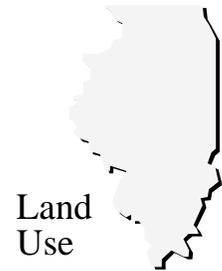




LOCAL GOVERNMENT TOPICS



Illinois County Officials: Land Use Issues and Concerns

In recent years, a number of land use issues, such as loss of agricultural land, impacts of nonfarm development, siting for specific land uses (animal feeding operations, for example), and even political issues related to how land use decisions are made, have been the focus of increased public concern and debate.

To document current patterns and trends in a variety of issues related to land use, the University of Illinois Extension Land Use Task Force and the U of I Laboratory for Community and Economic Development joined forces to survey local county officials.

Survey

In the fall of 1998, surveys were sent to one elected official on each county board as well as one professional staff person in a local county planning department or similar office. A total of 101 counties (all Illinois counties except for Cook County) were surveyed. Approximately 60 percent of the counties surveyed responded, and the survey results provide critical insight into county officials' perspectives on local land use issues.

In analyzing the survey results, it is useful to categorize counties as either metropolitan or nonmetropolitan. Census data from 1990 and a coding system developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service were used to determine the appropriate category for each county. Approximately 89 percent of metropolitan counties responded to the land use survey, while 50 percent of nonmetropolitan counties responded. The higher response rate of metro counties could itself be an indication of the relative importance or incidence of land use issues in those counties.

The survey instrument was designed to address a number of issues:

- the land use issues of greatest concern to local communities
- the land use planning process
- the availability and application of land use and development tools
- the identification of local officials' educational and training needs regarding land use issues.

Land Use Issues

The first major category of responses provides some insight into the local land use issues of greatest concern across Illinois. Survey respondents were asked to identify land use issues that were public concerns in their county. Survey results highlighted some important differences in the concerns of metro and nonmetro counties, as illustrated in Table 1.

Not surprisingly, nearly all metro counties (96 percent) identified urban and suburban growth issues as a public concern. By contrast, only 35 percent of nonmetro counties expressed concern about these growth issues. Both metro and nonmetro counties (96 and 83 percent, respectively) identified issues related to rural residential development as a concern, on the other hand.

Another major category of issues relates to farmland and open space preservation. Ninety-six percent of metro counties and 67 percent of nonmetro counties identified farmland preservation as an issue, while 83 percent of metro counties and 32 percent of nonmetro counties expressed concern about open space preservation. These responses seem to suggest that concern with preserving open space increases as the amount of open space and farmland in an area decreases. Thus, metro counties, which have a higher percentage of developed land and less open space and farmland, are likely to value open space preservation more highly than nonmetro counties.

The relatively high level of interest in farmland preservation among all counties may be explained by widespread concern about loss of

farmland and agricultural production. Metro counties' concern with preserving farmland may also be related to their use of farmland as "open space." As an area becomes more highly developed, the remaining farmland can both provide open space and serve as a buffer against further development. That metro counties expressed somewhat more concern about farmland preservation and significantly more concern about open space preservation suggests this secondary role of farmland-influenced responses.

Survey responses also indicated that other issues, such as stormwater management, recreation uses, and concerns over specific land uses, are generally of greater concern in metro counties. Specific land uses that generate public concern include localized uses that usually spark resistance whenever proposed (for example, siting of landfills). The survey highlighted animal feeding operations as a specific land use issue, and responses indicate that this is one of the few land use issues of greater concern in nonmetro (rural) counties than in metro counties.

Public Policy Development

Public policy development refers to the process for addressing land use issues. In many situations, the procedures themselves raise public concerns. For example, discussions about where to locate specific land uses, such as landfills, can often focus on the political process and the level of actual political control over the decision. At other times, the policy development process itself can affect whether the resulting land use policy tools or plans are successful. Furthermore, concerns over issues such as private property rights can emerge as a result of which policy tools are implemented or how those tools are implemented.

Survey respondents were asked to describe their local political infrastructure and planning process. The political infrastructure and development tools available to counties varied significantly. Table 2 provides information about the political infrastructure different counties have in place to address land use issues.

All reporting metro counties indicated that their county boards include a committee focused on land use issues, while only 57 percent of nonmetro county boards have a land use committee. Similarly, all metro counties have a planning and zoning department, while 61 percent of nonmetro counties have such a department. The presence or absence of this

political infrastructure suggests the relationship that likely exists between the size, population, and urban growth in a county and the demand for policy tools to address land use issues.

The activity of this political infrastructure is often centered on developing and implementing land use plans. Survey responses demonstrate that more metro counties have implemented land use plans than nonmetro counties (see Table 3). Metro counties are also more likely to review their land use plans frequently and to adjust for changing conditions, even though the plans generally look farther into the future (see Table 3).

Development Impacts and Tools

Any focus on land use issues must account for various related tools and policies that have land use components but are not specifically identified as land use tools. Previous Extension policy education programming efforts highlighted a number of these issues. The Rural/Urban Policy Series, conducted from 1994 through 1996 along the urban fringes of the Chicago metropolitan region, highlighted a number of development impacts. The impacts could be clustered loosely into three major themes:

- the fiscal impact of development
- the geographical impact of development
- the social impact of development

A number of tools primarily address the fiscal and geographical impacts of development, including the use of impact fees and land cash ordinances to finance part of the public infrastructure or to provide the necessary land for public investments, such as parks and schools. Other tools include requirements for infrastructure development and off-site improvement that place some of the infrastructure costs on the original development. Special service area designations or even privatization of services may pass the cost of certain infrastructure requirements on to the residents or businesses occupying the newly developed area.

The survey results do not provide clear information about the availability and use of these tools, except to demonstrate some current activity and certainly growing interest in how to apply these tools.

Land Use Tools

While the impacts of development can be complex and the resulting application of development tools can be difficult, the availability of various land use tools is well established. Some tools are available through state statutes while other new methods are untested as yet.

Some of the "newer" land use tools include conservation easements, purchase-of-development-

rights (PDR) programs, and transfer-of-development-rights (TDR) programs. The goal of these programs is to maintain land in its present agricultural or conservation use and thus prevent development. A significant hurdle to successfully implementing conservation easement and PDR programs is obtaining sufficient financing. On the other hand, the TDR program is financially self-sufficient—it works by letting developers trade development rights from one area to another, thereby allowing development in parts of a region while preventing development from occurring in other parts. The TDR program poses significant political challenges, however, in the negotiation process for identifying initial development rights and the location of developable and non-developable areas.

As noted previously, the survey data indicated that these tools are not in widespread use currently. In fact, there is still some question as to the statutory authority of some tools, such as PDR and TDR programs, in Illinois. However, growing interest in the programs suggests the need for further information and education.

The survey provided some insight into the relationship of land use regulations to residential development and agricultural zoning. Most counties currently allow residential development to occur within areas zoned for agriculture, but various restrictions on that development exist (see Table 4). Among the counties that allow development, most require a minimum lot size for residential development (all metro counties reported a minimum requirement, while 58 percent of nonmetro counties have minimum requirements). The

minimum lot size varies widely from county to county, ranging from as little as 1 acre to as much as 40 acres. Generally, minimum size requirements in metro counties are stricter, with several reporting the 40-acre requirement under their current zoning regulations.

Land Use Policy Education

The survey posed several questions about educational and training needs regarding land use issues. The following list, in order of priority, summarizes the primary needs identified.

1. Respondents identified the need for a current assessment of various land use issues as their highest priority. As new development and its associated impacts spread to more regions, the need to understand development tools and regulations becomes more widespread.
2. Respondents also expressed a strong desire for further training in technology. They showed particular interest in learning how to use newer technologies, such as geographic information systems, for planning purposes.
3. Respondents noted the need for increased education about legal issues related to land use. New case law and regulatory development constantly change the legal environment and the policy development process.
4. Finally, respondents expressed the need for educational programs to enhance understanding of basic land use tools (such as planning and zoning), as well as training regarding newer tools (such as the PDR and TDR programs).

Essentially, creating a toolbox full of land use tools requires educational efforts on all fronts.

This fact sheet adapted from *1999 Illinois Land Use Survey Report*, University of Illinois Extension Land Use Policy Task Force. Task force cochairs: Brad Lubben, Extension Educator, Farm Business Management, Champaign; and John Church, Extension Educator, Natural Resources Management, Rockford. Prepared in cooperation with U of I Laboratory for Community and Economic Development.

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Table 1. Identification of Local Land Use Issues

Land Use Issue	Metro Counties	Nonmetro Counties
(Percentage of counties identifying topic as local public issue)		
Urban and suburban growth	96	35
Rural single-family residential or rural subdivision development	96	83
Development in flood plains	71	59
Stormwater management	77	40
Specific land uses	68	59
Farmland preservation	96	67
Open space preservation	83	32
Land use for public recreation	48	35
Animal feeding operations	52	73
Private property rights	68	54
Annexation by municipalities	78	24

Table 2. Political Infrastructure

Current County Policy	Metro Counties		Nonmetro Counties	
(Percentage of counties responding yes)				
County board land use committee	100		57	
Planning and zoning department	100		61	
(Number of members and percentage of counties)				
Of those with a county board land use committee, the number of members on the committee	0-3	17%	0-3	45%
	4-6	53%	4-6	40%
	>6	30%	>6	15%
Of those with a county planning and zoning department, the number of professional staff in the department	1	14%	1	80%
	2	22%	2	13%
	3-6	41%	>2	7%
	7-13	14%		
	>13	9%		

Table 3. Land Use Planning

Planning Infrastructure/Tools	Metro Counties		Nonmetro Counties	
	(Percentage of counties responding yes)			
Land use plan	96		48	
Planning commission	86		53	
County or township zoning authority	100		57	
	(Number of years and percentage of counties)			
Of those with a land use plan, the number of years before the plan is reviewed	1	16%	1	13%
	2-3	10%	2-3	0%
	4-5	37%	4-5	27%
	>5	37%	>5	60%
	Other		Other	
Of those with a land use plan, the number of years into the future the plan projects	1-2	25%	1-2	9%
	3-5	50%	3-5	27%
	>5	25%	6-10	27%
			>15	37%

Table 4. Residential Development and Agricultural Zoning

Policy Issue	Metro Counties		Nonmetro Counties	
	(Percentage of counties responding yes)			
Single-family residential development allowed in agricultural zoning	86		96	
Minimum lot size required	100		58	
	(Number of acres and percentage of counties)			
Minimum lot size required for single-family residential development in agricultural zoning	1-2	29%	1-2	50%
	3-5	12%	3-5	43%
	6-10	12%	6-10	0%
	11-39	12%	>10	7%
	40	35%		

