Growth
The Funders’ Network is a great resource for information on local, state, and national foundations. www.fundersnetwork.org

Smart Growth EPA Office
This website provides quick access to news and recent publications on smart growth, as well as details on EPA funding opportunities and Award Recognition Program. www.epa.gov/smartgrowth

National Charrette Institute
The NCI aids in the creation of healthy, livable communities by supporting civic involvement during the planning process. The Institute itself provides training for planners, developers, town council members, and others interested in organizing charrettes for their communities. www.charretteinstitute.org

Place Matters
Provides a set of tools and techniques for planners, community leaders, and public agencies looking for land use and growth management solutions. It includes not only the tools and how to use them, but also information on place-based planning, as well as various case studies. www.placematters.com

Surface Transportation Policy Project
STPP is a national coalition of organizations working to promote better communities and improved quality of life through increased transportation options. Their website provides detailed information about transportation policy and issues at the national level. www.transact.org

Congress for the New Urbanism
Is the best resource on new urbanist principles, developments, and speakers. www.cnu.org

PolicyLink
The key to sustaining equity is building strong, organized communities. PolicyLink brings together resources, partners, and information to craft policies and strategies that build the public will for change. www.policylink.org

Once There Were Greenfields: How Urban Sprawl Is Undermining America’s Environment

National Trust for Historic Preservation
This website has tons of information on historic preservation, main street redevelopment and big boxes. www.hthp.org

Smart Growth Network website
This website contains essentially anything you might want to know about Smart Growth. Including recent updates, tools for advocates, information about grants and funding, and links to numerous other resources. www.smartgrowth.org

LWV for Smart Growth, a task force of LWV-Chicago would like to thank all the Leagues who contributed to the production of this newsletter, Smart Growth America for their assistance in pulling it all together and the Funders Network for Livable Communities and Smart Growth for their generous support. For further information, please call Chris Miller, Associate Director, LWV-Chicago, 312-939-5935, ext. 24.