



CHAPTER 13: KEY EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

Previous chapters have provided a myriad of information, all of which can inform discussion about land use in Champaign County. The purpose of Chapter 13 is to highlight specific statements that are especially relevant, and summarize the issues that the Land Resource Management Plan will address. Despite many elements of this document focusing on topics broader than those typically found in a comprehensive plan, consideration of the existing conditions and trends are kept within the scope of this planning process.

Selected Key Conditions and Trends

From Chapter 2...

Statement 1: County land use policies are contradictory and some have not been updated since their adoption nearly thirty years ago. The County is without a clear plan to guide development and manage land resources.

Significance: The Land Resource Management Plan can have policies that embrace past ideals while identifying solutions to current issues in a non-contradictory manner. The intent of this plan is to develop a single set of policies to be used to guide County land use decisions and provide an accepted direction for making regulatory changes.

Statement 2: County and municipal planning jurisdictions overlap, which is a challenge to both intergovernmental relations and for private sector development.

Significance: The Land Resource Management Plan can have policies that engender intergovernmental cooperation and strive to reflect the issues, needs, desires, and plans of all overlapping jurisdictions.

Statement 3: State law and the recent Illinois Supreme Court decision in *Village of Chatham vs. Sangamon County* has created new opportunity for serious conflict between County and municipal planning jurisdictions.

Significance: The Chatham decision allows municipalities to essentially annex land anywhere, rather than only within their 1-1/2 mile extra-territorial jurisdiction. Policies established in the Land Resource Management Plan can provide guidance regarding the location of rural and urban development in Champaign County.

From Chapter 4...

Statement 4: Champaign County has experienced moderate but stabilized growth, with a focus on growth in the urban areas, since about 1980.

Significance: While some population growth has occurred in core areas of Champaign County municipalities, a significant amount has also occurred on the fringes of these municipalities, converting rural land for urban uses. Land Resource Management Plan policies can encourage further rural and urban development in areas most suited.

Statement 5: Some unincorporated areas have experienced recent population growth. This is especially noted in townships closest to the larger municipalities.

Significance: Piecemeal residential development continues to occur in rural areas; this type of development can create issues for adjacent lands, the transportation network, services infrastructure, the natural environment, and wildlife habitat, among others. Land Resource Management Plan policies can endeavor to create sustainable developments that are beneficial in many ways to their surroundings.

From Chapter 5...

Statement 6: Onsite wastewater treatment and disposal is problematic on most County soils due to drainage conditions. Also see Chapter 10.

Significance: If several onsite wastewater disposal systems are not functioning properly within a single watershed, collectively the malfunctioning systems can be a potentially significant source of phosphorus pollution to a stream or river. At present in Illinois (and within the County) once private residential wastewater systems are installed, there are no requirements in place that set effluent limits for some pollutants, or that require that effluent be tested periodically to ensure that onsite wastewater disposal systems are functioning as they should. Failing onsite wastewater disposal systems may potentially discharge minimally-treated or untreated sewage, along with disease-causing organisms, directly into the ground or body of water.

Statement 7: Groundwater availability is limited in some parts of the County and can result in challenges for large rural subdivisions.

Significance: Land Resource Management Plan policies and future land use maps can clearly reflect where groundwater issues might affect some types of development.

Statement 8: The Mahomet Aquifer is the single largest source of water for the County and the Aquifer may be reaching its limits of sustainable use. The results of a regional water planning study of the Mahomet Aquifer is expected to be available in 2009.

Significance: Until the regional water planning study results are available, what policies will guide the County's decisions regarding how much and what type of development should be allowed to occur in Champaign County?

From Chapter 6...

Statement 9: Wind energy is expected to be a more important energy source in the future and may have dramatic impacts on the landscape of the County.

Significance: Wind turbines could be considered obstructive to scenic viewsheds in the County. Policy statements in the Land Resource Management Plan can aid in locating these alternative energy generators in unobtrusive yet effective locations.

From Chapter 7...

Statement 10: Maintenance of the rural drainage system in the County continues to be important for both urban and rural areas.

Significance: Maintaining the rural drainage system is required for continued agricultural use and can either alleviate or aggravate potential environmental impacts to adjacent and downstream land uses.

Statement 11: Some rural locations in the County are located more than five miles from fire protection services and necessarily receive a different level of service for fire protection and emergency services.

Significance: Fire protection and infrastructure provision are important in protecting the health, safety, and welfare of Champaign County residents. Maintaining shortest distance to these services promotes both economic and service provision efficiency through cost, materials, and time. Policy statements in the Land Resource Management Plan can suggest future development locations that encourage contiguous growth and efficient growth of services provided.

From Chapter 8...

Statement 12: Park acreage in the County has grown but open space needs have not been comprehensively assessed. There is no current standard for how much acreage is sufficient for a community.

Significance: Land Resource Management Plan policy statements can reflect the desire for having sufficient open space in Champaign County.

From Chapter 9...

Statement 13: The motorized vehicle transportation system became more depended upon between 1980 and 2000, as noted by the increase in the percentage of workers using a personal vehicle for their journey to work.

Significance: As development occurs, some roads are not upgraded for emerging traffic volumes due to lack of funds. Compact development, development along existing principal arterials, and public private partnerships can be outlined in policy statements that will help mitigate pressures on the transportation system.

Statement 14: The greatest volume of vehicular traffic is carried by the State and Federal highways.

Significance: Development that occurs along rural roadways will necessitate maintenance that has a higher likelihood of only be payable by local government entities such as Townships. Policy statements can communicate the desire for creative partnerships that collaboratively pay for such maintenance, and/or for the desire that development occur adjacent to State and Federal highways.

Statement 15: Most rural roads in the County are maintained by Township Highway Districts and have limited capacity.

Significance: Roadway expansion might be necessitated by new development in rural areas. Where possible, creative partnerships with developers or other interests would assist Townships with expansion and creation. Policy statements can communicate the need for such collaborations.

Statement 16: Non-farm traffic on rural township roads in the County conflicts with farm traffic.

Significance: As development occurs on rural township roads, an increasing number of conflicts could necessitate safety measures, roadway reconfigurations, and/or capacity limitations. Policy statements can assist in controlling types or quantities of development along rural roads.

Statement 17: There is a demand for additional recreational trails to be developed in the unincorporated parts of the County.

Significance: Right-of-way for recreational trails can be obtained through donation, purchase, easement, or other agreement with property owners. Some rural landowners do not desire the traffic and other potential issues that are perceived to come with such trails. Policy statements and future land use maps can help indicate ideal locations for connecting county open spaces such as Forest Preserves and municipal parks.

From Chapter 10...

Statement 18: 170 miles of the 400 miles of streams in the County do not attain current quality standards set by the USEPA.

Significance: Water resources will become more critical in the future; it is important to protect and when possible improve upon their quality. Policy statements in the Land Resource Management Plan can help protect the County's water resources.

Statement 19: Air quality in the County currently attains the quality standards set by the USEPA.

Significance: Increased development could change the County's attainment status due to increased industrial uses, increased motorized traffic and other factors.

Statement 20: Approximately 77% of the soil in the County is considered best prime farmland.

Significance: Continuing development on municipal fringes and piecemeal rural development could convert more best prime farmland for urban uses. Policy statements can be created to help protect best prime farmlands.

From Chapter 11...

Statement 21: Commercial agriculture in the County depends upon convenient access to support services.

Significance: Support services include grain elevators, implement and supply stores, freight carriers, and all levels of roads in the county, among other needs. Balancing these factors with other uses is an integral element to effective policy statements in the Land Resource Management Plan.

From Chapter 12...

Statement 22: Commercial agriculture is the largest single land use in the rural area of the County.

Significance: Protecting the resources that contribute to the rural livelihood in our County is integral to maintaining a core element of our County's sense of place.

Statement 23: Commercial agriculture is generally not compatible with isolated rural residential development, which is still permissible under the *County Zoning Ordinance*.

Significance: Land Resource Management Plan policy statements can recommend buffers and other methods to separate incompatible land uses.

Statement 24: An annual average of 563 acres of farmland was converted to non-agricultural uses from 1998 to 2005.

Significance: Of the 4,310 acres of farmland converted into residential uses since 1988, 3,737 of those acres are now single family homes. Most of the homes are located on smaller lots in urban areas with sanitary sewers. The Land Resource Management Plan can include policy statements about farmland protection and residential densities.

Statement 25: Rural residential development appears to have caused about 21% of the average annual farmland conversion (or about 118 acres annually) from 1998 to 2005.

Significance: Development is not only occurring in the municipalities. Rural residential development can create infrastructure, transportation, and other issues for Township governments.

Statement 26: Some incorporated villages and isolated small settlements have County zoning that has never been comprehensively updated.

Significance: Zoning and planning conflicts can complicate decision making and policy statements creation. For successful implementation of the Land Resource Management Plan, conflicts need to be rectified via policy statements and ultimately in zoning ordinances.

Statement 27: The *County Zoning Ordinance* assigned non-residential zoning to some unincorporated residential areas and made them nonconforming.

Significance: Such conflicts prohibit significant investment and repairs in residences and leads to a general decline in the residential environment. Policy statements can help pave the way for mitigating these conflicts.

Conclusion

With the extensive amount of information presented in the Existing Conditions and Trends Report, attempting to identify a responsible and structured path that will guide the County for many years to come may seem daunting. Is every theme significant in our County? Are there topics that deserve more attention than others? How do all these ideas relate to one another? What other information do we need to make informed decisions?

This final chapter of the Existing Conditions and Trends Report highlights some of the more obvious conditions and trends in Champaign County. The following points identify relationships

between issues presented in the existing conditions and a trend report and presents questions that will be answered later in the Land Resource Management Plan.

- Increased development in rural areas may necessitate additional road, sewer, water, and energy infrastructure. What kind of development makes the best use of these types of infrastructure?
- Rural development is not dense enough to warrant mass transit availability; such development is dependent on automobiles. What does this mean for the environment? Does this present safety, maintenance, and other issues for rural roads? What modes of transportation are effective and efficient for Champaign County?
- As development occurs, what happens to soil, water, and other natural resources? Do certain types of development affect natural resources in different ways?
- Current trends show prime farm soils being converted to uses other than farmland. How important is the possibility that Champaign County residents have a decreasing supply of agricultural land for its variety of uses? Is this a resource that can truly be depleted? If so, what does this mean for County residents 20 years from now?
- The County's population continues to increase. What kind of development do we want to occur in the planning area? Does the zoning ordinance permit or oppose this kind of development?
- Employment in the County is decreasing in the farming sector, and there are fewer farms than in past years. What is happening to those employees and that land? Does this trend reflect what is desired for the County's image and well being?
- The drainage systems that serve rural agricultural operations need to continue to function. Can drainageway maintenance methods allow for continued natural biodiversity of a stream and be cost effective at the same time?
- Are there enough parks for Champaign County residents? Other than land donations, are there other ways in general or a means through this plan to increase parks acreage in the county? What kind of development would be desirable around such areas?
- Studies are currently being done to determine how much water we have available for consumption and how long it should theoretically last. Are there enough controls in place to balance the benefits of water-consuming industries versus providing water for generations to come?

Many if not all of these questions have conflicting answers. It is thus imperative that the plan begin to focus on relevant priorities and to finally come to a compromise scenario where all parties can agree that the best planning has been done for the future of Champaign County land use.