



The MPC Chronicle

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Planning Commissioner / ZBA Training and Networking

The Metropolitan Planning Commission is hosting our Annual Winter Workshop on Thursday, February 24, at 6:45 p.m. The breakout sessions include a variety of topics that are of interest to new and experienced planning commissioners and board of Zoning Appeals members alike. The event will be held at the County Administration Building at 200 Grand River Avenue. Registration begins at 6:30 and the program starts at 6:45 pm sharp. This workshop is a tremendous value for our local partners at \$7 for early registrations and \$10 after February 22. The following concurrent sessions will be available:

Site Planning 101

Has your community ever struggled over a site plan? Do you receive them so infrequently that you need to brush up on your skills? Have you every ended up with a development that is totally different from what you thought had been approved? Well if you answered yes to any of these questions, then you definitely want to sign up for a brand new program we are offering. The Site Plan Review session is a two-hour interactive, hands-on session developed by Birchler-Arroyo Associates in conjunction with the Michigan Society of Planning. It is our first hands-on session and should be “in site”ful. Mrs. Heidi Hannan, Planner with Birchler-Arroyo, will be leading the class. Come prepared to roll up your sleeves and have fun!

Roles and Responsibilities of Planning Commissioners, Part II

Since the Winter Workshop is on a Thursday night, you will also have an opportunity to attend one of the Citizen Planner classes meeting that night. The seven week Citizen Planner program which begins on February 3, will be presenting the program entitled ‘Roles and Responsibilities of Planning Commissioners, Part II.’ If you would like to gain an overview of zoning, site plans, or the ZBA, this may be the class for you. It will run for the entire evening and is targeted toward new planning commissioners.

Zoning Board of Appeals, 101

How do you know when to grant a variance? Who has the authority to interpret the Zoning Ordinance? In some situations, the Zoning Board of Appeals is a hotter seat than any Planning Commissions.’ Find out the basics on making sound decisions for your Board and your constituents. Most importantly, keep your community safe from costly litigation.

**Annual
Winter
Workshop**

**Thursday
February 24th**

**6:45 p.m. To
9:00 p.m.**

**St. Clair County
Administration
Building**

Message from

We have a few new faces at the Planning Commission. Last month Mr. Wallace Evans (County Commissioner from District 6) was appointed as the Board of Commissioners' representative to the Metropolitan Planning Commission.

In addition to Mr. Evans, two new planners have been added to the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) staff. During the last few months of 2004 two vacancies were filled. Mr. David Stuck is the new Planner II, and Mr. Mike Latuszek the new Planner I. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find a short biography on each of them. If you run into either during any of our upcoming meetings or training sessions, stop and welcome them to the community!

This year the planning community's year begins much as it has in the past; with lots of training opportunities. On February 3, Michigan State University Extension Service's Citizen Planner program will return. Training will run through mid-March. This program was last offered in 2003 and was attended by well over 70 participants. If you are interested in attending give our office a call. Even if you call after the 3rd of February we can make arrangements to get you into some of the other classes scheduled to run throughout the late winter and into early spring.

Also in February the MPC's annually winter training workshop will be held. On Thursday evening, February 24, from 6:45 through 9 p.m., the County Administration Building will be filled with planning commissioners, ZBA members, elected officials, and interested citizens all taking advantage of this very popular program. If you haven't already received a brochure advertising the program, visit our website or give us a call and one will be sent out to you right away.

This issue of the Chronicle is packed with what we hope is useful information. Make sure you take a moment to read the update on a new piece of planning legislation just signed by the Governor which permits Contract Zoning. This is a powerful tool for communities but can be just as powerful for a developer. Don't stop learning about the law with this article. A lot has already been written about contract zoning, and if your community is going to use this tool, you have

got to be just as knowledgeable as the party sitting on the other side of the table (and believe me, they will know what they are doing!). If you want more information give us a call and ask for David Struck.

Under the GIS portion of the Chronicle you will find a short article on a new tool that the County has launched on the Internet. This new County site enables users to view and print 2000 aerial photos, property lines, roads, and other information. It is very easy to use and designed to download information you request quite fast. If you look at it and have some thoughts, give us a call with your reaction and comments.

Well the editor tells me I am running out of space so I had better end this now! Enjoy this issue. I believe you will find it particularly informative.

- Bill Kauffman, bkauffman@stclaircounty.org

A Planners Dictionary

Occasionally, while reading a technical article you may run across an unfamiliar term specific to a specialty or profession.

In the planning field, "A Planners Dictionary" published by the American Planning Association can be an invaluable resource. Some terms will have several citations, each from a different source. Septage has three, two are brief. The third citation originated in Concord, North Carolina and was ten times longer than either presented below. All three can be found on page 350 of the edition released in April 2004

septage - The solid and liquid wastes removed from private sewage disposal systems. (*Illinois Department of Public Health*)

or

Septage - Waste, refuse effluent, sludge, and any other materials from septic tanks, cesspools, and any other similar facilities...(*Bethel, Maine*)

-editor

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY PLANNING

Safe Routes To School Campaign

The St Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission has teamed up with over 50 organizations statewide as part of Michigan's Safe Routes to School campaign. Safe Routes to School is a national movement to make it safe, convenient and fun for children to bicycle and walk to school. When routes are safe, walking or biking to and from school is an easy way to get the regular physical activity children need to succeed.

Here are ten reasons why kids should be encouraged to walk or bike to school:

1. **They'll Be Healthier:** Physically active kids have fewer chronic health problems and report lower levels of smoking and alcohol consumption. Walking and biking to school is a great way to help your child be more physically active.
2. **It's Educational:** Because there's so much to see, smell, touch, think and talk about children start learning as soon as they leave home.
3. **They'll Perform Better:** Children that are more fit have higher levels of achievement, especially in math. Their creativity and problem-solving ability increases as well.
4. **It's Fun:** Research shows it is children's preferred method of getting to school. There's so much to see, smell, touch, think, and talk about.
5. **They'll Build Relationships:** Meeting friends to walk together is a motivator to get up and get moving.
6. **It's Economical:** Fewer car trips mean lower gasoline bills, a significant factor with today's higher prices.
7. **They'll Concentrate Better:** Physically active kids have improved mood and concentration. That means they have fewer discipline problems.
8. **It's Non-polluting:** Walking and biking do not result in any harmful emissions. In addition, walkers and bicyclists breathe less pollution than people inside an idling or slow moving car.
9. **It's Less Stressful:** When you don't have to coordinate drop-off and pick-up schedules you'll find your day is much less stressful. As your child gains independence you'll spend less time driving them places and have more time for activities of your choice.
10. **They'll Be Independent:** Physically active kids have a stronger self-image and more self-confidence. Kids who show they are capable of walking to school on their own are more likely to get permission to do other things on their own – e.g., walk to the ice rink, or a friend's house.

We are proud to be part of the statewide coalition leading this effort. For more information on Safe Routes to School, contact the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports at (517) 347-7891, or visit the Michigan Safe Routes to School web site at www.saferoutesmichigan.org, or contact:

Douglas Plachcinski, AICP, Senior Planner
at (810) 989-6950
or dplachcinski@stclaircounty.org.



Legislative Update: Contract Zoning

Governor Granholm recently signed into law three bills that authorize cities, villages and townships to consider contract zoning proposals, thus amending all three zoning enabling acts in Michigan. The bills are known as Public Acts 577, 578, and 579 of 2004. Contract zoning is a practice that allows a property owner to voluntarily enter into a written agreement with a local government to rezone certain areas of land, on the condition that the limitations or restrictions set by the municipality for those parcels are accepted by the owner. The conditions would not necessarily be applied to other similarly zoned parcels.

Negotiated agreements are not new to Michigan. For many years now, the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process has involved negotiation between planners and developers, resulting in a “contract” that outlines what each party can and cannot do. The PUD is a tool that is meant to offer flexibility to the rigid nature of zoning. Special land use approvals and site plan reviews have also involved development agreements. The difference between those agreements and contract zoning is that contract zoning will allow for a wider range of conditions, including off-site improvements.

Other states that currently authorize contract zoning include Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, and Washington.

Michigan Land Use Leadership Council (LULC): In “[Michigan’s Land, Michigan’s Future](#),” the final report of the LULC, the council supports and recommends allowing contract zoning. In Chapter 6: *Planning and Development Recommendations*, the LULC provides a list of new tools for local governments that should be authorized. One of the recommended tools is to allow aesthetic or design-oriented contract zoning if mutually agreed to by the developer and local government. The LULC further recommends enabling local governments to enter into voluntary development agreements for on- and/or off-site improvements in return for long-term guarantees on development approval. These recommendations are intended to provide for more certainty of outcomes for all involved (local governments, developers, citizens, etc.) and to eliminate regulatory barriers that detract from state

land use goals.

Critics of Contract Zoning:

Critics contend contract zoning is invalid because it is arbitrary spot zoning and an illegal bargaining away of the zoning power, and because it violates the statutory provision that requires uniform land use regulations within zoning districts. Others feel contract zoning represents a complete failure of the planning process because it is seen as preferential treatment for developers and undercuts the credibility of planning in a major way. Many planners are of the opinion that local governments can accomplish all of the same goals in a well-designed planning process that has broad citizen support.

Arguments for Contract Zoning:

Contract zoning advocates defend it as an appropriate zoning technique that tailors land development to its environment and assures its compatibility with adjacent land uses. Local planners would be able to rezone a property, such as an abandoned warehouse, subject to specific required conditions in order to maintain high quality standards.

Proponents of contract zoning see development agreements as a mechanism that can minimize the risks inherent in the project approval process. In the absence of a development agreement, the community is at risk of getting an undesirable development. Improvements promised by a developer, but not required by ordinance, could be omitted from a project. The development agreement, or signed contract, strengthens a local government’s enforcement capabilities.

Contract Zoning and the Master Plan:

One of the main concerns that planners have with contract zoning is that it undermines the master plan and the general police powers of a local government. However, contract zoning can be executed in a manner that is consistent with the goals and objectives of the master plan. The key is smart negotiation on behalf of the local government. The negotiating team for the community must include someone with a deep knowledge of the master plan. Furthermore, the language in the ordinance that authorizes contract zoning must

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Replacement Data Book Nears Completion

Our current edition of the St. Clair County Data Book was released in 1998. For the past year and a half, an effort has been undertaken to release a more current edition, one that takes full advantage of the Decennial Census conducted in 2000. Originally intended for

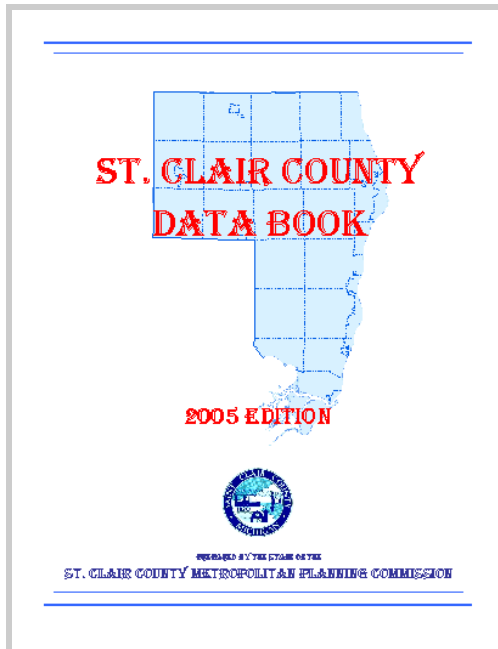
release in 2004, we anticipate that the new edition will be available sometime in February, 2005.

Whereas the 1998 edition contained; 28 pages, 21 tables, 3 maps and 3 graphs, the replacement edition will be almost twice as large and include a minimum of 46 tables, 7 maps, 22 graphs and 11 charts.

Admittedly the scope on this effort is much broader than its predecessor and far exceeds the original intent. This is due partly to the abundance of data available via governmental websites now, versus eight years ago, but also primarily due to myself and the experience I bring to this task.

Most of my professional career has been spent in the private sector. Usually, I'm the person who approaches a governmental entity, such as the Metropolitan Planning Commission, seeking the very demographic data that I am now in the process of compiling and analyzing. From this unique perspective I am

aware of the demographic statistics and variables I utilized in my past analyses, as well as those utilized by my fellow consultants and staff members of the firms at which I was employed.



The 2005 edition of the Data Book is intended as a “living” document. As new data is released, efforts will be made to update the appropriate entries as well as the source information accompanying each analysis.

In the past, once an edition was released, a print run of several hundred would be arranged. The production of a replacement, would be initiated as either the supply became exhausted or the data became too obsolete.

The availability of desk top publishing, in-house printing and binding allows for smaller print

runs, less on-site storage requirements and the presentation of more current data. While the cover will reflect the year of the edition, the title page will reflect that actual date a particular copy was printed. The price of the new publication has yet to be determined.

-James Vaughn, jvaughn@stclaircounty.org

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clearly point to the master plan as the basis for decision-making. After all, most zoning enabling acts around the country call for zoning to be based on a comprehensive plan. The following is sample language from Okanagon County, Washington:

17.37.070 Contract Zoning - *To the extent permitted by law, the county may enter into an agreement with the applicant for, or the beneficiary of, a proposed amendment action, executed concomitantly with and as consideration for approval of the amendment, for the purposes of mitigating*

public burdens caused by the proposed use and to maintain harmony of the proposed use with the Comprehensive Plan.

The agreement must be constructed so that the community does not give up its ability to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. If the spirit and intent of the ordinance can be maintained, the appropriate mitigation can be attained, and the goals of the master plan achieved, both the community and the developer can be satisfied with the resulting development.

-Dave Struck, dstruck@stclaircounty.org

An Inside Look at Transportation Planning

BACKGROUND

Transportation helps shape an area's economic health and quality of life. Not only does the transportation system provide for the mobility of people and goods, it also influences patterns of growth and economic activity by providing access to land. Furthermore, the performance of this system affects such public policy concerns as air quality, environmental resource consumption, social equity, economic development, safety, and security.

The transportation planning process is more than merely listing highway and transit capital investments; it requires developing strategies for operating, managing, maintaining, and financing an area's transportation system in such a way as to advance its long-term goals. Transportation planning provides the information, tools, and public input needed for improving transportation system performance and should reflect the community's vision for its future.

PROJECT FUNDING

The funding for transportation plans and projects comes from a variety of sources including the federal government, state governments, special authorities, assessment districts, local government contributions, impact fees, and tolls. However, in most metropolitan areas, federal funding, transferred first to the state to be distributed to metropolitan areas, is the primary funding source for plans and projects.

A metropolitan area's transportation system represents a massive investment in transportation facilities, and the capital assets used to operate and maintain that system. Use, as well as wear and tear from the environment (such as heaving from freezing and thawing), will deteriorate transportation infrastructure over time.

Therefore, one of the main goals of transportation agencies is preservation – to keep the infrastructure in operating condition. If roads, bridges, airports, transit facilities, ports, bicycle and pedestrian paths, etc. are not maintained, people and goods will not move as easily, resulting in reduced quality of life and diminished economic activity.

THINK SAFETY

Safety is one of the most important goals in the operation of the transportation system. Transportation planning takes safety considerations into account by identifying high-accident locations and assigning them high priority for improvements.

Over the past three decades, transportation fatality rates have declined in relationship to system usage, due in large part to safer cars, tougher police enforcement, and increasing use of seat belts, air bags, and child safety seats. However, in many crash categories, the actual number of crashes has increased because there are more people using the transportation system. Integrating safety into the transportation planning process requires local coordination with transit authorities, state highway and motor carrier safety agencies.

LAND USE and the ECONOMY

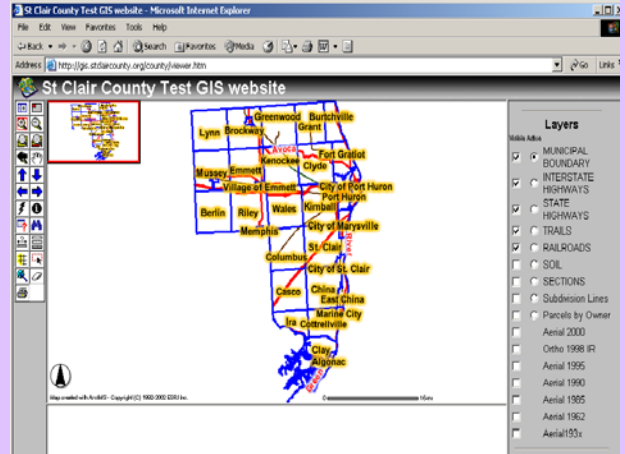
Transportation planners must make every effort to consider the comprehensive land use plans of the region and local communities, and maintain a constructive line of communication with land use officials.

Activities meant to stimulate economic development can affect the transportation network and adjacent parcels of land in terms of zoning. Therefore, it is important to consider the effects of development on the quality of life for residents, the transportation network, and the regional economy as a whole. Considerable attention is devoted to the end result of proposed transportation improvements and includes factors such as traffic noise, improved mobility, and increased jobs.

TECHNOLOGY

Better planning tools are increasingly available to help Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's) understand the impact of economic development decisions on the transportation network and the natural environment. Examples of planning tools include: technology such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to help illustrate how transportation facilities can affect a region or community; travel demand and emission models which help show how transportation can affect air

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quality; and transportation models that include land use considerations. These models are simulations of the "real world" that can be used to show the impact of changes in a specific area, or in this case, on a transportation system (such as adding a new road or transit line, or increases in population or employment).

Transportation model results are only as good as the data that go into them, and the results of models are still, at best, only estimates. They cannot provide a definitive picture of what will happen in the future. Much like economic projections, transportation model forecasts are greatly affected by the long-term economic health and attractiveness of the region, by population changes, and by the individual behavior of each person using the transportation system, which no one can accurately predict.

MODELING WITH TransCAD

Transportation planning in St. Clair County presents its own unique challenges and possibilities. To assist the Commission in responding to these issues, the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission staff employs the use of various purpose specific planning tools, one of which is the TransCAD transportation software package.

TransCAD is a geographic information system (GIS) designed specifically for use by transportation planning professionals to store, display, manage, and analyze transportation data. With this software, we can create and customize maps, build and maintain geographic data sets, and perform many different types of spatial analysis. Also, because they have similar formats, TransCAD integrates well with other GIS sys-

tems and can easily utilize data from virtually all major GIS and CAD software packages.

There are many reasons why it is valuable to have a GIS as part of a travel demand-forecasting package; first, GIS makes it possible for planning models to be much more accurate; and second, the entire modeling process becomes much more efficient. Data preparation is simplified, and visualization tools catch errors before they create modeling problems. As a result, TransCAD requires less staff time to implement and maintain an effective travel demand model.

CLOSING

Transportation's basic purpose is moving people and goods from one place to another, but its effect on a community goes well beyond this. An efficient transportation system can improve the economy, shape development patterns, and influence the natural environment and quality of life.

As the agency responsible for coordinating the regional transportation planning process, the MPO must actively involve all affected parties in an open, cooperative, and collaborative process that provides meaningful opportunities to influence transportation decisions. Transportation has a profound influence on the lives of people. Therefore, transportation planners must consider fully the social, economic, and environmental consequences of their actions, and assure the public that transportation programs support local land use plans and community values.

Text derived from the FHA Briefing Notebook 2004, and from the Caliper Corporation, Newton, MA.

-Michael Latuszek, mlatuszek@stclaircounty.org

Keeping Septage Out of Our Waterways

St. Clair County residents have identified clean water as one of their top quality of life issues for our region. However, increased populations and aging septic systems – compounded by combined sewer and sanitary sewer overflows and stormwater runoff – have negatively impacted the water quality of the St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair. If this pollution is not corrected, it will continue to harm wildlife, the environment, and impede recreational activities. In a report developed by Macomb and St. Clair counties, “*Cleaning up Lake St. Clair: the need for septage disposal*,” several concerns surrounding septic-tank waste (septage) disposal were identified:

- Potential health and environmental impacts of applying septage on the surface at agricultural sites,
- Winter land application problems, including ponding of septage, runoff, and contamination of surface waters, and
- Illegal dumping.

Working together, officials from different County departments realized that projects that they were independently working on could be brought together for a common gain. While working to address increasing concerns associated with septage disposal, Health, Planning and Drain Commissioner staff, realized their ‘problem’ could actually benefit a project under devel-

opment at Smiths Creek Landfill.

To improve the water quality of our region, St. Clair County is currently working on a pilot project to address the increasing need for safe and innovative ways to dispose of septage that is pumped from on-site disposal systems. Plans are underway to incorporate septage waste from septic haulers into an innovative stormwater recirculation system that is being built at Smiths Creek Landfill. With this new approach for handling the disposal of septage, rainwater and septic waste will be piped into the landfill allowing for the liquids to filter through. These extra liquids when recirculated will accelerate the decomposition of garbage in the landfill. “By accelerating the rate at which garbage breaks down, we can extend the life of the landfill,” said Smiths Creek Landfill Director, Larry O’Keefe.

A side benefit of this process is the increased amount of methane that may be generated when the decomposition of garbage is accelerated. St. Clair County has already built a network of pipes at Smiths Creek Landfill which work together to vacuum out the methane that is generated. The methane gas which is collected can then either be transformed into electricity on site or piped to other locations or businesses in the county for alternative energy production.

-Geoff Donaldson, gdonaldson@stclaircounty.org

Elimination of Sewage Sources

In 2002, the St. Clair County Health Department and St. Clair County Drain Office received grants and contributed County funds totaling approximately \$465,000 to look for illicit discharges to waterways in the Anchor Bay and Pine River watersheds. Examples of illicit discharges are failing septic systems, illegal dumping of oil or grass clippings, washing machine and dish washing water discharges, and commercial or industrial discharges. In the spring of 2002 teams of inspectors began walking all waterways looking for illicit discharges. They use a Geographical Information Positioning System and digital camera to mark the location and photograph each outfall (pipe) they find that leads to a natural waterway, drain or ditch. If

there is flow coming out of the outfall they test the water for indications of problems. Once an illicit discharge is confirmed notification to the owner of their responsibility to fix the discharge is begun. Results of the Health Department and Drain Office grants are as follows:

- Surveyed 1,067 miles of streams, shoreline and road ditches.
- Located 3,615 outfalls in 17 communities
- Identified 295 failing onsite sewage disposal systems.
- Worked with homeowners to correct 49% of

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St. Clair County Agricultural Preservation Board – One Farmer’s Perspective

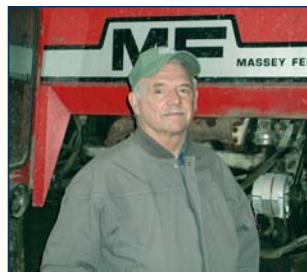
St. Clair County is growing and new development is displacing valuable agricultural land and natural open spaces. Sprawl is impacting communities across the United States. In neighboring counties like Macomb and Oakland, communities are fully entrenched in combating sprawl. Macomb County has lost nearly 87,000 acres of farmland and nearly 1,400 farms over the last 40 years. As Metro Detroit continues its expansion outward to the fringes, vast expanses of farmland are being sold off, split up and transformed into sprawling subdivisions.

As homeowners continue to strive toward achieving the “American Dream,” development densities continue to decline and families are settling on larger and larger lots. This trend, according to Chuck Kwasnik, is hurting the fabric of farming that has been so vital to St. Clair County throughout its history. *“It’s a shame to see things go. We need to use our land resources wisely. Newer homes are wasting valuable land – land that we will never be able to get back,”* says Kwasnik, a farmer in Kenockee Township and a member of the St. Clair County Agricultural Preservation Board.

The St. Clair County Agricultural Preservation Board, formally established on June 9, 2004, is dedicated to developing innovative procedures for preserving farmland in St. Clair County. Creation of a formal board positioned the county to take advantage of state agricultural preservation funds for local farmland preservation programs.

Kwasnik has been involved with the Agricultural Pres-

ervation Board since its inception. In 2000 he was part of the original Farmland and Open Space Initiative (FOSI) that worked with consultants in the development of a countywide Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program and the Farmland Preservation Ordinance that was adopted in March 2004. He participates in the Agricultural Preservation Board because he feels it is important to educate landowners in the county and work toward preserving a network for farming to be successful. *“Farmers cannot farm alone and farms cannot be ‘islands.’ Farmers need an established agricultural infrastructure and the agriculture community needs a social network. Farmers rely on that network and the resources of the neighborhood, such as machinery and the sharing of ideas, in order to thrive.”*



Chuck Kwasnik

According to Kwasnik, the biggest impact the Agricultural Preservation Board can have on the community is educating community leaders on the importance of preserving farmland and making smart land use decisions. *“With interest and education will come the desire to make something happen. We must reach landowners to drive change and we need the principles of smart growth,”* says Kwasnik. In his mind, we must do something now and implement a successful PDR program, or valuable farmland will be lost forever. *“In ten years, it will be a slam dunk... good land will be consumed and it will be too late to do anything about it.”* Fortunately for St. Clair County, the Agricultural Preservation Board will be on the front lines, securing funding resources and educating our local officials to help drive that change.

-Dave Struck, dstruck@stclaircounty.org

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- the systems (to date).
- Once all systems are corrected, 14.1 million gallons of untreated sewage containing 4,000 lbs nitrogen, 800 lbs phosphorus and various other pollutants will be eliminated from surface waters annually.
- Identified several clustered areas with illicit connections that will require regional solutions

Both offices continue to work with homeowners to correct failures discovered to date and have received additional 2004 grants to continue this work in the rest of the county. Investigations have already begun in the Lake Huron Direct Drainage Watershed and will continue in the Black River Watershed this spring and summer.

-Kristen O’Reilly, koreilly@stclaircounty.org

Hazard Mitigation Planning Underway in St. Clair County

St. Clair County communities are subject to a wide range of natural and technological hazards, including: floods, winter storms, hazardous material spills, transportation disruptions, invasive species, and many others. The impacts of major disasters on communities can be devastating: the total damages, economic losses, casualties, disruption, hardships and suffering are often far greater than the physical damages alone. Completely eliminating the risk of future hazard events is neither technologically possible nor economically feasible. However, considerably reducing the negative impacts of future hazard events is achievable with the development and implementation of an effective Hazard Mitigation Plan.

The Hazard Mitigation Plan represents the county's commitment to reducing risks from hazard events and serves as a framework for allocating resources and making decisions to minimize the effects of hazards. The county began the planning process with a "kick-off" meeting in October 2004. A hazard mitigation steering committee was formed to facilitate the project.



The committee is comprised of a diverse group of individuals, including representatives from local fire departments, township and city managers, and representatives from the county's Road Commission, Health Department, Office of Emergency Management, and the Metropolitan Planning Commission.

The Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) is funded through the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, which was amended in 2000, requiring communities to have a Hazard Mitigation Plan in place as a condition to receiving funds. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) began providing funds to communities in 2002 for hazard mitigation planning. Ultimately, the adoption of the Hazard Mitigation Plan makes FEMA funds accessible to local agencies for hazard mitigation projects.

There are four key concepts when it comes to mitigation planning: hazards, exposure, risk, and mitigation. **Hazards** are natural or technological events that could cause potential damages, losses or casualties (e.g. floods, tornadoes, wildfires, public health emergen-

cies, etc). **Exposure** pertains to the extent and vulnerability of the built environment, such as utility lines or buildings, susceptible to one or more hazard events. **Risk** is the threat to the built environment or to populations - the potential for damages, losses and casualties resulting from hazards. **Mitigation** is an effort intended to reduce the risk due to hazards. Mitigation projects may be construction projects that physically reduce risk or they may be planning projects that "soften" the negative impacts of hazard events.

Developing and adopting the Hazard Mitigation Plan is critical to the safety of county residents, as it will allow decision makers in numerous county departments to know the potential risk of hazard events occurring. Understanding where risks are highest for particular hazards can help county agencies and local governments integrate capital improvement projects and operational programs that reduce potential damage. The Plan will include a community profile, profiles of potential hazards, a vulnerability assessment, mitigation goals and objectives, and will be incorporated into existing planning mechanisms, such as the County Master Plan.

The community profile identifies information that is pertinent to hazard mitigation, such as the county's present land use and development patterns, geography and climate, transportation network, demographic information, housing and economic characteristics, and key public facilities. The community profile serves as the basis for determining hazard exposure.

The vulnerability assessment entails a determination of the county's vulnerability to the identified potential hazards and is dependent upon a thorough community profile since it will compare areas where hazards overlap with people and important public facilities. The community profile and vulnerability assessment, coupled with input from citizens and other pertinent stakeholders, will lead to the formulation of mitigation goals and objectives.

There will be numerous opportunities for public participation in the planning process. A series of public

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Schools Project

Staff of the Metropolitan Planning Commission has been involved in an emergency-planning project with the Office of Emergency Management. The Schools Project, designed for emergency planning, began with grant money in the spring of 2004, and will conclude in March 2005. The Planning Commission's involvement is with the GIS portion of the project.

The project's intention is to map each public school building (59 total) in St. Clair County, down to each classroom. The purpose of the project is for emergency personnel to have more information available to them in case an emergency situation arises. The concept was piloted a few years ago in Yale Public Schools.

Blueprints of each school were gathered, then converted and rectified to an aerial image in the GIS. The buildings were then digitized, creating polygons for each classroom. This allows data to be sorted by building or classroom. Pictures were taken at each school, and are linked to the database at the location they were taken. The ability to link other documents to a location in a school exists within the project. For instance, in the future, MSDS sheets (Material Safety Data Sheet) could be linked to hazardous chemicals on site in a school, allowing emergency personnel to have information about each chemical on site. Other types of media, such as video clips of halls or special-use rooms, can also be linked within the project.

When the project is finished, first responders will have access to the data through a secure website, or if access to the Internet is not available, a compact disc. The sensitivity of the data cannot be understated, but the benefit to first responders is immeasurable.

-Lori Eschenburg, leschenburg@stclaircounty.org

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open house forums are planned for early spring 2005. For further information on the St. Clair County Hazard Mitigation Plan, contact the author.

-Dave Struck, dstruck@stclaircounty.org

Please Welcome Dave and...



David Struck joined the Metropolitan Planning Commission on November 1st as the new Planner II. Previously, David was an Associate Planner for Planning & Zoning Center, Inc. in Lansing, where he served as a consultant to local communities on land use and zoning issues. David has experience in writing and updating comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances, as well as in conducting planning

workshops and visioning town meetings with local planning commissions and citizen planning groups. In addition, he conducted research and authored feature and supplemental articles for the *Planning & Zoning News*, a monthly magazine focusing on statewide planning issues.

Except for the time he spent away at college, David has lived in Sterling Heights his entire life. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Administration from Grand Valley State University and a Master of Urban and Regional Planning (M.U.R.P) degree from Michigan State University. In his spare time, David enjoys watching college and pro sports and spending time with friends and family. He and his fiancée Courtney, who is a high school chemistry teacher in the Utica Community Schools, will be married in July.

...Mike to our Staff



Michael Latuszek joined the Metropolitan Planning Commission staff on November 29th as the new Planner I, and will initially focus on transportation planning.

Prior to joining the MPC, Michael was an Assistant Planner with the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians in Harbor Springs, Michigan. His responsibilities involved developing cultural and community recreation facilities, managing federal road construction projects, and performing demographics research for comprehensive planning. He is experienced in creating maps through the use of GIS/GPS, and is certified to perform environmental site assessments.

Michael is a native of Midland and a veteran of the United States Navy, serving aboard two aircraft carriers and with a construction battalion. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Geography from Central Michigan University with coursework in land use planning, cartography, and remote sensing. His outside interests include playing hockey and lacrosse, reading, and spending time with family and friends.



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A Historical Glimpse.....

By Lori Eschenburg

Tara's Hall - The Village that Disappeared

Patrick Kennedy founded the Irish Catholic settlement of Tara's Hall on the Pine River around 1854. The name was derived from Thomas Moore's lyric "The harp that once through Tara's halls the soul of music shed, now hangs as mute on Tara's walls as if that soul were fled." At its height, the village had a Post Office, three stores, a church, a school, several stove and shingle manufacturers and a population of 200 people.

Tara's Hall was located in section 24 of Emmett Township, but nothing remains where this bustling hamlet once stood. How does one know that the village even existed? Metropolitan Planning Commission staff found two text references to Tara's Hall, and its geographical location documented on an 1859 antique wall map.

One reference described Tara's Hall as 'A small post village of St. Clair County, pleasantly situated on Pine River, 25 miles by stage from St. Clair, 50 from Detroit.'

The above description of the village references at least nine buildings that housed business or government endeavors. How many dwellings would house 200 people in the late 19th century? The village would have to be at least several blocks long, maybe the size of today's settlement of Avoca. What caused Tara's Hall to disappear from the landscape?

It seems that Thomas Moore's lyric was prophetic.

The St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission holds monthly meetings on the third Wednesday of every month at 4:00 p.m., in the County Administration Building located at 200 Grand River, in Port Huron, Michigan

Update your address books. Information inquiries should be sent to:

scmpc@stclaircounty.org