



*Woodford County is changing. What shall it become?*

Like other counties in the Bluegrass region, Woodford is redefining itself to remain economically viable and at the same time a desirable place to live and work. This historic place offers a spectrum of ways and places to live, from the blend of urban life and small town charm in Versailles to the quiet rural communities such as Mortonsville. The Bluegrass beauty and lifestyle continues to attract more people to the area, but this growth pressure in turn makes inevitable the need to shape that growth positively.



## *Whose Side Are You On?*

In recent decades, a battle has been waged in Woodford County between two entrenched camps, one decisively pro-growth and the other against it, period.

The unmistakable evidence, the development already built, creates an impression, shared by many in the no-growth camp, that growth automatically makes things worse. Who can blame them for this reaction? Almost all of the postwar development in the region has been built without regard for livability, the quality of the place, or the town-building traditions found throughout the Bluegrass. Conventional suburban sprawl has been eroding the character and setting that attracted families and investment to the region in the first place. It is transforming large stretches of this unique landscape into banal strip shopping centers and undistinguished subdivisions, adding traffic, and harming historic settlements in the process. This has given rise to the understandable, reflexive conclusion that all future growth is bad. Therefore a lot of local energy has been focused on finding ways of hindering growth, and of stopping developers, rather than arriving at creative solutions under which growth can occur in a responsible way. This exhausting approach is neither sustainable, fair, nor affordable. Many pro-growth advocates point to the need for economic vitality, employment, tax base stability, respect for the rights of

## The Geography of Nowhere

Eighty percent of everything ever built in America has been built in the last fifty years, and most of it is depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy, and spiritually degrading— the jive-plastic commuter tract home wastelands, the Potemkin village shopping plazas with their vast parking lagoons, the Lego-block hotel complexes, the “gourmet mansardic” junk-food joints, the Orwellian office “parks” featuring buildings sheathed in the same reflective glass as the sunglasses worn by chain-gang guards, the particle-board garden apartments rising up in every meadow and cornfield, the freeway loops around every big and little city with their clusters of discount merchandise marts, the whole destructive, wasteful, toxic, agoraphobia-inducing spectacle...

The newspaper headlines may shout about global warming, extinction of living species, the devastation of rain forests, and other world-wide catastrophes, but Americans evince a striking complacency when it comes to their everyday environment and the growing calamity that it represents...

Suburban streets invariably debouch into collector roads— that is, highways... If the housing developments in the area have been in place for more than ten years, then it is likely that the collector roads will have accumulated a hodge-podge of businesses: little shopping plazas, convenience stores, muffler shops, plus a full complement of fast-food emporiums...

Here there is no pretense of being a place for pedestrians. The motorist is in sole possession of the road. No cars are parked along the edge of the road to act as a buffer because they would clutter up a lane that might otherwise be used by moving traffic, and anyway, each business has its own individual parking lagoon. Each lagoon has a curb cut, or two, which behaves in practice like an intersection, with cars entering and leaving at a right angle to the stream of traffic, greatly increasing the possibility of trouble. There are no sidewalks out here along the collector road for many of the same reasons as back in the housing developments— too expensive, and who will maintain them?— plus the assumption that nobody in their right mind would ever come here on foot

Of course, one could scarcely conceive of an environment more hostile to pedestrians. It is a terrible place to be, offering no sensual or spiritual rewards. In fact, the overall ambience is one of assault on the senses. No one who could avoid it would want to be on foot [here]... Any adult between eighteen and sixty-five walking along one would instantly fall under suspicion of being less than a good citizen.

Try to imagine a building of any dignity surrounded by six acres of parked cars. The problems are obvious. Obvious solution: Build buildings without dignity. This is precisely the outcome in ten thousand highway strips across the land: boulevards so horrible that every trace of human aspiration seems to have been expelled, except the impetus to sell. It has made commerce itself appear to be obscene. Traveling a commercial highway surrounded by other motorists, assaulted by a chaos of gigantic, lurid plastic signs, golden arches, red-and-white striped revolving chicken buckets, cinder-block carpet warehouses, discount marts, asphalt deserts, and a horizon slashed by utility poles, one can forget that commerce ever took place in dignified surroundings.

—Excerpted from **The Geography of Nowhere** by James Howard Kunstler  
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property owners, and accommodation of the demand for housing and workplaces, but they do not sufficiently distinguish between one type of growth or another. This is a far cry from the discerning vision of the American leaders and developers who originally founded fine towns like Versailles. Developers were once the heroes of their communities. These were careful developers of real neighborhoods with high aspirations. The cherished heart of old Versailles exhibits the design conventions they followed to make lasting human settlements.

Government policy has confusing impacts on the debate as well. Officially, the County has endorsed a controlled-development philosophy in its Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Ordinances and Subdivision Regulations. Meanwhile, the state and federal governments have funded and built road-widenings, highway bypasses and other auto-oriented infrastructure projects that add powerful fuel to sprawl, essentially urging on developers.

It has become clear that “pro-growth versus no-growth” is a false choice, and nobody wins. Nobody likes the protracted court fights. Few Woodford Countians, on either side, express enthusiasm for the unmemorable developments that do squeeze through, albeit more slowly. Developers maintain that if the community would be clear about what they will accept, the industry will deliver it.

### *A Better Way: Good Growth*

There is a third alternative: growth on the community's terms. Growth that makes things better rather than worse, that makes sense for developers, and that is coupled with a long-term preservation strategy *is* achievable.

This Plan rejects the old pro-growth versus no-growth dichotomy. This Plan is about *good growth*.

### *The Process*



The community working together at tables

The debate about growth in Woodford County has moved at last to a solutions-oriented stage with the process that created this Plan. In 1999, the Woodford County Task Force was created and empowered through the Fiscal Courts and Versailles City Council to set goals for positive community growth and undertook a public process that epitomizes the new cooperative spirit in the community.

In May 2000, this Plan was created through an intense design event, called a “charrette.” Over the course of seven days, a series of hands-on workshops were held with the community and a team of design professionals. The team was led by town planners Dover, Kohl & Partners and assisted by Ferrell-Rutherford Associates. Community participants included property owners, neighbors, business people, developers, members of the Fiscal Court, the City Councils, the Task Force, the Planning and Zoning Commission, County staff and others. In this charrette, the participants worked to plan the more urban center of Versailles (both the existing downtown and emerging “uptown”) as well as the rural community of Mortonville.

Two special sessions were held on separate days, one focused particularly on Versailles and the other on Mortonville. Each of these events began with a presentation on traditional neighborhoods and basic urban design principles. The long-established neighborhoods of Woodford County were examined and compared to conventional subdivisions and



peer communities around the nation. The presentations focused on the physical qualities that are important to foster true neighborhoods and a strong sense of community.

Citizens then began designing. More than 100 people at each table session, armed with markers and pencils, gathered around tables, rolled up their sleeves, and drew their ideas on large maps. Later in the day, a spokesperson from each table presented their main ideas to the larger group. Surveys were also distributed asking the community for further input, and a website was established for communication about the Plan.

Throughout the remainder of the week, meetings and interviews were held to gather more information. Several “pin-up” reviews of initial ideas were held as the work progressed. The designers combined all the input from the various meetings into a single plan for Versailles and for Mortonsville. A work-in-progress draft of the two master plans was presented for further input at the close of the charrette, using extensive visuals and examining both “big picture” ideas and technical issues.

Based on the input of the community and the direction of the Woodford County Task Force, this report represents a synthesis of the community’s desires and good planning practice. The final plan and design illustrations incorporate refinements made since the charrette.

### *Different Areas, Different Strategies*

## Strong Opinions

There were many recurring themes that threaded through the citizen participants' comments. Memorable quotes from these conversations include:

- “Save the farmland”
- “Protect the sense of place & history and uniqueness”
- “No-mega-boxes”
- “I want a town center for sitting, walking, socializing”
- “No big 'sea-of-asphalt' parking lots”
- “When green space is gone, it's gone forever”
- “Discount prices aren't everything”
- “Let's not be like Anywhere USA”
- “Promote arts & culture downtown”
- “I would like to be able to walk or ride a bike around”
- “I want my children to want to stay here”

## The Main Ideas

As a result of the information gathering, several principles emerged:

1. Revitalize Downtown
2. Build & Restore Real Neighborhoods
3. Transform the Auto-Oriented Strip
4. Revive Yet Protect Small Communities

This report is divided into chapters that detail the physical areas of the Plan and strategies in four areas of Woodford County. Each chapter contains illustrations of the design details for the plan followed by policy statements and explanations. The four areas are:

- Downtown Versailles:** Revitalize and fine-tune the historic fabric
- Lexington Street:** Transform the auto-oriented strip
- Uptown:** Redevelop Versailles Center with mixed-use neighborhoods
- Mortonsville:** Re-establish strong rural communities

*A national model for vitality, preservation, and livability can be established in this exceptional place through investment, cooperation and persistence.*

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Downtown



Lexington Street



Uptown



Mortonsville



Downtown

Lexington Street



- Civic Buildings
- Existing Buildings
- Proposed Buildings



Uptown