

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Online tool aids in local planning, economic development**

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - Land use and economic development planning takes time and money - two things few cities and counties have in abundance. Thanks to an online resource, they don't have to.

The Local Decision Maker (LDM) is a comprehensive planning tool that provides almost instant data for producing a socioeconomic and environmental community snapshot, as well as a portrait of how that community might someday appear. It was developed by Purdue University and the Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant.

There is no charge to use the LDM, located at <http://ldm.agriculture.purdue.edu/>.

The Web-based resource allows government officials to get more bang out of taxpayers' bucks, said Richard Farnsworth, Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant associate director for Extension in Purdue's Department of Forestry and Natural Resources and a LDM project leader.

"Every comprehensive planning process begins with a community inventory and analysis phase," Farnsworth said. "Inventory and analysis is also expensive, although much of the data is available from public sources. We have discovered that rural communities and counties spend between 60 percent and 80 percent of their limited budgets on inventory and analysis, thus leaving very little for the actual plan."

Consultants often are hired by cities and counties to collect and analyze the data for comprehensive plans, said Christine Nolan, chair of the Purdue Extension Land Use Team and a LDM team member.

"A comprehensive plan for a small or midsize city or county can cost \$45,000 to \$65,000," Nolan said. "Plans for big metro areas and specialized economic development plans, which require very detailed data, can be into the hundreds of thousands of dollars."

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The LDM contains government- and geographic information systems-based data in the areas of population, environment and natural resources; land use and land cover; education; and economy and labor markets.

"The two available geographies are counties and school districts," said Indraneel Kumar, a regional planner at the Purdue Center for Regional Development (PCRD). "GIS-based data for municipalities and townships are works in progress, as are other elements of comprehensive plans, such as transportation, housing, health and human services, and governance."

By choosing the appropriate data, the online program leads the user through a four-step community audit ("Inventory/Analysis"), a community goal ("Vision/Objectives"), plan development ("Alternative Strategies") and plan implementation.

"Planners and government officials will be able to use the Local Decision Maker throughout the entire planning process, from beginning to end," Nolan said.

Nolan described an example of how a county planner might utilize the LDM.

"Let's say they need to determine the location for new schools. This resource will provide information on demographics, roads, taxes, land cover and sensitive areas, as well as aerial photographs. By having that data, the planner then can identify the suitable sites for those schools."

Professional consultants who helped test the LDM are excited about the resource.

"They feel this will boost their capacity and productivity," Nolan said.

The LDM will be updated regularly as new data become available, Farnsworth said.

"This is a value-added resource," he said. "We're adding value through the consolidation, flow and analysis of information."

Purdue's LDM development team included the PCRD, Purdue Cooperative Extension Service and Purdue's Center for the Environment at Discovery Park.

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**Related Web sites:**

Purdue Cooperative Extension Service: <http://www.ces.purdue.edu/>

Purdue Center for Regional Development: <http://www.purdue.edu/dp/pcrd/>

Purdue Center for the Environment at Discovery Park: <http://www.purdue.edu/dp/environment/>

Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant: <http://www.iisgcp.org/>