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News Release

From: Travel, Tourism & Recreation Resource Center
& Planning & Zoning Center, Inc.
Contact: Dr. Sarah Nicholls – 517-353-5190, nicho210@msu.edu
& Dr. John Warbach – 517-886-0555, warbach@pzcenter.com

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“Michigan’s Land Use Professionals Support Smart Growth Principles According to New Research”

EAST LANSING—The Michigan professionals responsible for planning and designing new development projects overwhelmingly agree that the ten smart growth principles outlined in the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council Report (August 2003) should be implemented, according to new research conducted by Michigan State University and Planning & Zoning Center, Inc. These principles include compact development, walkable communities, preserving farmland and open space, and concentrating new development in or near existing cities.

Over 2,000 land development professionals in six categories—architects, attorneys, civil engineers, landscape architects, planners and surveyors—were surveyed this past spring about the smart growth principles, impediments to implementing these principles, and ways to overcome those impediments. The land development professionals who responded also agreed that the current rate of urbanization of Michigan could have a negative affect on water quality, scenic quality, the vitality of both urban and rural areas, wildlife habitat, agriculture, forests, and open space.

Among the impediments to smart growth that respondents identified were:

- Existing zoning codes and the professional training that continues to promote outdated regulations and promotes unrealistic expectations of the outcomes of those regulations.
- Abhorrence for higher density development by both individuals and community agencies.
- A societal shift in attitude favoring automobile mobility over community cohesiveness.
- A fear or dislike of other races or economic classes of people.
- An unwillingness of many local government officials to accept that development trends in their communities will drastically change its character.
- It is far easier and cheaper for development to occur in previously undeveloped areas (greenfields) than in or near existing cities.

The professionals offered the following suggestions as steps in overcoming impediments to smart growth. (This is a partial and preliminary list as these results are only now being analyzed.):

- Extensive re-writing of existing master plans and ordinances to better reflect the goals of individual communities and smart growth principles.
- Better professional training.
- Education about smart growth for local officials, developers and citizens.
- More regional planning for infrastructure investment.
- Design professionals taking a more pro-active approach in advocating smart growth principles.
- A variety of legislative changes.

Researchers on the project, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s People and Land (PAL) Program, will complete interpretation of survey responses in the next few weeks. Results will be used to develop policy recommendations to address the identified impediments to smart growth. A final report will be available later in the summer.