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News Release

From: Travel, Tourism & Recreation Resource Center; and
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“Michigan’s Land Use Professionals Identify Impediments to Smart Growth According to New Research”

East Lansing, MI, January 27. The professionals responsible for planning and designing new development projects in Michigan overwhelmingly agree that while smart growth principles should be implemented in Michigan, existing laws, policy and cultural ideals are major impediments, according to research conducted by Michigan State University and Planning & Zoning Center, Inc.

Over 2,000 land development professionals in six categories—architects, attorneys, civil engineers, landscape architects, planners and surveyors—were surveyed last spring about the smart growth principles outlined by the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council (August 2003), impediments to implementing these principles, and ways to overcome those impediments.

Among the most commonly identified impediments to smart growth were that:

- Sprawl has been institutionalized, with policies, subsidies and laws that promote a widely-marketed cultural mindset for low-density development that only recently has been recognized as promoting an unsustainable pattern of development.
- Zoning standards developed in response to problems of an earlier time in America’s history are still being used today, with the result of continued separation of land uses and low density, sprawling patterns of growth.
- Many individuals and communities do not accept higher density development due to the widely promoted and accepted ideals of spaciousness and separation from less desirable people.
- Out-migration and decreased investment leads to urban decline, and a reduced ability of cities, and now older suburbs, to attract development.

- Mobility – the ability to go anywhere anytime by auto in comfort and privacy – is more important to people than the cost and time expenditures associated with having cars, and the dissolution of traditional forms of community.
- It is often more cost-effective for developers to build in new suburban and rural areas, and in low-density, sprawling patterns that conform to local zoning, than to develop at higher densities or in cities.
- Urban schools are often perceived as being of poor quality, leading to reluctance to invest in urban development.

When asked to rate the potential effectiveness of a series of steps that might be taken to help overcome the impediments to smart growth identified above, education of local officials and of developers emerged as two of the most highly ranked possible solutions. Legislation to promote smart growth and the availability of case studies or demonstrations of successful smart growth projects were also rated of potentially high utility.

Smart growth principles include compact development, mixed land uses, providing a variety of transportation choices, preserving farmland and open space, and concentrating new development in or near existing urban areas.

The land development professionals who responded also agreed that the current rate of urbanization of Michigan could negatively impact the state's forests, water quality, scenic quality, and wildlife habitat.

The study resulted in the formulation of a series of ten recommendations for the land development community. These include the need:

- For research projects to examine (i) gaps in the understanding of smart growth terms and principles among land development professionals, local officials, developers, legislators, and citizens, (ii) the attitudes of the public and our leaders about the public subsidy of sprawl, and (iii) how the private sector can be financially successful through smart growth in Michigan
- To develop a series of case studies describing successful smart growth projects
- For land development professionals to do more to educate their peers about smart growth and smart growth impediments, as well as to take a stronger leadership role in its implementation

Full copies of the final report for this project, which was funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's People and Land (PAL) Program, are available at

www.tourismcenter.msu.edu/ttrc/html-ttrc/publications-ttrc/PAL-Report-Dec2004.pdf