

**LAND USE CONSIDERATIONS
FOR THE BROOME COUNTY PLAN
FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Recommendations by the
Broome County Environmental Management Council
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INTRODUCTION

The EMC recognizes the need for economic development within Broome County and believes that long-term growth is possible without jeopardizing the area's natural environment. If preserved, the natural environment can be an asset to attract people and businesses to the County. Therefore, the EMC believes that the County must blend its economic development goals with environmental protection while minimizing environmental degradation, pollution, and social decay.

Generally, surveys find that people prefer living in communities that follow sustainable practices rather than in those where uncontrolled urban growth proliferates. New York State is currently encouraging responsible growth through its Quality Communities Program. The State's 2001 Quality Communities Task Force report, "State and Local Governments Partnering for a Better New York," outlines creative implementation strategies that communities can use to balance future development with environmental protection in ways that enhance both economic strength and quality of life. The EMC reviewed that report and included in this paper those recommendations that the EMC believes are attainable in Broome County. Therefore, if our suggestions are followed, Broome County can employ some of the State's strategies towards developing quality communities.

This paper consists of two sets of recommendations for achieving environmentally sustainable development: the first highlights overall land use goals, while the second provides specific recommendations that can be applied in the County. The EMC intends its recommendations to apply to all types of land use: residential, commercial, industrial, etc.

I. LAND USE GOALS FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Promote healthy and safe living conditions for all County residents
- Promote preservation/perpetuation of existing natural resources

Healthy, safe, and pleasant living conditions require:

- Clean air
- Pure water
- Uncontaminated food sources
- Uncontaminated living conditions
- Aesthetically pleasing surroundings

Perpetuation of existing natural resources encompasses:

- Protecting and preserving regional ecosystems
- Promoting regional biodiversity
- Promoting sustainable use of natural resources
- Promoting best management practices in agriculture
- Preserving agricultural real estate
- Protecting watersheds, water supplies, and wetlands
- Protecting local air quality
- Providing outdoor recreational opportunities
- Promoting reclamation and reuse of vacant commercial and industrial properties
- Promoting activities that minimize waste byproducts and energy consumption
- Promoting regional infrastructure that minimizes human impact on natural resources
- Preserving greenspace within urban areas

Practices for sustainable land use minimize the following:

- Creation of air and soil pollutants
- Contamination of watersheds and ground water supplies
- Expansion of landfill areas
- Expansion of urban and suburban sprawl
- Degradation of natural resources
- Energy consumption

II. SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BROOME COUNTY

A. Sustainable Land Use Practices

1. **Preserve Open (Green) Space**

Preservation of open space can have a profound impact on a community's quality of life, and therefore a region's economic prosperity. Open space supports smart growth goals by bolstering local economies, preserving critical environmental areas, providing recreational opportunities, and guiding new growth into existing communities. The EMC recommends that the Plan for Sustainable Economic Development (the Plan):

(a) Market our landscape to potential employers as an important quality of life asset.

Unlike many other communities, Broome County offers vistas of hills, valleys, rivers and streams. Many other areas trying to attract development offer gridlock, limited small urban parks, and two-hour drives to recreational activities. Broome County can attract people and

businesses that value the natural environment. The number of people seeking outdoor activities is growing, as documented by the increased use of national parks, ski areas, and river trails in urbanized areas. Having areas that offer recreational activities close to work and home can draw people to this area if these activities are promoted as assets. Methods for maintaining and marketing these assets are a vital part of a Plan in the County. The Plan should help us make use of these valuable landscapes.

(b) Preserve green infrastructure.

Networks of preserved open space and waterways can shape and direct urban form, and at the same time prevent haphazard conservation that is reactive and small scale. These networks, known as green infrastructure, help frame new growth by locating new development in the most cost-efficient places, where roads, sewers, water lines, and other utilities currently exist. Green infrastructure also ensures that preserved areas are connected to create corridors for wildlife and plantlife. These connections will preserve water quality and maintain economically viable working lands.

(c) Encourage urban forestry.

The value of urban areas can be enhanced through the implementation of urban forestry projects. The use of trees and other plants can create cleaner air and provide beauty to developed areas.

2. Strengthen and Direct Development Toward Existing Communities and Brownfields

Smart growth directs development towards communities already served by infrastructure. Thus, smart growth principles seek to use the resources that existing neighborhoods offer and maintain the value of public and private investment. By encouraging development in existing areas, communities benefit from a stronger tax base, closer proximity to jobs and services, increased efficiency of already developed land and infrastructure, reduced development pressure in edge areas, and preservation of farmland and open space. The public sector can also often avoid the cost of new road, sewer, and water networks that are needed in greenfield development.

In addition, focusing development in existing communities can maximize the use of existing impervious surfaces, thereby maintaining local and regional water quality. This can create opportunities for more transportation options, which lower vehicle miles traveled and ultimately improve regional air quality. Existing neighborhoods often can accommodate growth through infill development, brownfields redevelopment and the rehabilitation of existing buildings.

Finally, reusing abandoned or underused properties can help eliminate blight, make the community a more attractive place to live and enhance the quality of life. Wherever feasible, the County should develop land that was previously used for all types of activity - residential, commercial, industrial, and even urban parks and trails. Brownfield redevelopment must be a priority for the County and funded wherever possible.

3. Maintain the Quantity and Quality of the County's Resource Base

New development projects should be located where resources (surface and groundwater supplies, sewage treatment capacity, electric power, landfill space, etc.) are in adequate supply and have adequate infrastructure for efficient delivery. Additionally, by-products of new development should be compatible with the existing resource base and available infrastructure, such that their continued availability or suitability for future users is not impaired.

Owners of water supplies, including municipalities, are recognizing the need to proactively minimize the impact that land use activities have on ground water quality. The Broome County

Health Department has assisted for several years with the development of source water protection strategies. The consequences of pollution are not cheap. Despite today's comprehensive rules on environmental infrastructure and hazardous waste handling, accidents can and do happen. Broome County has a history of public well contamination, much of which is related to industry located in close proximity to water supplies. To avoid this risk, the EMC recommends that new development with the potential to pose a threat to public and private water supply wells be sited where these practices are least likely to pose a threat.

4. Encourage Creative Mixed-Use Development and “Main Street” Zoning

Mixing land uses (commercial, residential, recreational, and others) in neighborhoods or places that are accessible by bike and foot can create vibrant and diverse communities. A mix of uses encourages people to congregate and live in urban neighborhoods or small towns. Old shopping centers and strip malls, as well as downtown buildings have been successfully converted to mixed-use communities. Mixed land uses are critical to achieving the great places to live, work, and play that smart growth encourages.

5. Develop a Comprehensive Vision for the Future of our Rivers

The County should encourage and facilitate participation from individuals and organizations interested in the future of the County's rivers and riverfronts. Our rivers and streams can serve as a focus for recreational activities. Land use planning should recognize this and consider ways to maximize their use. Creating a system of community greenways is an opportunity that should not be overlooked.

6. Heritage Preservation and Cultural Promotion

The County should work to preserve and effectively use heritage areas and reuse historic buildings for cultural arts promotion. This will instill knowledge and pride in the area's local history and provide a lifestyle desired by families the County hopes to attract.

7. Update and Maintain the County's Natural Resources Inventory (NRI)

The NRI serves a twofold purpose. First, it fulfills the New York State mandate to the Council to inventory the natural resources and conditions within its jurisdiction. Second, and more importantly, it serves as a basic tool for all decision-makers—both public and private—to incorporate environmentally sound goals for development within Broome County. Such decisions will not only insure enhanced quality of the environment, but can also result in great economic and social savings by identifying the most functionally appropriate natural conditions for various types of land uses.

8. Employ a Hierarchy of Land-use Options

The following outlines land use options for considering development in Broome County:

- (1) reuse existing, recently vacated, high quality industrial buildings,
- (2) reuse other large buildings,
- (3) reuse previously used, abandoned, or underutilized sites (brownfields)
- (4) expand existing industrial parks,
- (5) develop sites along existing urban corridors in western Broome County where infrastructure capacity exists,
- (6) develop sites along new corridors,
- (7) develop sites that could support package sewage treatment plants, and
- (8) develop greenfield sites.

Appendix A highlights the strengths and weaknesses of these options.

B. Strategies for Intergovernmental Land Use Planning in Broome County

We must recognize that New York is a home rule state. For any plan to succeed in Broome County, it must reflect the different characteristics and needs of the County's numerous local governments. Broome County government has limited ability to implement the Plan recommendations without the active support and participation of local municipalities. We therefore urge the consultants to:

1. Make an Active Effort to Secure Involvement in Plan Development from Key Local Government Officials

The Plan should focus more heavily on demographic patterns, infrastructure, other strengths and weaknesses of local jurisdictions, as well as how site selection/land use recommendations in the Plan will differentially impact various jurisdictions. An economic development strategy that is designed and structured to benefit (and is perceived as benefiting) all of the major jurisdictions is much more likely to be successful than one that assumes that anything good for Broome County will be good for all component localities.

2. Review Existing Comprehensive Plans of Local Municipalities

The consultants should look at local comprehensive plans, especially those that have been or are in the process of being updated for present and future land use components. In making land use recommendations for the County, the consultants should be aware of existing planning efforts at the local level.

3. Foster Best Management Practices for Local Environmentally Sustainable Development

The County needs to increase its efforts to educate local officials and residents on best management practices for development. Having a County plan that stresses principles of sustainable growth as a goal will help this process. The New York State Quality Communities Task Force suggests increasing grants for local governments to be educated in smart growth techniques. Currently, there are a number of barriers that discourage development in existing communities, some of which include detailed zoning plans, government policies and regulations, and taxpayer subsidies that encourage development in edge and greenfield areas. Compliance with typical zoning requirements in edge areas is often easier, because these areas frequently have few existing building types that new construction must complement. Also, edge areas do not have as many residents to object to new construction. Developing communities by smart growth principles may, unfortunately, legally conflict with many land use plans adopted by Broome County municipalities.

The County should continue to work with local officials and residents of local municipalities to:

- educate them on planning and zoning issues,
- stress the need to enforce existing regulations and to limit exceptions and abuse,
- look at legislation relevant to land use concerns,
- provide hands on examples of the advantages of mixed land use and the reuse of existing brown space, including site visits (e.g. reuse of old strip malls),
- assist in obtaining grants to redevelop previously used areas, and
- encourage visual assessments of the community, including suggestions as to how to implement smart growth design standards within municipalities.

4. Introduce Strategies for Local Governments to Work Cooperatively on Land Use Issues

Communities must work with other communities in their region to make open space preservation a reality. Possibly the County could annually recognize the local municipality that did the best job in implementing smart growth during the year.

C. Formal Coordinated Review Process

For larger or environmentally sensitive development projects in Broome County, it would be helpful to have a formal coordinated review process that includes the Planning Department, the EMC, the Health Department and other interested parties. The Health Department, for example, has a wealth of information on historic land use activities, sensitive aquifer areas, old dump site locations, soil conditions, sewer/water availability and other environmental matters. If a potential problem exists with a new development proposal, it would be useful to know about it during the initial planning stages so that mitigating steps can be taken. This need not add extra time to a plan review, especially if done early on, and could help prevent potential problems.

D. Alternative Financing Mechanisms

It is critical that the benchmarking analysis and the evaluation of site selection options devote explicit attention to how various options have been (in other localities) and would be (in Broome County) financed. If successful economic development efforts in peer communities relied on a financing mechanism that is not available in New York State, this needs to be taken into account in the report. Financing mechanisms are important in other contexts as well. For example, if the Plan recommends creation of a formal economic development agency in Broome County, it needs to suggest how such an entity would be funded and discuss how peer communities have funded similar entities.

E. Sustainable Community Indicators

Sustainable community indicators are measuring systems that are developed by members of the community. They are like instrument panels that provide citizens with information about past trends and current realities and assist them in steering their communities on their desired course. They help civic leaders to clarify key issues and prioritize spending. Such indicators can point a community toward specific initiatives or policy changes that will have a real effect on quality of life.

Many of the tactics currently used to measure health and well being are inadequate or even faulty. Broome County needs measures that will help strike a balance between economic, environmental, and social concerns. Better yet, we need to find ways to integrate these concerns, so that they are no longer seen as competing interests. These indicators also need to be linked to performance, so that citizens, civic leaders, and political leaders can hold themselves accountable.

The BC plan employs traditional measures to assess Broome County's economy, demographics, and future trends. Appendix B includes a table that compares traditional measures with sustainable community indicators.

Good indicators are developed by a broad spectrum of community members. Since the *process* of developing sustainable community indicators is just as important as the indicators themselves, it is not recommended that the consultants develop a set of sustainable community indicators to replace the traditional measures they are currently using. Rather, it would be desirable for the

consultants to include in its Phase Two report a recommendation for the citizens of Broome County to begin developing our own sustainable community indicators.

CONCLUSION

The EMC offers this report recognizing that both the natural and developed environment of Broome County must be enhanced and preserved. We recognize that a tension exists between these aspects of our environment, but not an irresolvable one. We offer to cooperate with and assist other organizations in preparing environmental plans and to investigate and recommend sound methods of ecological planning for the use of the County's resources as the Plan is completed and implemented. We look forward to participating in the ongoing work of building a sustainable, quality community.

APPENDIX A

Land Use Options Strengths and Weaknesses for Broome County Siting Alternatives

MORE DESIRABLE OPTIONS		
Options	Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Reuse existing high quality buildings (e.g. in <i>Kirkwood, Conklin, and Glendale parks</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycles existing building structure and land • Access to existing infrastructure • Efficient use of previous public expenditures • Excellent highway access • Minimizes impacts on environment and natural resources • Ready-to-occupy facilities with short lead times for needed renovations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited inventory of suitable buildings • Buildings suited for previous use may not be suitable for desired new use • May tie into overtaxed Binghamton-JC STP
2. Reuse other large buildings (e.g. <i>Binghamton Psychiatric Center</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycles existing building structure and land • Access to existing infrastructure • Efficient use of previous public expenditures • Minimizes impacts on environment and natural resources • Shorter lead-time for occupancy than undeveloped site or site with unsuitable building(s) • Limits greenspace development to localized area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially high renovation and remediation costs • Limited inventory of suitable buildings • Limited range of compatible uses • May tie into the overtaxed Binghamton-JC STP • May lack good highway or rail access
3. Reuse brownfield sites (e.g. <i>for interlinked business park system</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycles existing land • Access to existing infrastructure • Minimizes impacts on environment and natural resources (and may have beneficial impacts) • May tie into Endicott STP, which has significant reserve capacity • May have good highway or rail access • Limits greenspace development to localized area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of contiguous acres is limited • Potentially high environmental cleanup costs • May tie into overtaxed Binghamton-JC STP • May lack good highway or rail access
4. Expand existing Industrial Park Sites (e.g. <i>Kirkwood, Conklin, Glendale parks</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent highway access • Reduces site development costs • Able to tap into nearby utility infrastructure • Limits greenspace development to localized area • Synergies with existing businesses may make such sites more desirable • Little or no environmental cleanup concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited availability of land for expansion • May tie into overtaxed Binghamton-JC STP • Lack of ready-to-occupy buildings • Large (albeit reduced) development costs • Incremental loss of greenspace

LESS DESIRABLE OPTIONS

Options	Strengths	Weaknesses
5. Develop sites along existing urban corridors in western Broome County (e.g. <i>Tri-Cities Airport</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to tie into Endicott STP, which has significant reserve capacity • May provide good highway access • Able to tie into existing infrastructure • Potential to concentrate development at existing buildings and brownfields sites (see option 1 and 3, respectively) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May infringe on floodplains • May lack ideal highway access • May have limited traffic capacity (but could be upgraded) • Potential loss of greenspace
6. Develop sites along new corridors (e.g. <i>Airport Road Corridor</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piggybacks on existing plans to expand water/sewer infrastructure • Relatively low land costs? • May provide good highway access • Avoids costs and liabilities of reusing previously contaminated sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major greenspace impacts (but utility line extensions would inevitably induce more (primarily residential) growth—which would otherwise yield far fewer benefits) • Few businesses need or desire close Airport or Landfill proximity • May require major road upgrades • Long construction and development lead times • Height and other restrictions may apply to buildings (near airport flight paths) • Promotes sprawl
7. Develop sites that could support Package Sewage Treatment Plants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids capacity limitations particularly for the Binghamton-JC STP • Enhances site selection options • Avoids costs and liabilities of reusing previously contaminated sites • Reduced land costs • Shorter sewer lines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sites limited to those in the vicinity of suitable receiving waterways (i.e., those with high assimilative capacities and/or low water quality use classifications) • Sites limited to those that are not in the proximity of a public drinking water supply • Would require critical mass of smaller facilities or one or more major facilities to support package plant costs • Requires other utility infrastructure • Major negative impact on greenspace • Potential negative environmental impacts • Promotes sprawl • Long development lead times
8. Develop greenfield sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids costs and liabilities of reusing previously contaminated sites • Reduced land costs • May have good highway access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Least desirable option • May lack adequate utility infrastructure • May lack good highway access • Negative impacts on environment, natural resources, and quality of life • Promotes sprawl • Long development lead times

APPENDIX B

Traditional vs. Sustainable Community Indicators

Traditional Measures	Sustainable Community Indicators	Emphasis of Sustainability Indicators
<i>Economic</i>		
Median income Per capita income relative to the U.S. average	Number of hours of paid employment at the average wage required to support basic needs	What wage can buy Defines basic needs in terms of sustainable consumption
Unemployment rate Number of companies Number of jobs	Diversity and vitality of local job base Number and variability in size of companies Number and variability of industry types Variability of skill levels required for jobs	Resilience of the job market Ability of the job market to be flexible in times of economic change
<i>Environmental</i>		
Ambient levels of pollution in air and water	Use and generation of toxic materials (both in production and by end user) Vehicle miles traveled	Measuring activities causing pollution
Tons of solid waste generated	Percent of products produced which are durable, repairable, or readily recyclable or compostable	Conservative and cyclical use of materials
Cost of fuel	Total energy used from all sources Ratio of renewable energy used at renewable rate compared to nonrenewable energy	Use of resources at sustainable rate
<i>Social</i>		
SAT and other standardized test scores	Number of students trained for jobs that are available in the local economy Number of students who go to college and come back to the community	Matching job skills and training to needs of the local economy
Number of registered voters	Number of voters who vote in elections Number of voters who attend town meetings	Participation in democratic process Ability to participate in the democratic process

Table from: <http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/Indicators/TraditionalVsSustainable.html>