

## IV. WHAT IS GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND SHOULD WE HAVE IT?

People all over the country are spending more and more time in traffic, watching rural lands consumed by buildings, wondering how to pay for new infrastructure.... In many places, growth management policies have been instituted in local municipalities and, to a lesser extent, in counties, regions, and entire states.



Growth management is neither pro-growth nor anti-growth. It is a policy of appropriate growth and land management. Growth management is about preserving and enhancing quality of life — the creation of communities that are economically, environmentally, and socially sound. Land is already managed one way or another — by private property owners or through the political process. Growth management is based on an explicit discussion of what the purposes of land management should be and how those purposes are to be implemented. It is a consistent program for both economic boom and bust periods, not simply a control mechanism for high growth periods.

Growth management involves answering three interrelated questions about a particular area:

- # Where should we grow?
- # How should we grow?
- # How much should we grow?

After we know the answers to these questions — which should be reevaluated regularly — we can develop the policies and strategies needed to implement them.

### Goals

The goal of growth management is to balance economic growth and development with preservation of environmental quality and resources. Environmental and economic choices are linked. Preserving land for conservation has economic consequences, and using land for economic production has environmental consequences. In simple terms, growth management planning emphasizes channeling new development to locations where there has already been an investment in infrastructure or where ecological systems have already been disturbed by human activities.

### Objectives

- # Minimize the conversion of open space for development
- # Maximize the use and economic value of existing infrastructure
- # Preserve and enhance the economic viability of city and town centers (where society has already made a major investment in the existing infrastructure and has disturbed natural systems)
- # Minimize the impact of development on environmental quality and resources

*2020 Vision: Planning for Growth in the Northern Middlesex Region*

# Preserve and enhance the profitability and viability of resource-based economic activities, such as farming and fishing, that promote the stewardship of natural resources

## **Implications**

# Discourage sprawl development

# Encourage compact development and develop design strategies to make denser development more acceptable

# Encourage infill, redevelopment and revitalization of urban areas

# Develop economic development strategies for places that need stronger economies

# Protect rural areas, including farm and forest lands, environmentally sensitive areas, and open space

# Provide housing affordable to all segments of the population

## **Benefits**

# Public improvements are coordinated, planned and predictable

# Improved overall quality of development

# Increased predictability of the approval process and reduced risks in development

# Protection of environmental resources

# Protection and enhancement of desirable amenities that make up community quality of life

# Management of change in the community to widen housing and employment opportunities for everyone

## **Potential Disadvantages**

# Shortages and higher prices for some types of developable land when development locations are restricted

# More limited amounts of affordable housing unless it is explicitly included as a goal

# Need for a knowledgeable staff and supportive elected officials

# Changed regulations with more flexibility can raise developers' costs for consultants

# Poorly managed growth management programs in practice can end up as crisis management and an uncoordinated collection of programs and regulations

# Local growth management does not address regional impacts and issues