



Chapter 7: Land

Land Introduction

For the purpose of this Plan, land incorporates a range of issues including elements of urban core redevelopment, sustainable development practices, agriculture preservation, urban gardening, property maintenance, and historic preservation. The Sustainability Team was able to group the multitude of land elements into three main areas of focus:

Focus Area 1: Urban Redevelopment and Jobs

The preservation of our natural resources and land, and the way we conserve them, are on the forefront of sustainability. Decatur is fortunate to have a rich history of a strong and vital urban core, anchored by jobs, community institutions, public facilities, and housing.

Infill development and revitalization decrease costs by reducing the need for new infrastructure, reducing development pressure on agriculture and environmentally sensitive land, increasing pedestrian and transit options, and providing economic development opportunities where people already live.



Creating a market and preservation of existing homes in the urban core is a key strategy towards sustainability

Consistent with Decatur's Comprehensive Plan, policies that support urban reinvestment and job development in the urban core should be supported.

Focus Area 2: Green Building and Sustainable Design

While revitalization of the urban core is extremely important, it is also essential that new development is encouraged and built sustainably. One such technique is to incorporate sustainable design and practices through green building techniques. The tenet of green building is the practice of creating structures and using construction methods that are environmentally responsible and resource efficient. Green building focuses on the entire life-cycle of a building from choosing a site to implementation of design, construction, operation, and ongoing maintenance. The primary objective of green construction is to minimize the overall impact of the built environment on human health and the natural environment by:

- Efficiently using energy, water, materials, and other resources;
- Reducing waste, pollution and environmental degradation¹; and
- Protecting occupant health and improving employee productivity.

These techniques can be utilized in a variety of development types including urban, suburban, rural, and agriculture. As a result of green buildings, new development can be constructed in a more environmentally friendly manner that reduces costs for builders, residents, and the City.

Importantly, Decatur has the opportunity to serve an emerging residential market looking for green building – especially growing demographics such as empty-nesters who may not want to “mow the lawn” and are looking for open views and less maintenance to younger households that are looking for starter homes, family-friendly environments and a connection to the outdoors.

Focus Area 3: Agriculture Preservation, Urban Agriculture, and Community Supported Gardening

Refocusing and reenergizing development in the urban core and incorporating green building and development techniques for periphery development will assist in preserving the Decatur and Macon County's agricultural productivity and history. Decatur has long been an innovator in agriculture – tracing back to the original introduction of the soybean- and a leader in agribusiness, and agriculture research and technology.

Building on this rich tradition and history, Decatur can continue its leadership in agricultural, economic development, and food supply. This can be accomplished by building a market for local bioenergy production, and convert acres of conventional agriculture into new crops demanded for energy production. We have a unique opportunity to set a new standard for sustainable agricultural production of bioenergy, utilizing forward-looking techniques and crops that can be tested for production, efficiency, and reduced “footprint” on the environment by conserving water, and reducing runoff of silt into our streams, rivers, and Lake Decatur.

In the 21st Century, we also have the opportunity to bring the benefits of agriculture and food right into our neighborhoods, through urban/neighborhood agriculture practices. Urban/neighborhood agriculture is the practice of cultivating, processing and distributing food in or around an urban area. Urban agriculture can take place in backyards, rooftop containers, public open spaces, community gardens, or greenhouses.

¹ United States Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.epa.gov/greenbuilding/pubs/about.htm>)

Urban agriculture advances environmental, social, and economic opportunities by providing a direct interaction between consumers and growers, use of residents as workers, use of typical urban waste products (organic waste as compost and stormwater for irrigation), greater social interaction through leisure and recreational opportunities, and a positive impact upon the urban environment.

In addition to urban agriculture, Decatur encourages Community Supported Agriculture. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that consumers provide mutual encouragement and a sharing of the risks and benefits of food production. By making a financial commitment to a farm, people become "members" (or "shareholders," or "subscribers") of the CSA. By buying shares, CSAs establish a direct relationship between the food buying public and a farm. Immediate benefits of sustainable, urban/neighborhood and community supported agriculture include:

- Social / Health
 - Dietary variety
 - Fresh food
 - Improved nutrition
 - Food security
 - Leisure and recreational opportunities
 - Community building, vitality
- Environmental
 - Waste management
 - Air and Social quality improvements
 - Reduced food related transportation
 - Increased crop diversity
 - Landscape diversity
- Economics
 - Job creation
 - Local economic development
 - Spin-off industries

Key Land 2030 Goals

- **New development in the “urban core” will account for 60% of the all new development by 2030.**

Unplanned and unmanaged development outside of the urban core resulting in low-density growth can cause numerous economic and environmental costs. Conversely, development and revitalization in the urban core decreases these costs by reducing infrastructure requirements and costs, reducing Vehicle Miles Traveled, reducing development pressure of agriculture land and environmentally sensitive land, increasing pedestrian and transit options, and providing economic development opportunities. Development in the urban core will be possible by developing appropriate strategies to create a market for development.

- **Community supported agriculture and urban gardening will increase in acreage to 300 acres by 2030.**

Currently there are less than 20 acres in Macon County that are farmed as part of a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm. Community supported agriculture and urban gardening

integrates three main goals: environmental stewardship, farm profitability, and prosperous farming communities.

Key Land 2020 Goals, Strategies, and Projects/Actions

GOAL 1: DECATUR DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES WILL FOCUS ON URBAN INFILL AND REVITALIZATION.

Decatur's recent Comprehensive Plan promotes urban infill and redevelopment. Urban core infill and redevelopment supports Decatur's existing residential base, reduces the need for costly new infrastructure, provides economic development opportunities, and builds on the sense of community.



There is existing and viable housing stock in the urban core.

STRATEGY 1: CREATE A MARKET FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE URBAN CORE.

A central core strategy is to rebuild the market in the urban core through public and private actions. As a community, we need to ensure that homeowners and businesses will receive a return on their investment in the urban core. Through a variety of techniques, leadership from the public and private sector, cooperation among neighborhood groups, and incentives for private sector investment, the development market for infill can rebuild over time.



One key to obtaining urban development is reducing developer risk.

Projects/Actions

1.1.1 Reduce risk for urban infill development by creating financial and partnership programs to incentivize development and assist financially distressed properties.

Private developers are more likely to take on infill development if they are able to reduce risks or costs to an acceptable level. As a result, the City will see greater success in new urbanized development if they are able to assist infill development by obtaining favorable financing terms or reducing acquisition costs. Success of such programs will also depend on a neighborhood with an active and engaged community support structure. The Plan advocates the consideration of these programs in order to reduce risk for development in the urban core:

- a. Establish an Urban Core Development Revolving Loan Fund.

Traditionally revolving loans are used to fund commercial and industrial developments; however some cities have established them to reduce costs or risks for infill housing development. A Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) is a source of money from which loans are made

for small development projects, where a low or no-interest loan is made to one person or business at a time and, as repayments are made, funds become available for new loans to other residents or businesses. Revolving loan funds operate, in principle, by issuing new loans as old loans are repaid. Hence, the money revolves from one person or business to another. Although best suited for increasing credit access for development that lack alternative funding sources, many RLF's assist local development that is in need of capital but are financially nonviable. Major objectives for RLF's are to: (1) correct market imperfections, (2) promote activities with a greater social than market value, and (3) stabilize economic activity.

Though the City, in partnership with the Economic Development Corporation of Decatur-Macon County, has already established a Revolving Loan Fund, the proposed Urban Core Revolving Loan Fund is a specific loan targeted towards urban core development. The Urban Core Revolving Loan Fund should remain independent and separate from the existing Revolving Loan Program. It is essential that the lending criteria and parameters of

Revolving Loan: Santa Barbara County, CA

Santa Barbara County has established a \$2.95 million Revolving Loan Fund. The fund was established in partnership with community lenders for below-market interest rate loans towards affordable rental or homeownership housing projects. Loan funds can be used for site acquisition, predevelopment costs and project construction. Eligible organizations include private and non-profit developers, faith-based groups, public agencies and non-profit agencies. –Source: Santa Barbara County

the fund recognize and understand the local community and are designed to meet the financial solutions that fit the community needs. The Urban Core Revolving Loan Fund can be used for both direct and gap funding and should target acquisition of property, improvement and site preparation, and construction of large-scale residential and commercial developments. The Urban Core Revolving Loan could target specific neighborhoods/areas that are in the periphery of downtown; one that is supported with an interested neighborhood organization and dedicated residents; and one that has the potential for redevelopment.

Startup money for the Urban Core Revolving Loan Fund can come from Tax Increment Financing, dedication of specific city fees, community foundations, or other public/private sources. The City can use federal CBDG and/or other HUD funds for this loan; however combining CBDG with other funding sources will trigger additional federal requirements. Those extra requirements include complying with FEMA regulations, prevailing wages and documentation, and procurement procedures. As such, the Plan recommends keeping this fund independent of federal moneys and rather use CBDG moneys to provide all necessary infrastructure improvements related to, but separate from the specific project financed through the Urban Core Revolving Loan Fund.

The City should set a financial target such as \$250,000 in public funds with a 100% match from outside moneys from community foundations, private entities, and Decatur businesses. For a small fund it is especially important to obtain outside capital because resources are increased when the City develops working relationships with a range of financial providers in the community. Furthermore, outside capital can reduce operating costs and increase fund impact.

While the fund is established by the City, the Plan recommends that the Urban Core Revolving Loan Fund be managed by a local independent entity, such as the Economic Development Corporation of Decatur-Macon County or another community development financial institution. Doing this would lend outside expertise and establish an important public/private partnership.

b. Develop a Land Bank Program or Community Land Trust

In land banking, a governmental or non-profit entity acquires property to later sell or lease for a nominal fee or below market rate price to induce a desired type of development. A land bank can be used as a type of public broker to acquire property such as abandoned or tax delinquent properties or properties sold for taxes. The land bank holds the property and readies it for redevelopment (by clearing the title, for instance). Land bank can include many programs (see Genesee County on the right).

A Community Land Trust is a technique to preserve land for housing, economic development and/or open space by providing ground leases to projects built on the land. Both tools could be used by Decatur to assemble urban land and bring it back to market for housing, commercial development and/or open space preservation.

c. Expand Existing Receivership Program

Decatur currently has a receivership program in which the City is able to place lien on properties with significant property maintenance code violations. The program allows the City to gain property control of a property in order to bring the property back into livable standards and encourage future redevelopment. A receivership program can be an effective solution to stabilize troubled properties and prevent the displacement of tenants. It can encourage existing owners to rehabilitate the property within a reasonable time to meet codes, agree to comply with a specified schedule for razing or rehabilitation, or allow the City to take receivership to encourage redevelopment. The receivership program should prevent property owners from allowing properties to deteriorate, and in the worst cases, assist in land assembly. Assembling small, individual parcels into larger blocks under common ownership can greatly enhance their development potential. The City can use the existing receivership program and work with existing community development corporations or other/public private partnerships to develop those parcels or bring additional resources and assets to development.

d. Develop Infill Fee Waiver Program

This Plan recommends identifying targeted areas of the urban core where the City will waive fees for plan review, building permits, or other specific fees for a limited period of time to incent new private development, additions, or remodeling in an areas that needs reinvestment and upkeep. Even though building permits and fees are not excessively high and might not be a significant barrier to urban redevelopment, providing such a program is another tool to attract development and represents Decatur's commitment to infill development.

1.1.2 Partner with Chamber of Commerce and business community.

This Plan supports the creation of necessary public-private partnerships with the greater Decatur business community, SCORE, Chamber of Commerce, development community, and the non-profit community. The importance of public private partnerships toward urban redevelopment can not be understated. Public-private partnership implies a common understanding of shared goals, a willingness to share responsibilities for their achievement, continuing dialogue on what needs to be done to promote realization, and an ability to leverage private investment to create community benefits. The City should continue the building of public-private partnerships to share responsibly and capacity to undertake regenerating neighborhood improvement efforts. Public-private partnership projects could include an on-going dialogue about overcoming existing policy obstacles to infill development, creation of financial incentives for new development in the urban core, and cooperation with property maintenance. Key elements to partner on include:



- a. Urban Core Revolving Loan Fund.
- b. Educational Workshops for Landowners on Sustainable Development Techniques.
- c. Coordination between businesses, Richland Community College, Millikin University and other workforce training programs on the need for new technologies, green jobs, and sustainable agriculture and industry.

STRATEGY 2: SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING AND IMPROVEMENT

Small investments in property maintenance can lead to significant increases in home values, as well as neighborhood pride. Often it takes a few property owners on a block to make improvements and beautification efforts to their property to encourage others on the block to make similar investments. The City should work in partnership with neighborhoods to define key projects that will jump-start and provide confidence in homeowners, landlords and business owners to invest in their properties.

Projects/Actions

1.2.1 Develop neighborhood plans to identify key projects that will increase homeownership, property maintenance, and quality of life to retain vibrancy of existing building stock.

Neighborhood planning has become an extremely effective means to build local pride, get to know your neighbors, and assist the City and other government agencies to understand what the most pivotal projects could be to improve at the neighborhood level. Neighborhood planning can be used to address local issues such as greening a parking lot at a local school, replacing street lights with attractive, energy-efficient light fixtures, fixing or adding sidewalks, addressing the need for an additional bus route, or creating a safe route to school program.

An inclusive process that involves neighbors, churches, local organizations, government agencies and local businesses can prove an effective means to prioritize investments, build trust, and make a visible difference on the ground.

1.2.2 Create a Property Maintenance Neighborhood Match Program.

Establish a property maintenance neighborhood match program that offers small matching grants, ranging from \$500 to \$5,000, for the purpose of neighborhood property maintenance and beautification. Matching can include cash, donated professional services, donated materials or volunteer labor. The City will need to establish criteria for projects such as:

- Have neighborhood support;
- Be able to obtain all necessary City permits;
- Be designed for low maintenance or be maintained by neighborhood volunteers or a contractor hired by the neighborhood; and
- Involve residents in all phases of implementation.

Examples of eligible projects for neighborhoods could include landscaping and signage for neighborhood entrances, landscaping traffic islands and city rights-of-way, and public art. The City should work with private businesses to sponsor neighborhood projects, where the business works in partnership with the neighborhood on project but also is able to receive public recognition for such work.

1.2.3 Improve property maintenance.

The purpose of property maintenance ordinances is to protect the properties in residential and commercial neighborhoods by establishing minimum maintenance standards, including:

Neighborhood Match: Bellevue, Washington

The Neighborhood Match Program offers grants up to \$5,000 for small neighborhood projects when matched by the community in cash, donated professional services, donated materials or volunteer labor.



- Discourage crime and graffiti;
- Maintain or increase property values;
- Encourage quality development; and
- Preserve the quality of life.

Property maintenance must be sensitive to property owners' circumstances, but also recognize the communities greater good to protect property values and eliminate health and safety hazards. Programs that combine early warnings and consistent application of property maintenance codes are extremely important to prevent long-term neglect of properties that may lead to uninhabitability and the need to raze older properties.

Proactive programs that combine weatherization, senior citizen homeowner assistance, education to landlords, and workshops for property maintenance may prove very cost efficient relative to loss in property value and the deterioration of older building stock.



Utilize existing property maintenance codes to ensure maintenance of vacant lots.

Decatur's neighborhoods have a tremendous amount of character, local assets, and solid housing that can be preserved, but it will take concerted efforts of both landowners and the public sector to ensure a high level of maintenance and confidence in landowners of the value of funding improvements to their properties.

STRATEGY 3: MAKE THE NECESSARY MODIFICATIONS TO REGULATORY DOCUMENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS TO REMOVE OBSTACLES AND INCENTIVIZE AND ENACT STANDARDS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE URBAN CORE.

Local governments must be an active partner in planning and implementation of in infill and urban core development strategies. Regulation through the zoning code and subdivision code is a significant tool that the City has to implement planning actions. Such modifications to codes should be viewed through the prism of permitting flexible dimensional, use, and design standards and streamlining the review and approval of urban development. Modifications to any regulatory documents should be made in concert with modifications with Macon County and adjacent municipalities' regulations, and the City should be proactive in working with the County and surrounding jurisdictions to enact similar regulatory changes.

Projects/Actions

1.3.1 Provide standards-based dimensional, use, and design standards to encourage reinvestment and sustainable design.

Amendments to regulatory changes work to both encourage and reduce barriers to urban infill development. While these amendments may allow for increased density and development potential in the urban core, new development should still need to be of high quality and follow all necessary building, life-safety, and property maintenance codes. The following zoning amendments should be considered:

- a. Amend the B1 and B4 Commercial District to allow for mixed use development as a permitted use.
- b. Amend the R5 and R6 residential districts to allow for mixed use development as a conditional use.
- c. Amend the R5 and R6 residential districts to allow for small, neighborhood scale retail uses as a conditional use.
- d. Within Section XI(D) for the B1 District, increase the size requirement from 6,000 to 15,000 square feet that triggers the conditional use process for uses that are permitted if smaller than that trigger size. Eliminating conditional use process expedites the review and approval process and reduces time and entitlement risk for developers.
- e. Amend Section XXI(C) to add the R5 and R6 Districts to the list of zoning districts that are allowed exceptions to front yard setback requirements.
- f. Add a provision to Section XXIV to allow a reduction in the required parking for urban core development for:
 1. Mixed use development;
 2. Developments in proximity to public transportation; and
 3. Existing on-street parking is adequate.
- g. Establish a transfer of development rights (TDR) programs to reduce density in some areas, while increasing density in target urban growth areas. A TDR will allow urban development to receive transfer of development right density from periphery development.

1.3.2 Streamline review and approval of urban development.

Lengthy development review procedures that require several different approvals, by multiple decision-makers and staff reviewers, can add significantly to the cost of a development project. In addition, the uncertainty in the outcomes of the review and approval process adds to the risk of a project. The goal should be to streamline or minimize the degree of processing, so that there are few regulatory hurdles that must be cleared before an infill development can proceed, which allows development in the urban core to better compete with development in the periphery. City actions should include:

- a. Create an expedited process for development in the urban core.
- b. Provide administrative review and action on permits involving variations for development in the urban core (handled by staff or hearing examiner rather than scheduling hearings before a commission).
- c. Assign a single staff contact for urban development.
- d. For large redevelopment projects establish a technical review committee to coordinate multiple department review for development in the urban core.

GOAL 2: NEW DEVELOPMENT AND REHABILITATION IN THE DECATUR AREA WILL INCORPORATE ALL APPROPRIATE SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN AND PRACTICES.

STRATEGY 1: PROMOTE, REQUIRE, AND INCENTIVIZE TECHNIQUES THAT PRESERVE LAND, PROMOTE COMMON OPEN SPACE, AND UTILIZE NATURAL STORMWATER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES.

Recognizing that for Decatur to grow both in population and jobs, land will be developed outside of the urban core. However, new development does not have to occur at the expense of environmental protection. For land that is developed outside the urban core, a goal is to make it more resource and environmentally-friendly, by incorporating specific sustainable development techniques and green building and development practices. The tenet of green building is the practice of creating structures and using construction practices that are environmentally responsible and resource efficient. Green building focuses on the entire life-cycle of a building from siting to design, construction, operation, and ongoing maintenance. The primary objective of green construction is to mitigate the overall impact of the built environment on human health and the natural environment by:

- Efficiently using energy, water, materials, and other resources
- Reducing waste, pollution and environmental degradation²
- Protecting occupant health and improving employee productivity.

Projects/Actions

2.1.1 Connected development

The City should utilize the Development Zone Map in the Macon County/Decatur Comprehensive Plan as a guide for the expansion of sewer and water service, to ensure that future development is strategically compact and contiguous to existing development. The purpose of this is to direct new development into the city where there is already established infrastructure and to reduce the development of urban sprawl. Requiring connected development preserves valuable agriculture and natural land, and maintains the balance of rural and urban land uses in the County. Actions the City should undertake to ensure connected development:

- a. Establish agreements between the Sanitary District and the County that strategically consider future sewer extension and the full costs to public agencies of all elements of land development.
- b. Review existing annexation agreements to ensure that potentially annexed area allows for connected development.
- c. Insert a “Connected Development” standard as part of the review process for any development that requires public review (PD process and conditional use)

2.1.2 Amend Zoning Code to Allow “Conservation Development” as a permitted use in residential zoning districts.

Conservation Development, sometimes referred to as Cluster Development, is a managed growth land use development technique that incorporates the natural landscape and ecology of a development site. Conservation Development is a typically density-neutral – meaning that the same number of units would

² United States Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.epa.gov/greenbuilding/pubs/about.htm>)

be allowed as conventional developments, but with more common open space in exchange for smaller individual lots. Smaller individual lot does not necessarily mean smaller houses. Principles of conservation development include the protection of natural features, viewsheds, and access to environmental resources; incorporation of BMPs, less intensive capital infrastructure such as use of shorter, narrower streets.

In many communities, conservation development can be accomplished only through the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process. The PUD process allows the municipality to maintain control over proposed development, and allows the public to have greater input and review through the process. However, one of the primary hindrances to encouraging conservation development is the time consuming and uncertain outcome of the PUD process. Simply by requiring these types of developments to go through the PUD process, communities (intentionally or unintentionally) create obstacles and an unpredictable approval process.

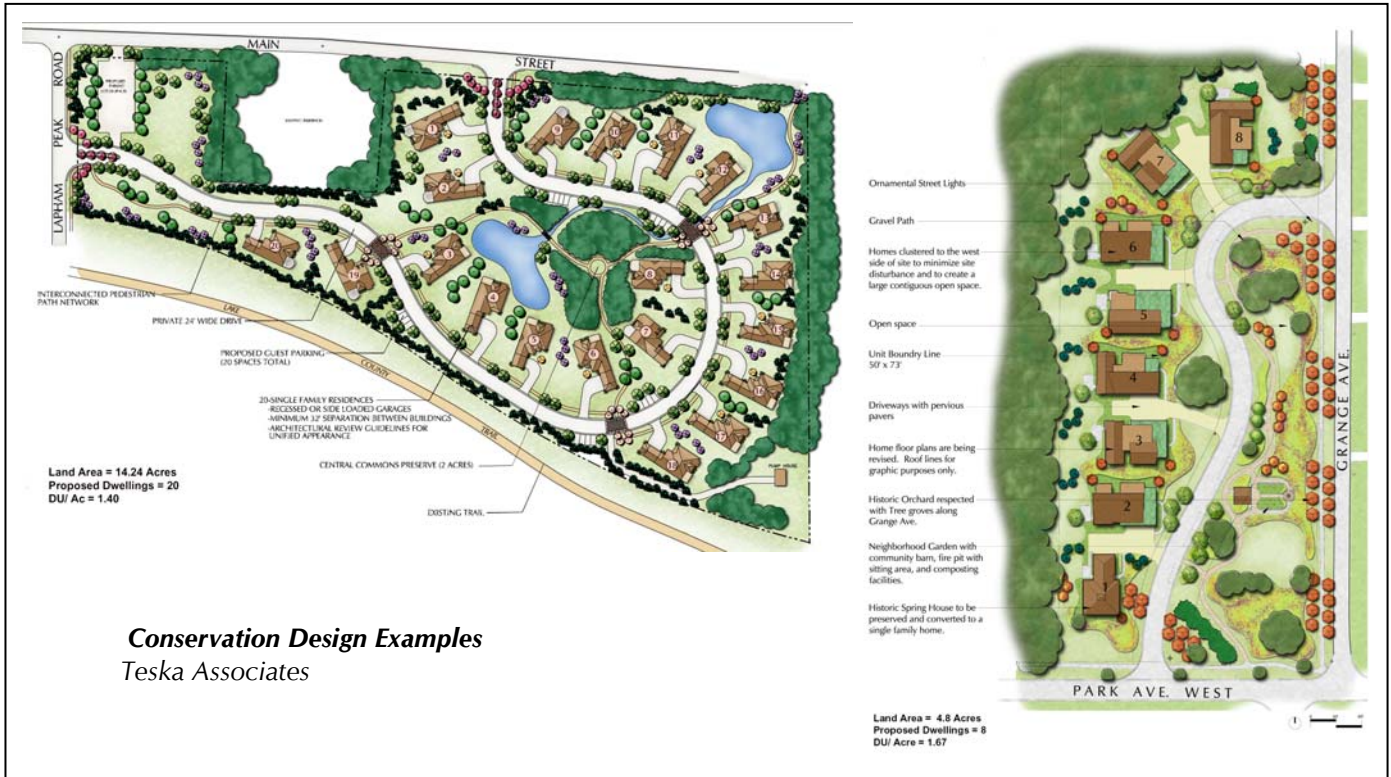
In order to “level the playing field” and eliminate unnecessary development barriers, Decatur should amend their zoning code to allow “Conservation Development” as a permitted use with specific development standards attached (minimum development size, setbacks, density, common open space requirements, etc). Allowing conservation development subdivision as a permitted use with specific development standards reduces developer risk, but also ensures that the development will meet all the necessary bulk and lot requirements. If the proposed development meets all standards, there is no additional time or expense needed to create a conservation development, thus this type of development can be a real option over a conventional subdivision design. The applicant could also pursue a PUD process for a custom development that does not meet the specific standards, but might still be desirable in the community.

Sample Zoning Ordinance language that Decatur can include to the current ordinance to outline standards for Conservation Design:

1. *Conservation Development consists of residential uses and structures.*
2. *Conservation Development allows a maximum density increase of 25% over the standards established for such uses of the residential zoning district in which they are located. (note: this language should be included to encourage conservation design)*
3. *Conservation Development requires at least 30% common open space (exclusive of land that cannot be developed due to other regulations such as protected wetlands).*
4. *Variances should be considered to allow smaller setbacks and greater height in exchange for larger common open spaces.*
5. *Lots within a Conservation Development shall not be required to meet the minimum lot width or minimum lot area of the residential zoning district in which they are located.*
6. *When abutting a Conventional Development, a Conservation Development perimeter buffer of at least 30 feet in width shall be provided.*
7. *The City should consider if the streets within a Conservation Development can be narrower than required the typical street standards in order to reduce impervious areas. Sidewalk requirements, however, should not be reduced.*

In order to ensure that the common open space is preserved and maintained, the City should consider requiring a performance bond, Special Service Area, or other means to ensure the site is built in accordance with standards and is maintained appropriately over time. Please note that necessary changes to the subdivision code may be required to allow Conservation Development. For new subdivisions in

the periphery, the City and County should encourage a natural resource inventory prior to subdivision and encourage the practice of conservation design and low impact development. In addition, the City should work with the Macon County to amend the County zoning and subdivision codes to allow and encourage Conservation Design in unincorporated areas.



2.1.3 Provide assistance for construction of LEED Certified Buildings.

Research has shown that green buildings have higher occupancy rates, higher rent per square feet prices, and higher property values³. However, due to lack of understanding and slightly higher development costs, many in the development and construction sector need additional incentives to build green buildings. Millikin University has already renovated a building to meet LEED standards. ADM-Scovill Hall, home to Millikin’s Tabor School of Business, was awarded a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) existing building (EB) gold rating by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) in its building certification program.

If the City would like to promote additional LEED buildings, it should consider the following incentives:

Fiscal

- a. Establish a revolving loan for green buildings.
- b. Provide tax credits or abatements for green buildings.
- c. Reduce permitting fees for green buildings.

³Study by Deloitte Financial Advisory Services: <http://www.awarenessintoaction.com/whitepapers/getting-the-true-assessment-of-a-leed-certified-buildings-value.html>

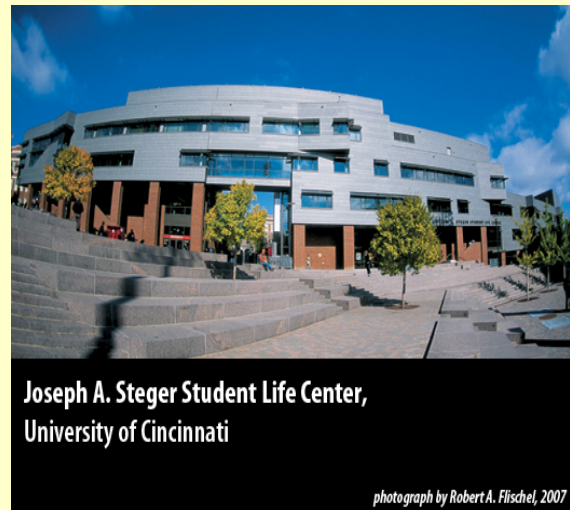
- d. Establish specific fees (stormwater, waste) where collections go towards assistance construction of green buildings.

Process

- a. Reduce permitting time. Reducing the duration of the review and permitting process, in exchange for committing to specific green building standards, can result in significant cost savings for the developer. This allows Decatur to offer a significant incentive with little or no financial investment, since it only requires a shift in permitting priority.
- b. Density or height bonus. Allow greater density or height in exchange for the provision of green buildings.
- c. Require LEED as “public benefit” requirement of the Planned Unit Development process.
- d. Technical assistance. Provide free access to a credentialed green building expert. This assistance may allow developers to become familiar with green building practices.
- e. Marketing assistance. Offer free marketing assistance, awards, websites, press releases, and other means.

Tax Abatement for Green Buildings: Cincinnati Ohio

The City of Cincinnati provides a 100% real property tax exemption of the assessed property value for newly-constructed or rehabilitated commercial or residential properties that earn LEED certification.



2.1.3 Amend Stormwater Management Ordinance: (See Stormwater Management Section in Water Chapter 5)

STRATEGY 2: UTILIZE PROGRAMS AND DEVELOP NEW PROGRAMS THAT INCENTIVE PROTECTION OF EXISTING STRUCTURES, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON HISTORIC PROPERTIES.

Historic preservation can – and should – be an important component of any effort to promote sustainable development. A century ago with no air conditioning, primitive insulation, and limited electricity designers and builders had to think about the natural environment. Buildings were sited to take maximum use of the sun or shade (heating and daylighting) and wind (ventilating). As a result, older buildings can be surprisingly energy efficient through the use of good ventilation, durable materials, and spatial relationships. In addition, local materials were used in their construction. Most importantly, the immediate advantage of older buildings is that the building already exists; therefore energy is not necessary to develop new infrastructure, create new building materials, or transport those materials. However, for many existing buildings minor modifications must be made to adapt them to compatible

new uses. At relative low costs compared to the construction of a new building, systems can be upgraded to meet modern building requirements and codes. This not only makes good economic sense, but preserves our legacy and is an inherently sustainable practice.

Projects/Actions:

2.2.1 Expand Historic Districts

Currently, Decatur has 9 structures on the national registry of landmarked properties, 2,088 total parcels in three national historic districts, and 332 total parcels in local historic districts. Decatur should survey neighborhoods to consider expanding existing historic districts or creation of new districts. Historic Districts provide additional preservation protection upon those structures and show a commitment by the property owners, and City towards historic preservation and sustainability.

2.2.2 Assist historic downtown commercial buildings.

Older downtown buildings are ideal models of sustainability. By their very nature, historic downtown buildings have some unique environmental factors including shared common walls; thicker walls; operable windows, shutters, and awnings; tall and reflective ceilings; skylights; passive solar; and recessed entrances. There is simply no method of construction that is more environmentally responsible than rehabilitating an older building. However many older buildings need assistance for renovation, which can come in the form of fiscal or educational:

Fiscal

- a. Provide small grants for energy efficiency upgrades (see Energy Chapter 6).
- b. Provide tax abatements for downtown historic preservation.

Historic Millwork District Revitalization: Dubuque, Iowa

One of Dubuque key economic development strategy was to revitalize the historic Millwork District into a “Model Sustainable District.” Utilizing the existing building stock and infrastructure of this historic mixed use district, the goal is to improve water quality, reduce reliance on water supply and wastewater system, and manage stormwater locally; minimize carbon footprint; use locally available resources; use embodied energy of historic warehouse buildings; preserve historical significance; and celebrate and encourage historical and cultural identity.

For more information visit:
www.cityofdubuque.org/millworkdistrict



- c. Work with local organizations or Decatur businesses, such as Green Home Inspections and Energy Audits (<http://greenhomeinspections.net/>), to offer low cost energy audits for historic downtown commercial buildings.

Educational

- a. Host a workshop in preservation and energy efficient improvements of commercial buildings with local builders and architects.
- b. Inform downtown property owners of potential tax credits. For example, encourage downtown commercial buildings to improve energy efficiency. The federal government offers tax deductions for improvements that save at least half of the energy needed to heat and cool the building and reductions for qualifying improvements in the building envelope, lighting, and heating/cooling systems. Landmark Illinois list numerous grant and tax advantages for historic properties on their website: <http://www.landmarks.org/incentives.htm>



The Shops on Merchant Street are prime examples of viable older buildings

GOAL 3: PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PRACTICES, AND BE A NATIONAL LEADER IN URBAN/NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE.

Decatur and Macon County will build upon its rich agriculture history and success. While this plan recognizes that federal policy and the world-agriculture market dictates the growing patterns of large scale farming, Decatur can focus on more localized implementation techniques of urban/neighborhood agriculture and community supported agriculture.

STRATEGY 1: CONVERT VACANT AND UNDERUTILIZED URBAN CORE PROPERTIES INTO COMMUNITY GARDENS AND URBAN AGRICULTURE USES.

Community gardens and urban agriculture provide access to fresh produce and plants, as well as provide labor, neighborhood improvement, sense of community and connection to the environment. Furthermore, active garden sites can create a stable force in the community and serve as anchors for other re-development initiatives.

Projects/Actions:

3.1.1 Through the Land Bank Program allow residents to plant adjacent vacant lots.

The City should allow lots that are eligible for acquisition through a Land Bank Program to be gardened, planted, and maintained by interested members in the neighborhood without having to purchase them. The City should make it clear that those lots may be sold in the future for development. See land recommendation 1.1.1b for details regarding the Land Bank Program.

3.1.2 Set Aside Areas of city land that could be used for Urban Agriculture Demonstration Projects.

The City in partnership with the Park District should pick one or more highly visible locations in the city to start an urban agriculture demonstration project to exhibit the capability and techniques of urban gardening. There is no "standard" community garden plot size and plot sizes can vary. For larger gardens in parks 20 ft x 20 ft is a common plot size (larger gardens in parks), while 10 ft x 10 ft or 10 ft x 15 ft is a typical inner city garden lot. Such demonstration project should be a joint public/private partnership with local schools, the business community, and participation by Decatur is Growing Gardeners (DIGG).



3.1.3 Work with a Macon County Conservation District to manage public community gardens.

The purpose of having Macon County Conservation District manage the public community gardens is to coordinate activities, support neighborhood volunteers who manage community gardens, and provide a one-stop shop for all materials and technical assistance.

3.1.4 Advertise and Make Logistical Changes to the Farmers Market in Central Park.

The success of the farmers market in Central Park has been limited due in part to both a lack of marketing and advertising, as well as logistic and layout concerns. As such, changes to the Central Park Farmers Market should be considered:



Picture courtesy of Decatur is Growing Gardeners

- a. Maintain a consistent day of week and time.
- b. Launch a direct and vibrant marketing campaign.
- c. Alter site logistics and layout. The City should consolidate all farmers market activities to the northwest corner of the park. As such, N. Park Street from Franklin Street to Water Street and the portion of Water Street from William Street to Prairie Street should be closed in order to allow vendors to park their trucks and sell out of the back of their trucks. Vending trucks should park on the opposite side of the street so that the back of their truck and wares for selling face the inside of the park. In addition, other vending sites and booths can line the inside of the sidewalks along the northwest corner of the park. The band shell and plaza can host demonstrations and live music.

3.1.5 Work with the Illinois Stewardship Alliance to create a marketing campaign to encourage residents, restaurants, and grocery stores to purchase localized food, herbs or other agricultural products.

The average food item travels between 1,500 to 2500 miles in the U.S⁴. Expansive food travel distances increase food prices, causes environmental degradation, and reduce the quality and nutritional value of food. Conversely, the advantage of local food are numerous including local produce tastes better, have more nutritional value, supports local farm families, protects genetic diversity, preserves open space, and supports a clean environment. Currently the Illinois Stewardship Alliance is marketing a “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” campaign for Central Illinois. The City should partner with the Illinois Stewardship Alliance to:



- a. Create a directory for finding locally grown food including: farmers markets, meat lockers, u-pick operations, as well as farms and businesses who sell locally grown products directly to consumers.
- b. Expand upon the Central Illinois a “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” and create a Decatur label for use in grocery stores and restaurants to identify locally grown products.
- c. Assist in advertising for restaurants and grocery stores that use and sell local products. Encourage the local grocery stores and restaurants to purchase more products from local farmers.

STRATEGY 2: INCREASE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PRACTICES INCLUDING COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE AND USE OF ALTERNATIVE CROPS.

Projects/Actions:

3.2.1 Provide outreach and assist Community Supported Agriculture.

Over the last 20 years, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has become a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer. In a CSA’s a farmer offers a certain number of “shares” to the public. Typically the share consists of a box of vegetables, but other farm products may be included. Interested consumers purchase a share (aka a “membership” or a “subscription”) and in return receive a box (bag, basket) of seasonal produce each week throughout the farming season. This arrangement creates several rewards for both the farmer and the consumer, including mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production. CSA can play a



⁴ The WorldWatch Institute “Home Grown”, 2002

substantial part in a sustainable future. It has the potential to establish greater environmental vitality in Decatur, and to extend basic, healthy linkages among the people who make up the community. Potential projects for the City to consider:

- a. Create a directory for local CSAs.
- b. Assist in advertising for local CSAs.
- c. Create a central city location such as Central Park in the summer and the Civic Center in the winter to allow for CSA drop off and pick up.

3.2.2 Recognizing the federal policy and world-agriculture market dictates the growing patterns of large scale farming, Decatur should work with the Macon County Farm Bureau and Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District regarding education and outreach for sustainable agriculture practices including use of BMPs and alternative crops.



STRATEGY 3: PRESERVE VALUABLE AGRICULTURE LAND.

In partnership with Macon County and the Macon County Farm Bureau, it is important for the region to protect soil-rich agricultural land and the cultural and economic well-being of the area. Benefits of implementing agriculture preservation tools include:

- Maintaining the valuable agriculture land for ongoing food production;
- Reducing development pressure on protected farmlands;
- Providing an area for stormwater infiltration and groundwater recharge;
- Protecting rural character; and
- Generating more in tax revenue than spent on for public services.

The City and County should amend their zoning and subdivision code to ensure that proper development regulations are in place to secure an economic return on farm land while maintaining it for agriculture use

Projects/Actions

3.3.1 Encourage a model a Open Space Development Utilizing Perennial Grass Bioenergy Production

The project could be expanded to consider a test project of how to incorporate perennial grass production in conjunction with conservation development. A perennial grass subdivision could be designed and developed similar to a “golf course community without the golf course,” providing permanent views of protected, productive lands, to clustered homes catering to households who do not want to take care of large, private lawns.

3.3.2 Work with County to Develop a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is a farmland preservation tool that has been used by local governments to preserve valuable agricultural land. TDR programs allow landowners to transfer the right to develop their parcel of land to a different parcel of land. TDR is used to shift development from agricultural areas to designated areas closer to municipal services by selling the development rights of agricultural land to an eligible property in an area with municipal services. The “sender” land would be permanently protected through a conservation easement.

3.3.3 Utilize Agricultural Designation Areas

Agricultural Designation Areas are another tool in farmland protection. The Illinois Agricultural Areas and Preservation Act provides for the designation of “Agricultural Areas”, which allows one or more landowners for land in totality of over 350 acres to voluntarily place their land into a protected district with the approval of the local county board. Agricultural Designation Areas help protect landowners from local ordinances that might otherwise interfere with normal farming practices, protection from special benefits assessments, and protection from locally initiated projects that would lead to the conversion of the land to other uses. However, they do not exempt farmers from nuisance suits or from following approved best management practices. The Agriculture Designation Area is an important public declaration that the county and the landowner feel agriculture is important to the community and still a viable industry in that area. Creation of Agricultural Designation Areas is a strategy outlined in the Comprehensive Plan.



A Transfer of Development Right program and Agricultural Designation Areas can be utilized to save farms such as this.