

# THE RURAL SOUTH: Preparing for the Challenges of the

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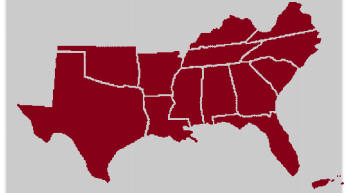
## Land use at the edge: The challenges of urban growth for the South

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### Urban Growth/Urban Sprawl

Across America, headlines reflect a new awareness and concern for urban growth. In the November 1998 elections, there were 240 ballot initiatives related to limiting urban growth or preserving agricultural lands/open space, and 72 percent of the initiatives passed, authorizing \$7.5 billion in conservation spending [10]. It is not just our largest or fastest growing metropolitan areas that are struggling with issues of urban development. In rural communities, both remote and on the urban edge, concerns about growth are increasing. In these places, sprawl tends to be “piano-key developments” of five and ten acre residential tracts along existing county roads as well as strip malls and other large-scale urban uses “plopped down” in the open countryside. Although the form and degree of growth may differ from what is occurring in larger cities, rural areas are no less affected.

Urban growth is simply the geographic expansion of urban areas, in and of itself, a benign concept. Sprawl on the other hand, has been defined as “dispersed development outside of compact urban and village centers along highways and in the rural countryside (Vermont Forum on Sprawl).” While “smart growth,” the catch phrase for those opposed to urban sprawl, has become a hot button issue in the current presidential campaign, the truth is that all politics are local and this is especially true of land use issues. Like big cities, smaller urban areas, as well as small towns and remote villages, are wrestling with the same questions: Is growth good or bad for our community? Should we try to manage urban growth, if so, how? The effort to answer these questions can tear a community apart or set it on a path toward a future that the community wants, and Southern communities will be attempting to answer these questions for years to come.



21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY



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### National and Regional Trends in Urban Land Use

America has been experiencing a burst of urban geographic expansion unprecedented in our history. For example, from 1970 to 1990:

- ◆ The population of the U.S. increased by 45 million (22.5 percent), and the urban population by 36 million (24.2 percent). But the density of the urban population actually decreased by 23.2 percent because land in urban areas increased by 21 million acres, a 60 percent increase in total area.
- ◆ More than 30,000 square miles (nearly 20 million acres) of rural land were converted to urban uses, about 400,000 acres a year.

Southern communities, both rural and those on the urban edge, increasingly must deal with questions of growth and sprawl. Proportionately, since 1980, both metro and nonmetro growth has been second highest in the South (32.3 and 10.6 percent, respectively), led only by growth in the West (36.2 and 27.2 percent, respectively). But, in terms of actual numbers, “the South added more metropolitan residents than in any other region (6.3 million), which was 46.5 percent of the country’s metropolitan growth...[moreover] the South added more nonmetropolitan residents than any other region (1.3 million)” [8].

However, the use of metro/nonmetro comparisons masks what is happening at the ground level. In most metro counties, there are significant parcels of rural land, just as in nonmetro counties, there are significant parcels of urban land. So, consider the change in actual land use in just a five-year period from 1987 to 1992. At a regional level, only the Northeast had a greater percentage increase in developed land than the South (see Table 1). Numerically, however, the South posted the largest increase in acres converted to developed uses—seven million over the five-year period—as well as the largest loss of rural acreage—eight million. Within the South [a], eleven of the sixteen Southern states experienced gains of twenty percent or more in “developed” land during this time period, and seven states gained thirty percent or more (Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia) (see Table 1). Finally, these land use transitions mean that the South has both the largest share of the total U.S. land area in urban uses and the second highest proportion of developed land among the four regions (see Table 2).

Atlanta best illustrates the nature of urban growth in the South. In 1970, the Atlanta metropolitan area, with a population of 1.39 million, encompassed 1,727 square miles and five counties. Today, the metropolitan area stretches 150 miles from north to south, encompassing over 6,126 square miles and twenty counties with a population in 1997 of 3.6 million. Over this same time period, population density *declined* from 805 to 592 per square mile. So, over a quarter of a century, the population of the Atlanta metropolitan area increased 161 percent, but the land within the metropolitan area increased by 254 percent, and the population density declined by 26.5 percent.

Clearly, “most of the growth is happening in the fringes of the Atlanta megalopolis....the population outside Atlanta’s central city increased almost 40 percent from 1990 to 1996, while growing just two percent within city limits [7].” While there is considerable pride that Atlanta has become the focal point of the economic and cultural

renaissance of the South, there is also a sense that somehow the growth is out of control. The endless miles of traffic jams on highways 12 to 16 lanes wide, the cloned strip malls and isolated subdivisions, the sheer inability to get around without a car, and the inadequacy of public transportation, all seem to dull the enthusiasm for three decades of growth. In Atlanta and elsewhere, there is an emerging anti-growth movement that says “enough is enough.”

What are the implications of these trends in the South? First, about 1.4 million acres a year were added to urban uses in the South during this last period for which data are available. This is substantially greater than is occurring in other regions. Second, these patterns of growth are unlikely to change. The South, both urban and rural communities, cannot ride out this wave of urban land use transitions in the hope that these pressures will subside. They won't. The population and economic projections for the South indicate continued growth. In a recent Sierra Club report on the twenty cities most affected by sprawl, Southern cities are ten of the top twenty cities listed by size: Atlanta and Fort Lauderdale in the ten largest cities (one million plus); Orlando, Austin, and West Palm Beach in the five mid-size cities (half to one

### The Issues

In rural communities, both remote and on the urban edge, concerns about growth are increasing. Although the form and degree of growth may differ from what is occurring in larger cities, rural areas are no less affected.

### The Trends

- ◆ Between 1970 and 1990, the more than 20 million acres of rural land in the country was converted to urban uses, translating into an average of 400,000 acres per year.
- ◆ In terms of percentage change, growth in the metro and nonmetro areas of the South has been the second highest of any region in the U.S. But, in terms of actual numbers, the South added more residents to the metro and nonmetro areas than any other region.
- ◆ Between 1987 and 1992, the South posted the largest increase in acres converted to development activities.

### Some Consequences

- ◆ *Farmland loss:* there remains considerable debate as to whether growth tend to absorb prime agricultural land.
- ◆ *Constraints on farming:* some believe that residential sprawl into agricultural areas makes farming more difficult because of the nuisance aspects that are brought against farmers.
- ◆ *Environmental impacts:* many are concerned about the impact of growth on wildlife habitats, wetlands, and watersheds.
- ◆ *Infrastructure and tax impacts:* studies show that sprawl may actually cost local governments more than what they are able to recover through property taxes and other revenues.
- ◆ *Property rights, individual choice, and controlling growth:* the fundamental question of whether local communities have the right to control growth, and deny individuals the right to use land as they please, remains a major source of conflict at the local level.

### Options for Managing Growth

- ◆ *Zoning:* involves the segregation of land uses so as to buffer differing types of uses from one another.
- ◆ *Setting limits:* delineates the urban growth boundary where urban services will be provided.
- ◆ *Open space zoning or clustered developments:* urban uses are allowed for only a portion of the land, while the land that remains is dedicated to conservation easements.
- ◆ *Purchase of Development Rights (PDR):* Assigns a certain number of development rights to open land.

### Implications

- ◆ The debate over urban sprawl will be fought in thousands of local communities around the South.
- ◆ Land use decisions continue to be the exclusive preserve of local governments, where citizens are most able to influence the decisions that shape their communities.
- ◆ Communities have the capacity to make choices on how their land patterns will unfold. However, do communities have the political will to make these choices?

**Table 1. Change in Nonfederal Land Use in U.S.: 1987-1992**

Area	Total Area <sup>b</sup> (in 1000's)	1987		1992 <sup>a</sup>		Change	
		Developed <sup>c</sup>	Rural	Developed	Rural	Developed	Rural
U.S.	148,4156	773,053	1,406,851	92,400	1,390,800	+19.5	-1.3
Northeast	100,778	9,611	91,166	11,900	88,800	+23.8	-2.6
Midwest	460,128	23,789	436,339	27,100	433,000	+13.9	-0.8
West	396,209	13,247	382,962	15,400	379,200	+16.3	-1.0
South	527,041	30,657	496,384	37,700	488,000	+23.0	-1.7
Alabama	31,230	1,640	29,591	2,000	29,100	+28.0	-1.6
Arkansas	29,904	1,232	28,672	1,300	28,500	+5.5	-0.6
Delaware	1,213	165	1,048	200	1,000	+21.2	-4.8
Florida	30,825	3,766	27,059	4,600	25,800	+22.1	-4.7
Georgia	34,664	2,375	32,289	3,100	31,500	+30.5	-2.4
Kentucky	24,023	1,224	22,799	1,700	22,300	+38.9	-0.8
Louisiana	26,472	1,455	25,016	1,800	24,600	+23.7	-1.7
Maryland	6,048	936	5,111	1,100	4,900	+17.5	-4.1
Mississippi	28,056	1,172	26,884	1,300	26,700	+10.9	-0.7
North Carolina	28,622	2,487	26,135	3,500	24,900	+40.7	-4.7
Oklahoma	42,431	1,716	40,715	1,900	40,500	+10.7	-0.5
South Carolina	17,785	1,422	16,363	1,900	16,100	+33.6	-1.6
Tennessee	24,759	1,669	23,090	2,200	22,600	+31.9	-2.1
Texas	163,971	7,203	156,768	8,200	155,500	+13.8	-0.8
Virginia	22,812	1,663	21,150	2,200	20,600	+32.3	-2.6
West Virginia	14,227	532	13,695	700	13,400	+31.6	-2.2

[a] For the U.S. in 1992, the total acreage in developed and rural uses does not equal the actual total acreage in the U.S. due to rounding errors.

[b] Total land area is for non-federal lands.

[c] "Developed" land includes urban and built-up areas in units of 10 acres or greater, and rural transportation.

million); and, all five (McAllen, TX; Raleigh, NC; Pensacola, FL; Daytona, FL; Little Rock, AR) of the small cities (200,000 - 500,00). There is a wave of growth coming toward the South, and while an aerial view may imply that its effects will be negligible, on the ground it will be a community-altering experience.

Third, land use transitions occur at the urban edge—whether that edge is the edge of Atlanta or Somerset, KY. These are visible and meaningful transitions to area residents. While the declines in “rural” land appear to be negligible in the context of the “big” picture of U.S. land use patterns, for local citizens, the land transitioning to urban uses is visible right here in *mycommunity*, while the thousands of remaining rural acres are often distant and unseen. Finally, because of the vigorous nature of nonmetropolitan growth in the South, it is likely that a substantial number of smaller communities are

**Table 2. Share of Regional Land Developed Uses: 1987-1992**

Region	1987	1992	Change
<b>Share of U.S. Total in Developed Uses</b>			
Northeast	12.4	12.9	+0.5
Midwest	30.8	29.4	-1.4
South	39.7	40.8	+1.2
West	17.1	16.7	-0.4
<b>Proportion of Nonfederal Land in Developed Uses</b>			
Northeast	9.5	11.8	+2.3
Midwest	5.2	5.9	+0.7
South	5.8	7.2	+1.4
West	3.3	3.9	+0.6

capturing a significant share of these land use transitions. These smaller places are less likely to have policies for managing growth and so, are more likely to be experiencing what some residents would claim to be “random” land use changes. Although in rural communities there is a strong tradition of limiting government powers, especially as they affect individual rights, land use changes are going to force citizens and local officials to address issues related to growth, shaping the nature of local politics for years to come.

### **Why Urban Growth and Land Use Issues Will Shape Local Politics in the Future**

Physical space is not a neutral canvas. Perceptual geographers argue that how we organize space, physically and conceptually, reflects our past, defines our present, and predicts our future. Everyday our decisions as to whether or how to develop a parcel of land, create a “symbolic landscape” that reflects who we are as a community and who we want to be. Land use decisions are, at their heart, decisions rooted in our values—what is important, what is desirable, what is preferred. It is our values that determine the “highest” and “best” use of land, and it is our values that determine how much we are willing to pay or forgo receiving in order to keep land in one type of use as opposed to another.

While land use conflicts are often written in large letters on the national arena, the reality is that land use issues emerge and are debated in communities and neighborhoods. Land use conflicts are fundamentally local issues, because while a proposed subdivision of a hundred houses may be a drop in the bucket within a metropolitan area, it is consequential for those who live next to the land that will be developed. In rural communities, land use changes can be more significant both socially and psychologically. For example, thirty new homes will sharply change the character of a rural community—adding about a hundred new people and altering the web of social relationships as well as the sense of the nature of the community. Precisely because rural communities are smaller places, any measurable change in the rate of growth will be consequential, influencing all aspects of community life.

Land use issues are complex, and there are no perfect answers. More than any other local issue, proposals for new residential, commercial, or industrial developments quickly become focal points for conflict, polarizing communities and often setting neighbors against neighbors. Why? Because there are different meanings attached to the land and as a result, different values associated with the land. Development proposals force us to consider: What is the “highest and best” use of land? For some, “undeveloped” land has little or no value other than its potential value once used as commercial, industrial or residential property. For others, the very concept “undeveloped” land is offensive, for it denies value (both economic and noneconomic) to land in nonurban uses; the “green space” that for many defines the essence of their community identity. The land use changes that occur are felt “on the ground,” and it is local people who give meaning to the changes. Is this good or bad for me, or for us as a community? While citizens in other regions may have already begun to address land use issues, those in the rural South will soon be forced to define the meaning of land and to determine its “highest and best” use within *their* community.

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The debate over population growth and its associated land use changes engages a diverse set of values, expectations, hopes, and dreams for our communities and our families. Whether we say the consequences are good, bad, or indifferent depends on the circumstances as well as individual and community values. The very words we use influence how we think about the issue. Urban “sprawl” is the negative term that has replaced the more positive urban “growth.” The shift in terminology from “growth” to “sprawl” is consequential, for each frames the issue in a different way. “Growth” and “sprawl” have very different meanings and elicit very different mental images of the nature of the changes that are occurring in a community.

What are the issues related to growth or sprawl that have become points of concern and points of debate? Generally, they reflect value-based judgements related to the costs or benefits of growth for individuals, families, or communities; or, value-based choices as to how to respond to the perceived consequences of growth. The next two sections highlight the complexity of these issues.

### Evaluating the Costs and Benefits of Growth

#### Farmland Loss

Does our pattern of urban growth consume valuable farmland? At a national level, the answer appears to be no. Today, 97.5 percent of America’s 2.3 billion acres are in rural uses and 2.6 percent are in urban uses, and the USDA estimates that about one million acres a year of rural land is converted to urban uses. However, the American Farmland Trust (1997) notes that between 1982 and 1992, 4.3 million acres of prime and unique farmland were converted to urban uses, nearly 50 acres every hour of every day. This is the basis for the argument that urban sprawl, precisely because it tends to absorb the prime farmland near to urban centers, is a threat to our agricultural system. But, federal estimates lead to a different conclusion. “Although conversion of rural land to urban uses is most likely to occur in metropolitan counties, where the proportion of prime cropland is higher than in non-metropolitan counties (61 percent compared to 52 percent), it is also true that only about one-quarter of all prime cropland is in metropolitan counties” [6]. So, people ask: “Is our community’s agricultural land base or our heritage of farming threatened by the growth and land use changes?”

#### Constraints on Farming

Setting aside the question of farmland loss, many argue that residential sprawl into agricultural areas makes farming itself more difficult. Urban sprawl drives up the price of farm land, closing off expansion as a business strategy for many farmers. And, while living in a rural area is desirable in the abstract, the reality of the sights, sounds, and smells of farming is quite different. Finally, many aspects of farms (e.g., equipment, livestock, ponds) constitute “attractive nuisances” in a legal sense. Thus, farmers in growing communities may face complaints, lawsuits over injuries to children or the “nuisance” aspects of customary farming practices (e.g., plowing, harvesting, spreading manure), and sometimes

livestock losses due to marauding domestic pets. As a result, many farmers in these areas simply give up the struggle to continue farming, as they find themselves priced out of the opportunity to expand their operations or tired of dealing with the “hassles” of farming on the urban edge.

But, the economics of farming have made it more difficult for farmers to make a profit or break even. Since land is a farmer’s key asset, if the land cannot grow a profit that will sustain the business and the family, the opportunity to sell off a residential lot or two can mean the difference between bankruptcy and survival. So a question communities often struggle over can be posed as follows: “Is it fair to force farmers to maintain their farms as open space when the agricultural activities on that land cannot support their businesses?”

### Environmental Impacts

There is a concern for the environmental impacts of urban land use changes, such as the loss of wildlife habitat and wetlands, or the contamination of watersheds. Urban development, for example, is defined by the National Wildlife Federation as one of the top threats to wetlands. Rural communities may be especially susceptible to environmental impacts. In growing rural communities, a substantial proportion of homes in new subdivisions have public water but use septic systems. Unfortunately, the quality of soils and appropriate maintenance are critical to the safe operation of septic systems, and there is often only minimal regulation of the siting of septic systems and no evaluation of their long-term operation. As a result, rural residential developments have been identified as a source of water contamination in many watersheds. So a question in many communities is: “Can urban land use changes occur without diminishing the quality of the local environment?”

### Infrastructure and Tax Impacts

A growing number of studies in diverse regions demonstrate that sprawl patterns of development cost local governments more than they produce in property taxes and other revenues. These studies report that for every one dollar of property tax revenues generated by an acre of farmland, on average it receives back between 21 and 48 cents in public services. On the other hand, for every one dollar in property tax revenues generated by the same land but now in low density residential use, it receives back between \$1.05 to \$1.36 in public services. The ratio of tax revenues to services received for industrial and commercial developments ranges from 1:18 to 1:44 [2].

*“In South Carolina, if sprawl continues unchecked, statewide infrastructure costs for the period 1995 to 2015 are projected to be more than \$56 billion, or \$750 per citizen every year for the next 20 years [5].”*

It can be argued that the issue is not the pattern of growth but the tax structures and fiscal management of communities. It is not the cost of developing infrastructure that is problematic but the ways in which we

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finance our communities, the level of community expectations for public services, and the willingness of local decision-makers to make difficult choices about how to finance local government. From this perspective, it is not inevitable that growth per se or the pattern of growth will be a financial burden. Citizens and local leaders make choices about what public services are essential and about acceptable methods of generating the funds to support these services. So, two questions for communities are: “How will we finance what level of public services for the new developments?” And, “is it fair to ask long-time residents to pay higher costs to subsidize public services to newcomers?”

### Property Rights, Individual Choice, and Controlling Growth

Overarching these issues, there remains the most important question: “Do we have a right to even try to control growth?” This question reflects the strong pro-growth bias within our society, the “American dream” of a single family dwelling, and the issue of private property rights.

Growth is as American as apple pie. New residents are new customers who will help “save” Main Street businesses, contribute to increases in property tax revenues, and stimulate new commercial and retail businesses, or so many believe. In rural communities and smaller cities, long left behind by the economic growth of the last half century, the new wave of urban land transitions—even if accompanied by growing pains—is seen as a solution for a host of problems.

Similarly, our culturally shared dream of the “ideal” home has powerfully shaped land use patterns. Suburban growth is a reflection of a deeply-held American value for low density, large lot residences in “country-like” settings. For half a century, millions of Americans have exercised their freedom of choice and voted with their pocketbooks for the type of urban development that the critics of sprawl denounce. What some may condemn as sprawl, millions of others define as their preferred choice for family living—the place they want to raise their children. What we have wanted and what we have found in rural residential subdivisions is the opportunity to live in low density single family homes with spacious yards in places far away from the crowded city streets.

Controlling growth, many argue, is contrary to basic American values and individual rights. On the other hand, others say there is no such thing as “good” growth. It is the very notion of growth itself — as one pundit called it the BANANA syndrome—Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything—that is contrary to the survival of everything they most value about their community. For these persons, growth is inherently unfair, shifting economic and other burdens on the many, so that a few can profit. So the critical question in any discussion of these issues is: “Can any community legitimately infringe on an individual’s right to expand their business with new clients, or an individual’s right to live where they want, or an individual’s right to use their land to their greatest benefit?”

*“The angry voters attending Fairfax County Commission meetings are not arguing over the form of development. They*

*simply want less of it because, as several told the Washington Post a few months ago, our housing values are stagnant because the county is allowing too many homes to be built” [4].*

## How Should We Manage Growth and Land Use Changes?

If a community decides that it is necessary and acceptable to manage growth, what are their options? Deciding how to manage land use changes can be as or even more controversial than deciding if to control growth, because this involves specific limitations on individual property owners’ choices in how they use their land.

### Zoning

Planning and zoning is the most common approach to managing growth. The fundamental principal of zoning is the segregation of land uses so as to buffer differing types of uses from each other. Zoning has been seen as the only way to bring order and economic efficiency to urban growth. The tremendous gain in housing values through this century has also been attributed to zoning restrictions which provide a guarantee of continuity in similarity of use. In many rural communities without zoning, large expensive residences often have single-wide trailers as their nearest neighbors, diminishing the value of the family’s most important investment.

But, many now indict zoning as a major factor producing sprawl. Land use zones typically encompass significant acreages, thus encouraging the geographic expansion of urban areas, as residential or other uses are forced to “leap over” exclusionary use zones. Since restrictions on design and construction typically come with zoning, it has been suggested that zoning actually increases development costs in those places where it is used, creating economic ghettos that are not formally recognized. Finally, since its inception, zoning has been bitterly fought as an unconstitutional “taking” of private property rights, and a blatant intrusion by government into individuals’ right to use their property for their own benefit. “No one can tell me what I can or can’t do with my land,” is the refrain that echoes through many communities struggling with this issue. So a critical question is: “Should we choose zoning as a means of managing land use changes?”

*One critic of urban sprawl argues: “If you want to make your communities better, begin at once by throwing out your zoning laws. Get rid of them. Throw them away. Don’t revise them. Set them on fire if possible and make a public ceremony of it [9].”*

### Setting Limits

An urban growth boundary defines the area within which urban services (e.g., public water, public sewers, public parks) will be provided, while outside the boundary, these services will not be made available or will be available at a substantial premium to cover the costs of delivering them to more dispersed populations. Both big cities and small towns use urban growth boundaries as a method of managing urban sprawl. Indeed, Tennessee passed legislation in 1998 requiring cities and counties

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to engage in growth planning, including establishing urban growth boundaries. Urban growth boundaries encourage more compact development and can reduce the development pressures on farm lands and open lands near the urban center. On the other hand, urban growth boundaries raise the specter of unequal burdens on farmers because if your land falls within the boundary you will gain a windfall profit from the artificially stimulated development value of your land, but if you fall outside the boundary, you may be excluded from the development option. So a question to be answered is: “Should we identify an urban growth boundary even if it means we create economic winners and losers in our community?”

#### “Open Space Zoning” or “Clustered Developments”

These approaches are typically found on the urban edge and permit the same amount of urban use as would occur in a conventional development. But urban uses can only be on a portion of the land, with the remaining land permanently reserved through conservation easements for agricultural use, woodlands, wetlands, or simply open space. An aerial view of a clustered development looks like a traditional rural hamlet—residential and other uses with a clear boundary through buffering between the urban and rural uses of the land.

Because the number of residential units that can be developed on a particular parcel of land remains unchanged, cluster developments face less opposition over the question of economic losses to the land owner. Moreover, since the reserved land can still be used for agricultural purposes by the original owner or rented to another farmer, those who are concerned about the loss of prime agricultural land feel this is a more acceptable pattern of development. But not all the remaining land can be or is retained in agriculture, so figuring out who will maintain the open space in what condition becomes a critical issue for local governments and home owners. In addition, clustered developments do little to reduce the public services costs of sprawl since residences continue to be scattered around the rural portions of a community. So the question is: “Should we save some farmland even if it means paying higher costs to provide public services to these developments?”

#### Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)

This is a tool for preserving open space that is also attracting national attention. In communities with zoning, open land is assumed to have a certain number of development rights attached to it, that is, the right to develop a given number of residential lots based on the local zoning ordinances. To encourage land owners to preserve farmland and/or open space, they can “sell” their development rights to someone else who then uses these to increase the density permitted on another parcel of land, generally one closer to the urban center. In some cases, the purchaser is a private developer, but more commonly, the purchaser is a government or a conservation nonprofit corporation. While millions of public dollars have been spent on the purchase of development rights, the impact of these programs tends to be limited by the depth of the public pocketbook. Furthermore, if development rights are transferred to a “receiving” area, homeowners in the receiving area often

protest higher density development in fear of its effects on *their* land values. So a question is: “Do we compensate farmers for not developing their land at public cost and at the risk of angering town residents with higher density development near them?”

## Summary

While many rural communities in the South are now enjoying the fulfillment of a long-standing desire to be growing communities, there is also a sense that maybe we have gotten more than we wanted. The South is going to continue to experience significant population growth and the inevitable land use changes that accompany it. In one sense, Southern communities are in an enviable position. Because many are in the initial stages of growth, there are opportunities to shape how it occurs and how it affects citizens, local businesses, agriculture, and the environment. Local leaders and citizens have an opportunity to evaluate patterns of development and management tools elsewhere and to then make choices about what they want to happen in their communities.

In the end, the debate over urban sprawl will be fought in thousands of local communities around the South. Land use decisions continue to be the exclusive preserve of local governments, where citizens are most able to influence the decisions that shape their communities. State initiatives may set broad parameters of expectations—a community must have a land use plan or a land use plan must contain certain components or be based on certain principles—but the “devil is in the details,” and this is particularly true of land use changes.

Land use issues strike to the heart of how residents define the nature of their community; the place they want to live and raise a family. Local governments are discovering that land use change proposals bring out hundreds of people who have never before attended a public meeting. The size of our communities, the visual landscape we see every day, the level of property taxes we pay for what kinds of community services, and the range of economic opportunities in a community, are fundamental concerns. Clearly, there is a sense that communities have the capacity to make choices in how their land use patterns will unfold. But two questions will drive what happens: “Do communities have the political will to make these choices?” And, “are citizens and local leaders willing to explore the underlying values and expectations related to growth, development and land use that will enable them to find common ground for decision-making?” How citizens and local governments come to deal with growth pressures will define the very essence of community life in the South for decades to come.

## Endnotes

[a] For the purpose of this paper, the South includes Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

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“Land use issues strike to the heart of how residents define the nature of their community; the place they want to live and raise a family.”

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