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What is Happening in Your Community?

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Louis A. Wolfanger, Resource Development and Soil Science

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WHAT IS HAPPENING IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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By Louis A. Wolfanger

Departments of Resource Development and Soil Science Cooperating

In what kind of a community do you live?

- A farm community?
- A suburban community near a town or city?
- A lake or riverside community?
- An unincorporated village?
- A northern Michigan rural community?

Ask yourself:

- What is happening in my community?
- Is it getting better every year?
- Is it going down hill gradually?
- Is it protected against hurtful uses of property?
- What will it be like 10 years from now?

Your community will be different because change is a law of life. Every community in Michigan is changing—some slowly, many rapidly, some for better, some for worse. Your community is not like it was even 5 years ago. Freeways and other advances of the future will bring even greater changes.

Every progressive community deplores its slum-like neighborhoods, its idle run-down farms, its polluted lakes

and streams, the wreckage which unwise use of property leaves behind.

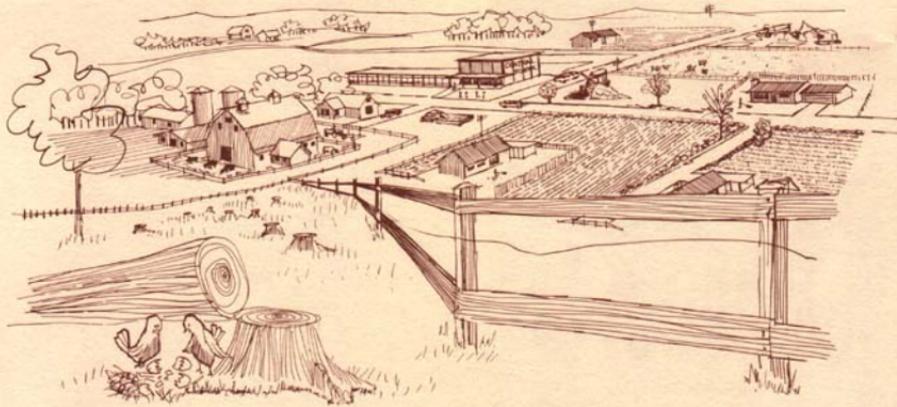
Good uses of land and resources, on the other hand, are assets to a community. They pay permanent dividends to both citizen and community in health, safety, dollars, lower taxes, and overall satisfaction.

Read the thumb-nail sketch of each community in this leaflet. Read especially the type in which **you** live. Perhaps you had not noticed some of the things that are happening, or thought much about them.

Whatever the conditions are, think about them. Do you like them? Are things going as they should? Or would you like to do something about them?

Read also the last page on "What you can do."

Even if you live in town or city, take time to read this leaflet too. Your community is wrestling with much the same changes and problems. Many are even bigger and tougher.



FARM COMMUNITIES

You live in a tranquil, pleasant farm community. There is no landscape more pleasing to your eye than the broad sweep of fields, meadows and woodlands of your open countryside. The scene brings delight to city people too.

Many farm communities in Michigan are changing, however, not only near the larger towns and cities, but also within commuting distance of the urban centers. Even the areas around many small towns and villages are changing.

Many one-time farm communities are no longer open country. Farm after farm is being sold off piecemeal. A number are being sold outright and subdivided.

Every day sees scores of people moving to the country. They are not interested in farming, however. They have a job in town. They want a home in the more open, less congested country. Some want only a lot, some an acre or two, others a miniature farm.

"Overnight" Changes

Each spring the urge to move is especially strong, although it goes on throughout the year. During a season or two of active building, a peaceful countryside can be strikingly altered. The changes are often breathtaking.

First a few houses go up. Then a dozen. Before long they pop up everywhere. They string along the highways. They branch out along side and back roads. A whole new subdivision may spring into life.

Soon food stores, gas stations, trailer parks, motels, eating places, building and garden suppliers, and junkyards appear. Dance halls, night clubs, taverns, and bowling alleys flock in. They spread out along the highways between the farms and suburban homes. They bunch up at road corners. Drag strips and go-kart tracks are laid out.

Many industries are shifting to the country. The country provides more space for low-storied modern plants, for parking, and for yard space. Often homes, stores, farms and industrial plants get all mixed up in one neighborhood.

New Landscapes

In the course of time only a small part of the land may remain as "country," and only part of that may be in farm crops. Many acres become idle or part-time farms as one or more members of the family find work in town.

As productive farms disappear, the community loses one of its chief attractions — its open character, the magic expanse of cultivated fields, and the green meadows dotted with livestock.

Because most of the newcomers are young families, there are usually many children. Existing school facilities must then be expanded, doubled or tripled. Fire-fighting equipment, policing, health, road and other services must be expanded. Taxes skyrocket. Frequently the greater

tax share falls on the farm people, forcing them out of the community, or lowering their standard of living.

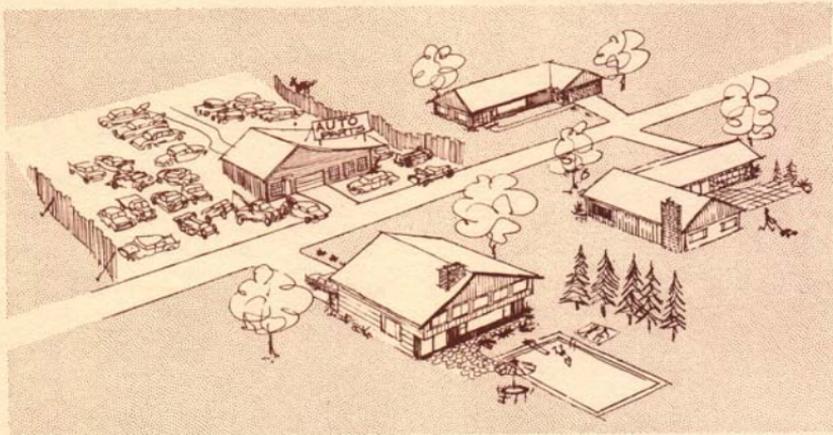
In short, many farm communities that had been better dedicated to agriculture, to water and wildlife conservation, and other open-land needs are being gradually diverted to housing, shopping centers, industry or a scramble of commercial uses.

Of course, changes cannot be stopped. They are inevitable for both distant and close-in farm communities. But they need not be haphazard or left wholly to chance.

They may be directed and made orderly, in line with good conservation principles in the broadest sense of that term.

The thousands that crowd our highways mornings and evenings, on weekends and holidays, and headed for "the country" are signals of changes that will ultimately sweep into nearly every accessible farm community in southern Michigan.

Look about you. What is happening in YOUR farm community?



SUBURBAN COMMUNITIES

If you live in the suburbs or a suburban community within a mile or so of a city, you have probably noticed how more city-like it is becoming each year. If there were no highway markers, you could hardly tell where the parent town ends and your suburban community begins.

The picturesque farms and open country which once attracted you have almost entirely given way to weed-choked lots or long-abandoned fields. Subdivision after subdivision has now been laid out and filled in. Some were designed with big lots and curving or cul-de-sac streets. Others have the old-fashioned grid-iron streets with small lots often too narrow for the elongated ranch-type house.

Because Michigan has complex soils which include many areas of imperfectly-drained land, many home seekers, unknowingly or in ignorance, erect their homes on wet lands. Here they constantly fight damp basements, risky water supplies, poor sewage disposal conditions, or storm waters that flood everything.

Others build on deep, dry sands where garden and lawn are perpetually thirsty, sickly-looking, or subject to blowing.

Hazards Arise

Many varying standards of health, safety, quality and soundness of construction are represented in the

location and erection of homes and buildings. Frequently sewage is discharged into drainage or roadside ditches which then become play puddles for children. Lack of adequate sanitation standards may bring on dysentery or other diseases. As population increases, private wells and sewer systems have to be abandoned, often forcing the property owner to pay for two expensive installations — first his own and then a public system. There is acute need for rubbish and garbage disposal facilities.

Unless regulated, some people build too close to their lot lines. Over-crowding increases the risk of spreading fires. It may also be a constant source of irritation between neighbors. It can pull down the quality of a neighborhood.

Troubles arise over goats, chickens, pigs, cows, rabbits, pigeons or other animals which some families maintain.

Confusion Compounded

The community grows like Topsy. Accidents are frequent to both people and property. As numbers increase, the community soon develops into a confusion of homes, retail stores, garages, beauty parlors, drive-ins, night clubs, taverns, amusements, gas stations, dog kennels, restaurants, supermarkets, cleaning establishments, junkyards, used-car lots and outdoor advertising signs. These often fan out into the more residential areas, except where limited by special subdivision restrictions.

Schools overflow with children and school taxes become nightmares.

Many industries are moving into the suburbs. Formerly unwelcome because of the smoke, dust, noise, odor or traffic that people usually associated with their operations, industries are now generally welcomed and even solicited. They bring added jobs and tax moneys. They usually landscape the buildings they erect, and exercise better control over former annoyances.

Disenchantments

Feelings are mixed as to the attractiveness of living in these half-town, half-country communities. Some love their zip, their newness, their frontier-like atmosphere. Other former city-dwellers do not find them as glamorous as they expected. In less built-up areas, there may be no nearby back-fence neighbor with whom the housewife can chat or share a pot of coffee. Young children get lonesome for playmates. Weeds are a never-ending problem. The big lawn requires hours to cut. Youngsters must be constantly taxed to doctor, dentist, music lesson, or youth club.

Unless the community exercises some controls through appropriate restrictions, everyone may use his property as he pleases regardless of the effect it may have upon others. No one can be entirely sure what may happen next door, or across the street, or in the neighborhood.

Look about you. What is the situation in YOUR community?





LAKE and RIVERSIDE COMMUNITIES

There is no resource like water. It exercises a magnetic power. Lakes and rivers draw people to their borders to live, play, and often to work, as no other resource does. First there are a few scattered summer homes on the well-drained shores at the edge of the woods. Only roughly-hewn out and winding trails lead in from the public roads. But this simple type of development soon changes to a complex one.

Cottages increase until the number is like a small village. Trailers come in and occupy individually owned lots. Someone stocks a few groceries with gasoline service. Another opens a boat livery and has bait for sale. Resorts spring up. Others erect rental cottages or cabins, public garages, restaurants, or refreshment bars. Dance halls, movies, skating rinks, taverns, and night clubs offer indoor entertainment. The commercial enterprises are sometimes grouped together, but are more often mixed in with the dwellings.

Fire standards are generally ignored. Cottages and

business structures are sometimes built of flimsy, easily-kindled materials. Chimneys are erected on insecure foundations. Metal stove pipes may be run through inflammable roofs or walls without adequate insulation.

Buildings are often crowded together on the same or adjacent lots, too close for fire or health safety. Anyone careless with cigarettes, stoves or inflammable fuel, or a child playing with matches can wipe out an entire waterfront in even a modest breeze.

Lots are often too small. The narrow, shallow lots and the lots located on low ground or on skimpily built-up wet lands are critically dangerous to health. They do not provide adequate conditions, area, or space for wells and sewage disposal. Sewage seeps into the ground-water or runs directly into open ditch, lake or river. Wells and privies or septic tank disposal fields are often crowded side by side, if not on the same lot, then on adjacent lots. Well water, especially if from shallow ground-water sources, is easily polluted by seep-in sewage.

Standards Lowered

Health authorities are often amazed at the crowded conditions and the low standards of waste and sewage disposal under which many people live while on vacation or living in a cottage on a lake or stream. These people frequently try to justify the low standards with the explanation that occupancy is temporary — for only a week or two, or for a summer. Or they say that land is too high priced for adequate spacing.

Too high priced for what? Fire and disease take no holiday. They don't stop at small lots. They respect no man, child, or calendar. They honor no single season, month, week, day, night or hour. Health or life once lost can never be recovered at any price.

Because many of Michigan's waters lie within easy driving distance of towns and cities, many people prefer to occupy their water-front cottage as a permanent home throughout the year. This adds further complications. Roads must be kept open in winter. Schools must be expanded. All-year fire protection, policing, sewage and waste disposal must be provided.

Year by year, many of the state's lake and river edge communities are becoming more town-like. Many are losing their peaceful, restful, attractive, and healthful qualities as more people crowd into them — as safe standards of sewage and waste disposal are ignored — as they continue to be a jumble of anything and everything — of jerry-rigged shacks, pleasing cottages and homes, resorts, trailers, disreputable amusements, and all sorts of commercial enterprises.

Much of Michigan's "water wonderland" is gradually becoming jumbleland.

Artificial Lakes

To meet the ever-growing demand for water frontage, parts of many water courses are being impounded to form artificial lakes. These lakes pose an additional problem: responsible maintenance through the years following construction. Adequate maintenance is important not only to all property owners around the lake, but also to those below the retarding dam.

Look about you. How good, safe, sound and orderly is your water-side community?

UNINCORPORATED VILLAGES

An unincorporated village is a miniature town. It is generally made up of less crowded homes that fade out gradually into the surrounding country. It has a few stores, garages and eating places, a school, one or two churches, perhaps an elevator, or stockyard, or town hall, and a few small industries. There is a sprinkling of in-home businesses that offer radio, television, refrigeration, electrical, auto-repair, carpenter, plumbing or some personal service.

Signs of New Life

Many people think of villages as sleepy, stand-still communities. "Nothing important ever happens there," is a common verdict.

Perhaps not very important in some. But have you noticed how many are getting a new store or a new industry or two? Have you noticed the new modern homes that are being erected and the older ones being remodelled? The neon signs? The new modern school?

You don't see these in every village, but you can see first one and then another from village to village.

The changes depend in part upon the location of your village. If you are near a large town or city that offers employment, many of your neighbors are probably going to work there. In turn, the village is attracting city workers who prefer living under its simple conditions. Friends visit them and decide to live there too.

Many industries are seeking village locations. Unincorporated villages have few, usually no, labor problems. They have low cost land, low taxes, and land aplenty. Some of the industries will bring smoke, some dust, some an unpleasant odor, some increased traffic. Yet they will be welcomed. They bring jobs and add stability if they succeed.

How Does It Fit In?

But where are they best located so as to fit in with the life and comfort of the community? Windows are open in summer. Will the prevailing winds carry the

smoke, odor, or dust into or away from the residential areas of the village? A growing village would do well to avoid some of the "messes" that cities are in.

Another problem confronting many villages is the growth of "home occupations" or businesses in the residence areas. One neighbor collects old motor vehicles in his back yard, dismantles them and sells the parts. Another saws and hammers at late hours, making furniture. Another runs a welding shop in his garage. Another raises rabbits, or pigeons, or quality dogs.

NORTHERN MICHIGAN COMMUNITIES

Changes similar to those outlined for southern Michigan's farm, water-side, suburban and village communities are taking place in corresponding communities in the northern part of the Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula. But as yet, they are not occurring to the same extent, nor at the same fast pace.

Basic conditions differ, too, in several important ways. Most of northern Michigan is forest-type land. This land is chiefly in public ownership, and generally dedicated to forestry and extensive recreation (hunting, fishing, camping, and the like).

The total resident population is small. Large areas are thinly populated. Only a few cities have reached even 10,000. Suburban growth around the towns and cities is still largely in its infancy.

New Values

But significant changes are in motion.

For many years, most of northern Michigan was widely regarded as merely "cut-over land," a region of low value. Now, however, it is recognized as one of Michigan's important resource regions. Land in its native vegetation, mantled with trees — even with no more than second growth — and uncluttered by the imperfections and complexities of modern civilization has tremendous appeal. Both city and country people from outside the

Reactions to such home occupations are varied. Some residents approve them. Some don't. Approval seems to depend largely upon whether it is the man with the shop or livestock that is talking or his annoyed next-door neighbor. It is generally admitted, however, that such occupations will in time break down the residential quality of a neighborhood if continued and expanded. Should they therefore be limited in any way? If so, how?

Look about you. What kind of community will your village become in the course of time?



region happily spend goodly sums to make holiday in such lands.

Coupled with the large areas of "wilderness" is a rich endowment of lakes and rivers. Water combined with forest and woodland is irresistible. From time immemorial, the two have attracted men to live and play. Their value is eternal, unreckoned in dollars or by any other measure.

Joined to forest and water are wildlife suitable for gun or camera, a mild summer climate, and snowfall adapted to winter sports.

Interspersed with the forest and recreation lands are "islands" of farm lands. The cleared openings they occupy provide attractive changes in the overall vista of forest-mantled lands. As yet, the farm communities are seldom unmarred by the complex of property uses which have invaded so many of southern Michigan's good farm communities.

Miles or Hours

Thanks to the state's limited access highways, the distance into northern Michigan is no longer tallied in miles, but in hours and minutes. For the Upper Peninsula, the Mackinac bridge also shortens the Strait's crossing from a slow ferry passage to a quick two-minute self-drive.

Ambitious plans are under way throughout northern Michigan for making more extended use of its assets, and attracting more people during each recreational season. Although the 'permanent' population is small, the thousands that flock in every season and weekend are a kind of semi-permanent resident during their stay. And it is people that bring about change!

Plan and Act

Every northern Michigan community — urban, as well as suburban, farm, waterside and village — would do well to profit from the painful experiences of many

southern Michigan communities: give early guidance to the future use of its assets. Fortunately few communities are as yet seriously hurt by a hodgepodge of property uses, poor or unsafe standards of use.

There is still time for determined action. But this will require cooperative planning and action by both public and private property owners, and by small as well as large owners. Action is especially urgent where land borders lake or stream. Here property has often been subdivided into parcels that can only lead eventually into sanitation, pollution, fire and traffic problems.

Are you giving thought to your tomorrow?

YOU MERELY HOPE?

Look about you. What changes are taking place in your community? Is your community continuing to be the kind you had thought it would be? For your home? For your business? For your recreation? To hand on to your children?

You hope it will be!!

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Remember: Changes cannot be stopped. You cannot build a wall against them. Whether or not you like it, your community will be different tomorrow from what it is today. Unless your community is a "dead" community, it will have more people, more homes, more businesses, more industry, more summer cottages, more good or bad occurrences.

You can help guide the changes, however. You can support good and decent standards of health and safety. You can help see that future developments occur in sound and orderly fashion instead of a costly or hurtful manner. You can help see that they fit properly into your community so as to benefit the community as well as the persons promoting them.

Poor or unwise use of resources and opportunities need not be the lot of any community.

Study Michigan's community laws — its planning, zoning and other acts. Learn how *your* community can work out a good blueprint for its development, like the sketch or blueprint you prepared for your home, farm, school, place of business or summer cottage.

Then get your county or township to consider a good planning program, a zoning ordinance, a building code, and other actions based upon the blueprint. The zoning acts are one of the tools which the legislature has provided for putting plans into effect — for guiding future changes. With a *good ordinance* your county or township can set a number of standards for future changes. It can encourage the best use of the resources and opportunities your community has. It can help reduce hazards to life, health and property. It can help stabilize your community.

But don't think of zoning as a cure-all. You will also have to use other laws and tools. You may have to think up new tools. On the other hand, a simple zoning ordinance and building code may satisfy all your community needs at present.

Extension Bulletin No. F-272, "Rural Zoning in a Nutshell," will give you a brief outline of what rural zoning is and how it works. F-273 discusses building codes.

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