



LOCAL GOVERNMENT PLANNING TOOLS

Executive Summary

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Mission of the Clearinghouse

The Growth Management Planning and Research Clearinghouse was founded in September, 1990, under a grant from the Northwest Area Foundation. The mission of the Clearinghouse is to help policy makers and the general public learn about and share information on effective and practical growth management techniques. In pursuit of this mission, the Clearinghouse set out three projects in its initial two year scope of work. The first was to improve access to growth management resources at the University of Washington. This project has resulted in various publications, including a directory of growth management resources, a pamphlet that identifies growth management course offerings, and a bibliography of faculty contributions to growth management research.

A second project of the Clearinghouse is to collect literature and summarize research related to the goals of Washington's growth management law adopted in 1990 and amended in 1991. The purpose of this project is to make the academic literature more accessible to professional and lay members of the community.

The third project in the initial work program is the subject of this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was produced by the University of Washington's Growth Management Planning and Research Clearinghouse, under a grant from the Northwest Area Foundation. It covers the use and effectiveness of growth management tools, such as urban growth boundaries and subdivision controls, by local governments in the United States. The findings should be useful to local governments in states such as Washington that are developing planning mechanisms under new state growth management laws. The complete report and information on individual tools is available from the Clearinghouse.

The information for this report was provided by one hundred and ninety-one jurisdictions throughout the country. It was collected using a mail questionnaire filled out by a senior official in each jurisdiction and from U.S. census reports. Follow-up telephone interviews also were conducted with 100 of the questionnaire respondents. The sample was randomly drawn from a list of all counties, cities and towns in the U.S. Non-response bias was tested for and no systematic differences were found between those that did and did not return the questionnaire.

The major results are presented below. Most results are presented separately for towns and small counties with populations of less than 25,000, medium to large counties with populations over 25,000 and cities with populations over 25,000.

- Respondent Profile

Responses were received from towns, counties and cities with populations from 1,900 to 2,900,000 in thirty-eight of the fifty states. Their geographic distribution is shown on Exhibit A. About two-thirds gained population and one-third lost population between 1980 and 1990. 1980 census data showed their populations ranged from 30 to 99 percent white, had median ages from 19 to 52 years and had median household incomes from

\$11,057 to \$31,000. The size of their planning departments ranged from 0 to 248 employees with budgets of \$0 to \$13,060,000.

- Influence Groups in Local Planning

The media was the only group that is reportedly influential in a majority of all types of jurisdictions. Other influence groups are strong in some types of jurisdictions but not in others. Planning commissions are strong in most towns and small counties and in most cities but not in most medium to large counties. Business groups and neighborhood associations are influential in most cities but not in a majority of other jurisdictions. Courts, environmental groups, state and federal agencies, and universities do not have clout in a majority of jurisdiction of any type, although there certainly are instances where they are important.

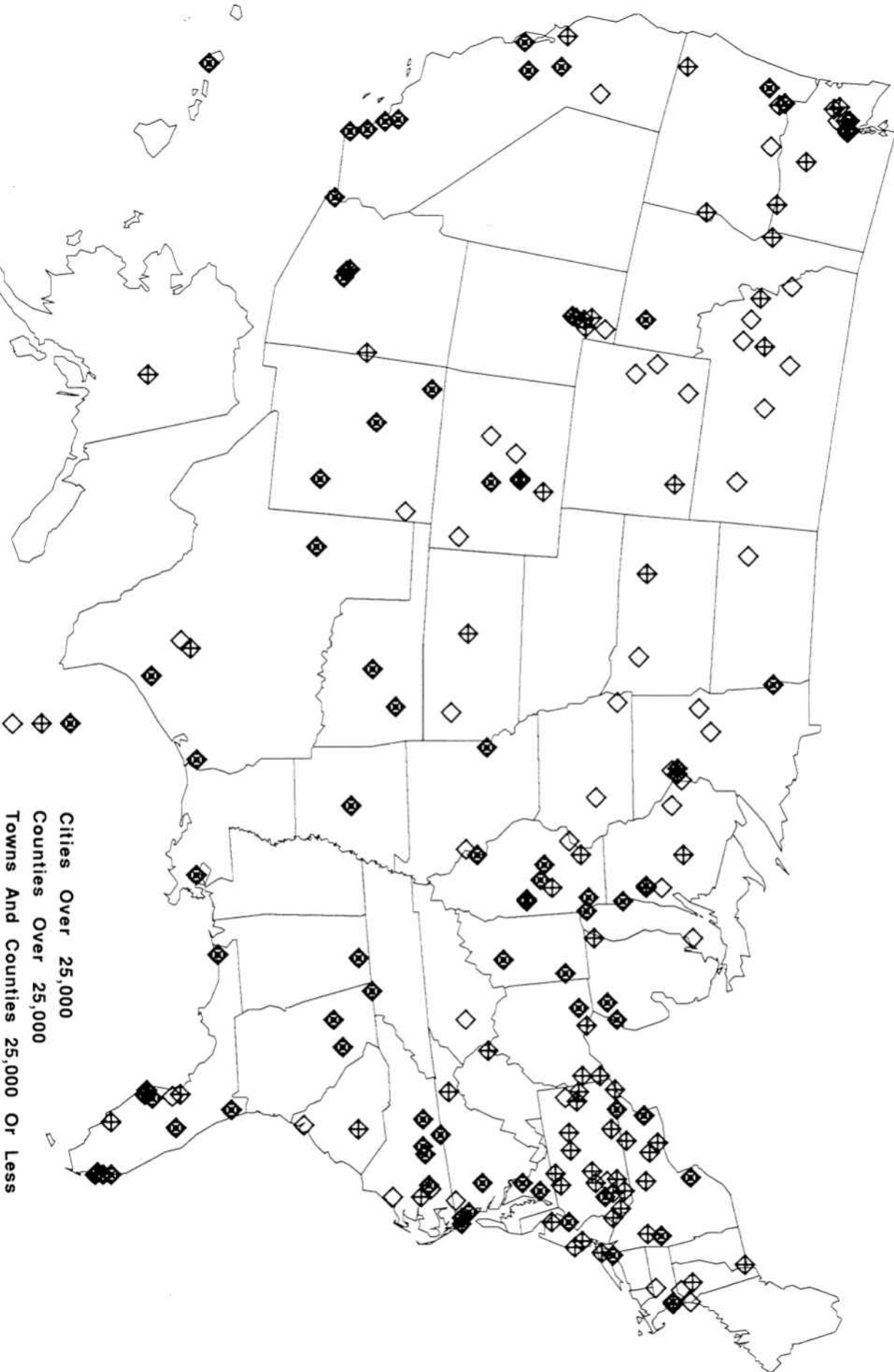
Therefore, in practice the relative influence of the local media and other interest groups in the planning process should be anticipated .

- Quality Of Life

Respondents were asked to rate the current and future quality of life in their jurisdictions using fourteen indicators on a five point scale (1=worst, 5=best). Their ratings for all of the current quality of life indicators averaged above midpoint on the scale suggesting that communities have a generally positive quality of life.

Most respondents also are upbeat about the future. However, some problems are seen as getting worse. The average rating for housing affordability and air quality is predicted to decline in all three types of jurisdictions, neighborhood quality and water quality are predicted to decline in small towns and counties and in cities, and traffic congestion is projected to worsen in towns and small coun-

EXHIBIT A - RESPONDING JURISDICTIONS



ties and in medium to large counties.

Therefore, in practice your community is probably below average if its quality of life in certain areas is below the mid-point on a scale of worst to best. In addition, housing affordability, neighborhood quality, air and water quality, and traffic congestion will be issues for many communities in the coming years.

- Primary Growth Management Problems

There is no single leading growth management problem that is being experienced by a majority of all types of jurisdictions. However, certain issues are being faced by large numbers of communities. The most common leading problems in small towns and counties and in medium to large counties are economic opportunity and infrastructure. Other major issues include housing, traffic, sprawl and water quality. The most common leading problems in cities are traffic congestion and housing. Other major issues include economic opportunity, infrastructure, downtown vitality and neighborhood quality. These findings, together with those on eroding qualities of life, point to economic opportunity, air and water quality, housing, infrastructure, traffic and neighborhood quality as major growth management issues for the future.

Although many of these problems are interrelated and their solutions can be complementary, not all communities recognize their common problems. Therefore, in practice it may be necessary to improve mutual understanding, particularly because cooperation is needed to solve many of these problems. With this understanding, solutions can be developed that will solve several interrelated problems at once.

- Comprehensive Planning Programs

Nearly all communities have a comprehensive plan and most contain elements that are required by the state and adopted since 1975. However, the plans seem to be weak instruments. Most are advisory rather than compulsory, most communities do not have to make their development regulations or capital budgets conform with the plan and most plans do not have to be monitored or updated.

Therefore, in practice your community is unusual if it doesn't have a comprehensive plan. However, even if it does, it is likely that your development regulations and capital improvement program are inconsistent with it and acting to impede its full implementation.

- Tool Use

The percentage of communities that use various growth management tools is given in Exhibit B. Those tools used by over half the jurisdictions are shaded. The tools that were studied include government regulations, such as building height limits, and government taxing and spending policies, such as preferential taxation. A definition for each tool is given in the Appendix. The exclusion of any tool from the study should not be taken as an indication of its use or effectiveness.

We found a large range in the percentage of jurisdictions that use the various tools. The most used tool was height limits, which is used by 91% of the cities. The least used tool is required voter approval of rezonings or development, which is used by only 3% of the medium to large counties. The most popular tools, which are used by more than half of all jurisdictions, are adequate public facilities requirements, planned unit or cluster development and subdivision controls. Most tools are used by less than half the jurisdictions. The most used tools and the least used tools are similar across all types of jurisdictions, although cities tend to use tools more often than other types of jurisdictions.

Some of the more widely publicized growth control tools of the 1970s (e.g., population caps and permit limits) are used by very few jurisdictions today. Other innovative tools (e.g., PUD/cluster zoning and design review) are now used as frequently as more traditional devices (e.g., zoning conditions and subdivision regulations).

There is large amount of variety in both the number and mix of tools used by individual jurisdictions. There does not appear to be a common "formula" used by most communities.

Therefore, in practice you may wish to look at whether the tools used by your community are commonly used by other places. If you're

