MEMORANDUM

COUNTY OF ERIE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

TO: ERIE COUNTY LEGISLATURE- Energy and Environment Committee

FROM: THOMAS J. DEARING, Commissioner

DATE: September 28, 2015

SUBJECT: One Region Forward

In response to the request from Committee members at the September 24 meeting of the Energy and Environment Committee, I am providing this summary memorandum and attached excerpt from the One Region Forward final plan. It describes the current status of signees to the Charter as well as information on alternative development scenarios. Feel free to contact me at 858-7256 should you have any questions.

A. CHARTER: There are currently five entities that have signed on to the One Region Forward Charter including the following: Niagara County, University at Buffalo, Belmont Housing Resources of WNY, Seneca Nation of Indians, and Western New York Environmental Alliance

B. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS: The One Region Forward Report presents four possible development models for the Buffalo-Niagara Region over the next 35 years. The first is "Business As Usual," which takes the development patterns of the last 20 years and projects them forward. Three models are then presented as alternatives:1. "Sprawling Smarter," 2. "A Region of Villages" and, 3. "Back to the City." To varying degrees these three alternatives recommend focusing development where there is existing infrastructure, that encourages walkable communities, that is close to existing transportation, that preserves farmland and open spaces, and that does not create situations where the development costs more in infrastructure and maintenance than it generates in tax revenue. How these alternatives "play out" are illustrated in the attached maps from the final report (pages 36-47).

It is important to note that the report does not advocate which alternative is best. In fact, as the report acknowledges, "there is no 'one size fits all.' These scenarios aren't meant to be either or choices." The report, and the charter, does reject the "Business as Usual" option as unsustainable.

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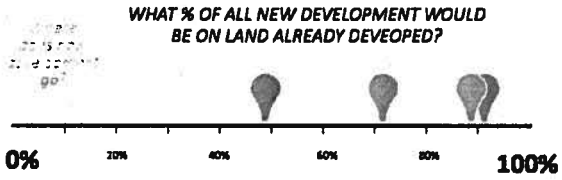
HOW DO OUR CHOICES PLAY OUT?

- *Business As Usual*
- *Sprawling Smarter*
- *A Region of Villages*
- *Back to the City*

What if we stay on our current path?

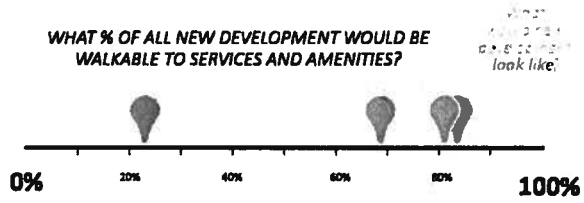
Business As Usual

Will we grow where we've already grown?



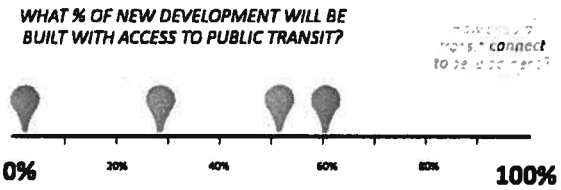
About half of new development would fall within urbanized areas, adding more infrastructure while neglecting existing infrastructure in urban areas.

Will we build walkable, livable communities and preserve those that are vibrant and working?



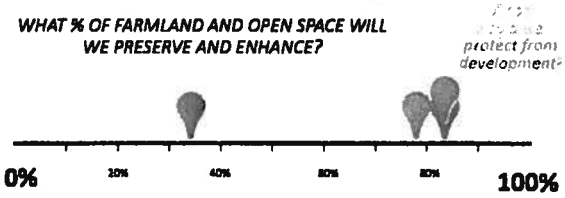
Over 75% of new jobs and homes would be added in low-density, single-use developments where most daily needs can only by accessed by automobile.

Will we better connect our region by diversifying transportation options?



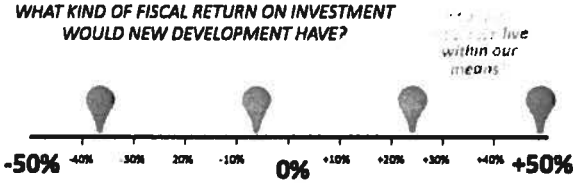
We would drive even more than we do now. The sprawl of homes and jobs would make building and maintaining infrastructure more costly and providing transit service more difficult.

Will we protect farmland, parks and natural areas?



One-third of our current undeveloped, natural areas would remain as farmland and environmental services in rural areas would be replaced by large homes on large lots.

Will our local governments be more fiscally sound?



Housing and jobs would grow revenue on undeveloped lands, but these additions to the tax base would not be enough to cover the costs of extending services to these sites.

What if we imagine our future differently?

Sprawling Smarter

About 75% of development would go in urbanized areas. Most development would be compact, **limiting new infrastructure**, adding a fair share of jobs to "brownfield" areas, and **curbing abandonment in some** neighborhoods.

Most development would be built with walkability in mind, but many new homes and jobs **would be disconnected from communities** that are already lively and walkable.

New suburban development **would be more pedestrian-friendly**, but since access to jobs would mostly be by private automobile alone, we **would drive about as much as we do today.**

"Smart growth" development in the suburbs **would protect a great deal of undeveloped land** even as it provided suburban housing choices on "greenfield" sites.

Though development would apply "smart growth" principles, **new revenues would still not cover the costs of extending infrastructure** to new developments, though it would come close.

A Region of Villages

Nearly 90% of **new development would go in urbanized areas.** Concentrating growth in the region's **treasured villages, hamlets and urban centers would significantly limit abandonment** and development on "greenfield" sites.

Focused development would place new homes by established communities with entertainment and services nearby, making **"walkability" the new norm** in places throughout the region.

High frequency transit service would become feasible in outlying village centers leading to a "hub and spoke" **transit network that would be accessible to half of new** homes and jobs.

Focusing development in villages, hamlets and urban centers would **protect 84%** of the region's prime farmland, natural areas and open space.

Investing in existing communities in villages, hamlets and urban centers would keep municipal finances "in the black" as **revenues would exceed costs by more than 20%.**

Back to the City

Over 90% of **new development would be within previously developed** areas, mostly in cities and older suburbs, **completely revitalizing many abandoned neighborhoods** and **adding a surge of jobs to "brownfields".**

New homes and jobs would grow closely together in cities and older suburbs, making these places even **more vibrant and walkable than they are today.**

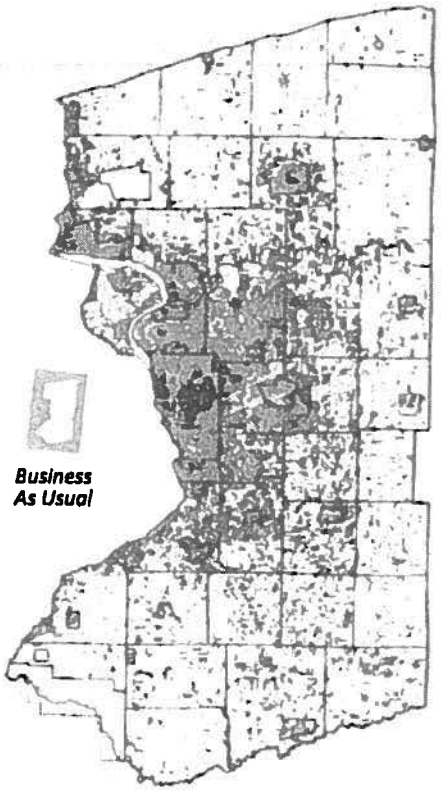
Though new transit stops would be limited, since 60% of new growth would focus around the existing transit network, this scenario would provide **the best transit connections and the biggest drop in automobile travel.**

Concentrating development in central cities and older suburbs would **preserve the lion's share of existing open spaces,** with 90% less farmland being developed compared to the "Business as Usual" scenario.

Focusing new development on the revitalization of central cities and older suburbs would generate the best return on investment of all the scenarios, with **revenues outstripping costs by nearly 50%.**

HOW DO OUR CHOICES PLAY OUT? *WILL WE* GROW WHERE WE'VE ALREADY **GROWN?**

Our Values



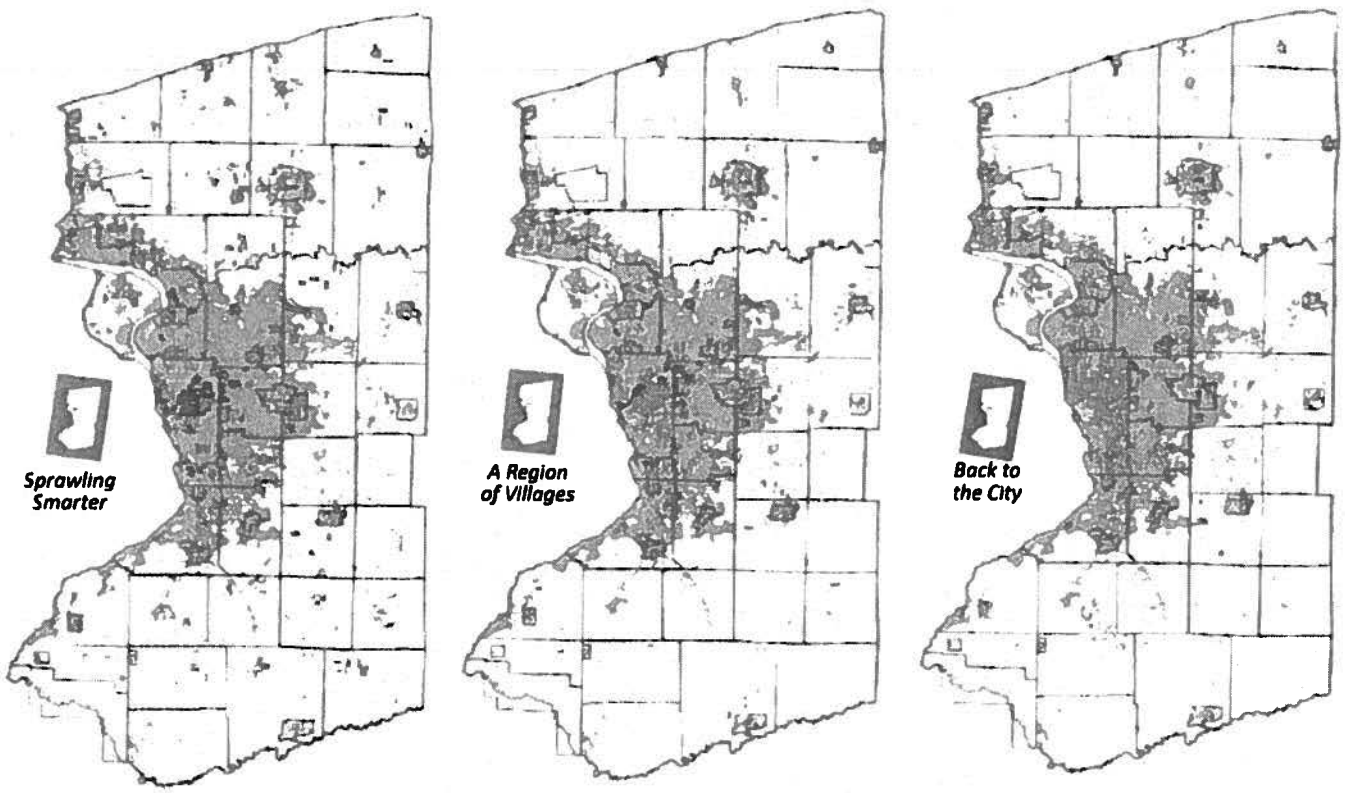
To **grow where we've already grown** means to focus future development around areas that are already developed. This common priority would focus **revitalization of older communities** while **protecting natural open spaces** and **curbing infrastructure costs.**

In the Business As Usual Scenario, new homes, jobs, roads, utilities, parks and schools would be built on the suburban periphery. By continuing to focus development outward, our old urban and suburban neighborhoods would suffer from increased vacancy, abandonment, and neglect. Former industrial sites in these areas would sit idle, further compounding environmental and economic issues faced by residents and municipal leaders.

In the three citizen-created scenarios, a majority of homes and jobs would be located in already developed areas. This would preserve open space and farmland while also avoiding the cost of building new infrastructure. By reinvesting in our existing communities - including housing rehabilitation – we would see fewer homes abandoned, avoid the high cost of demolition, preserve our tax base, and conserve embedded energy. Former industrial sites would see significant reinvestment and become new employment hubs well served by existing infrastructure and our public transportation system. Without the need for as many new impervious surfaces, such as roads, parking lots, and buildings, maintenance costs for municipalities would be much lower while the amount of polluted runoff making its way into our region's watershed would be limited.

Percent of **New Homes** in Developed Area	**37%**
Percent of **New Jobs** in Developed Area	**64%**
Homes Left **Abandoned**	**60,668**
New Jobs Brought Back to Former Industrial Sites	**1,551**
New **Paved** Surfaces (Acres)	**15,785**

See "How Do Our Choices Play Out" in Data Sources and Notes for detailed definitions of indicators and methodology for how they were measured.

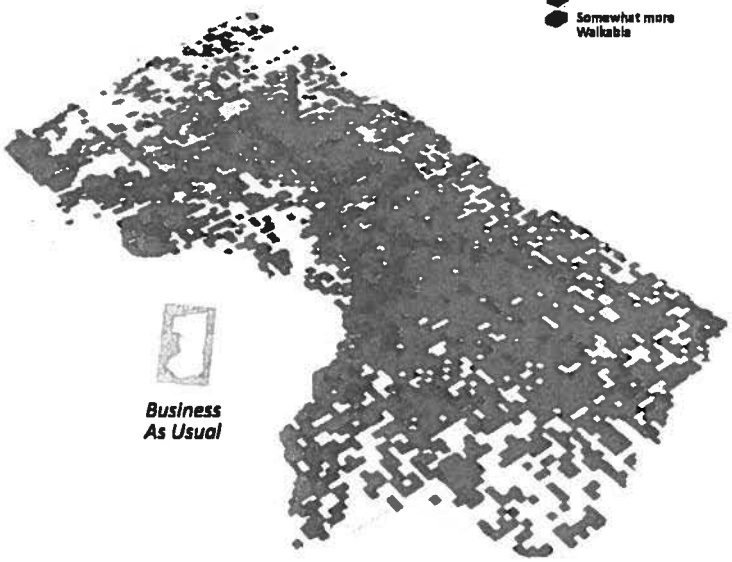


	Sprawling Smarter	A Region of Villages	Back to the City
	66%	86%	88%
	79%	92%	96%
	40,776	38,783	15,778
	17,087	15,996	21,700
	8,482	6,578	3,356

HOW DO OUR CHOICES PLAY OUT? *WILL WE BUILD AND PROTECT* WALKABLE COMMUNITIES?

Our Values

Walkable places are naturally created when homes and jobs are in close proximity to each other.



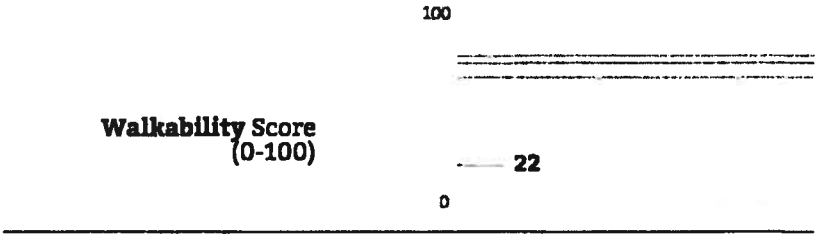
Business As Usual

Building walkable, livable communities means that places would get more compact with a variety of amenities located close to homes. Developing denser places limits outward growth, conserves land, curbs infrastructure costs, and makes it easier to get around without a car.

In the Business As Usual Scenario, a majority of homes would be built in low-density, single-use developments that separate out employment and shopping centers. Limited bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, such as bike lanes and sidewalks would require the use of a car for most daily activities and also limit the effectiveness of transit service.

In the three citizen-created scenarios, a majority of new homes would be built in walkable communities, using "smart growth" principles to create more walkable suburbs in the Sprawling Smarter Scenario, or focusing infill housing in our center cities, older suburbs, and village centers in the Region of Villages and Back to the City Scenarios. A mix of uses, higher densities, and transit oriented development would all contribute to a better pedestrian experience, making it easier and safer to walk to work, school, shopping, and recreation, while also conserving land and encouraging a healthier lifestyle.

Percent of New Homes in Walkable Communities **23%**



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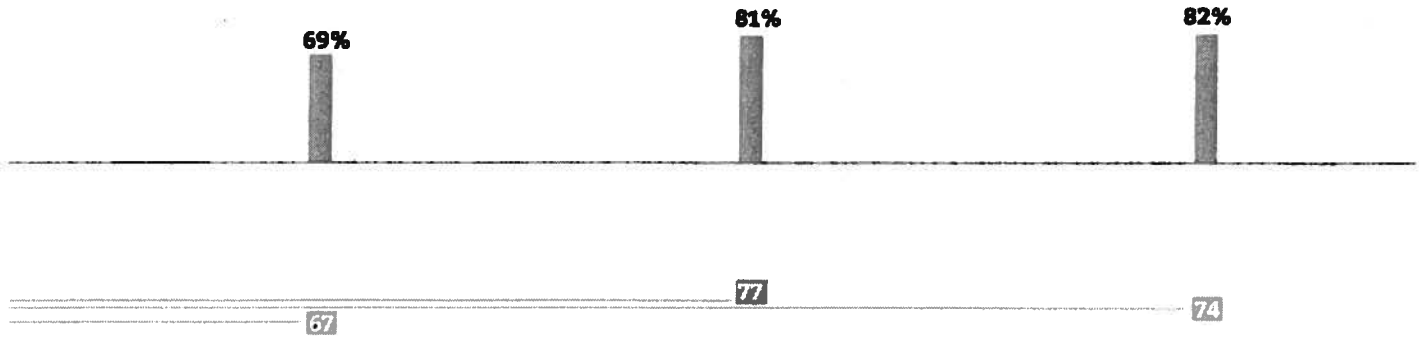


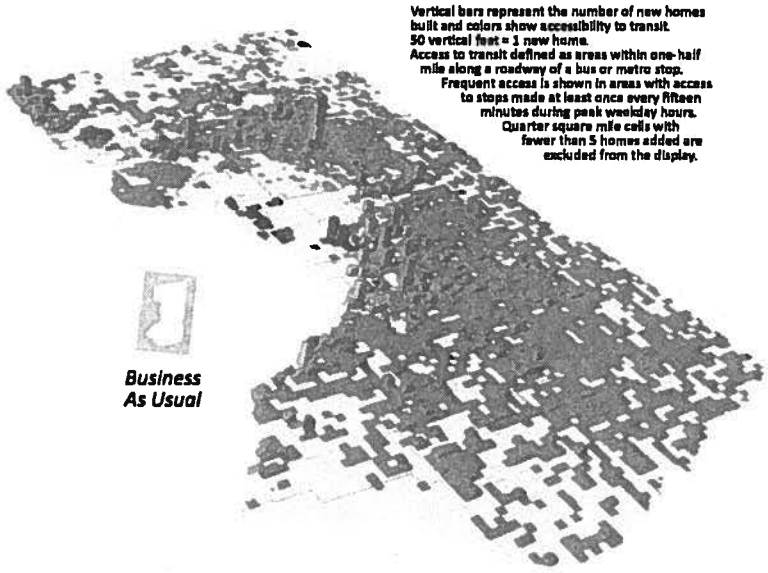
HOW DO OUR CHOICES PLAY OUT? *WILL WE* BETTER CONNECT OUR REGION BY DIVERSIFYING TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS?

Our Values

To **connect our region** means development would be focused around the existing transit network while stops would be made more often and in more places across the region. This approach reduces our impact on the environment, reduces our reliance on cars, and concentrates development in existing communities.

The continued sprawl of homes and jobs in the Business As Usual Scenario would require us to build over 1,500 miles of additional roads over the next forty years. This would greatly increase the maintenance cost incurred by municipalities, as well as the tax burden placed on residents. By living further from our jobs and other daily services, the amount we drive each day would continue to rise. Few jobs and even fewer homes would be built in close proximity to transit, furthering our reliance on cars to get around.

In the three citizen-created scenarios, a larger percentage of new jobs and homes would be served by transit. We would be able to depend less on cars for our daily trips, conserve more energy, and emit less carbon into the environment. In the Region of Villages and Back to the City Scenarios, a majority of new job and housing growth would be in areas already well-served by transit. With more choices to get around we could save valuable time in our daily commutes, save household money, conserve energy, and reduce the size of our carbon footprint.



Transit Proximity to New **Homes**	**1%**
Transit Proximity to New **Jobs**	**4%**
Daily Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Per Capita	**22.7**
Lane Miles of **New Road**	**1,553 miles**

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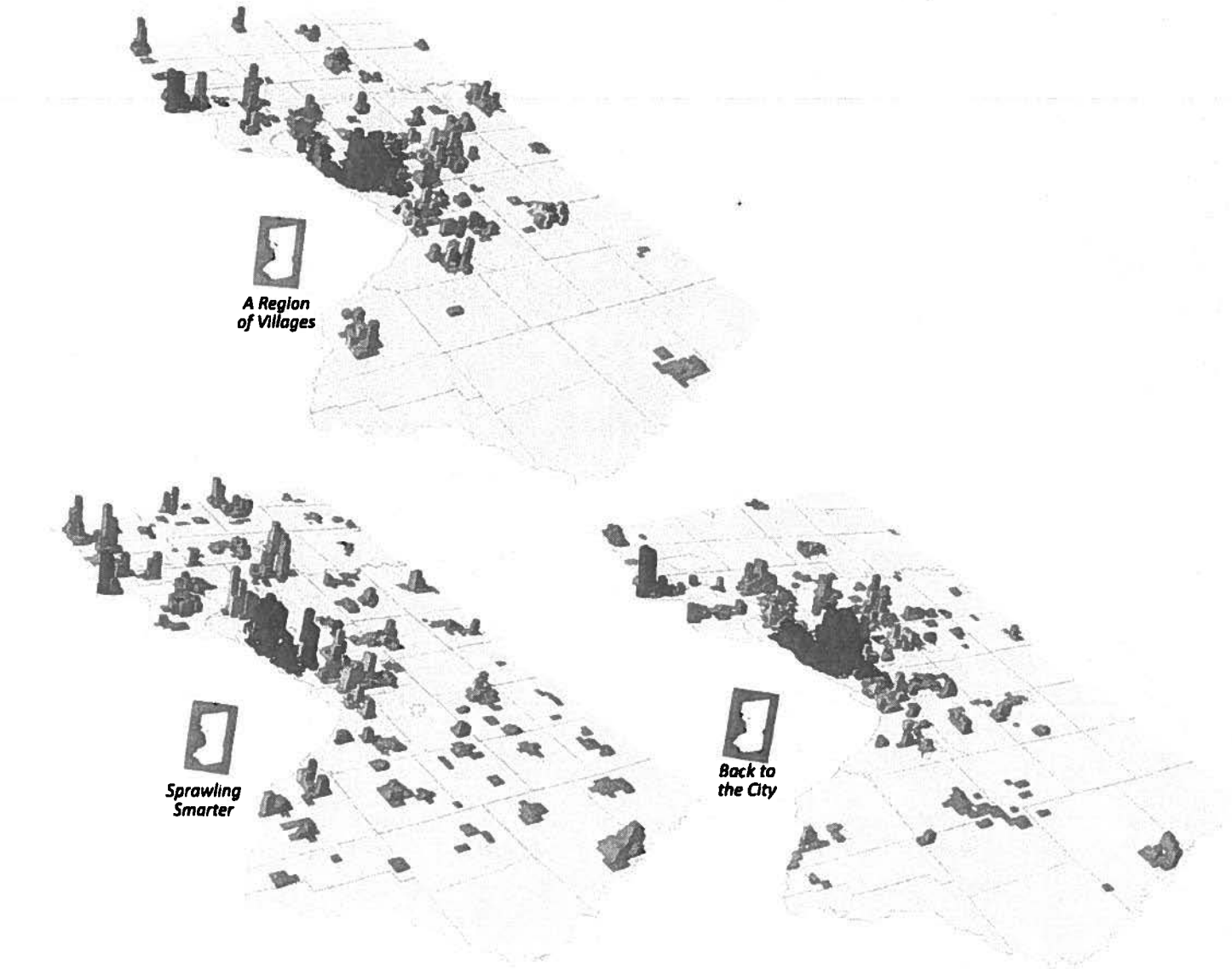
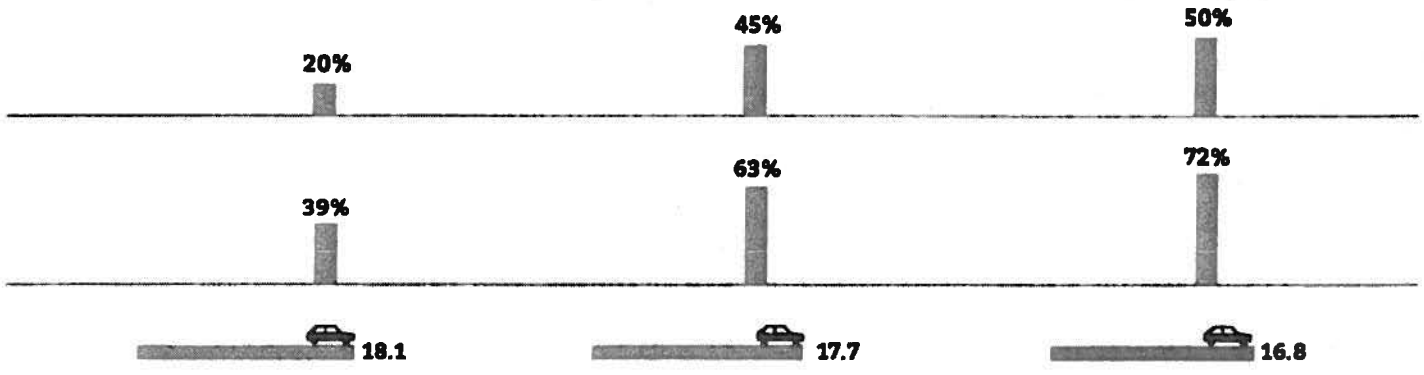
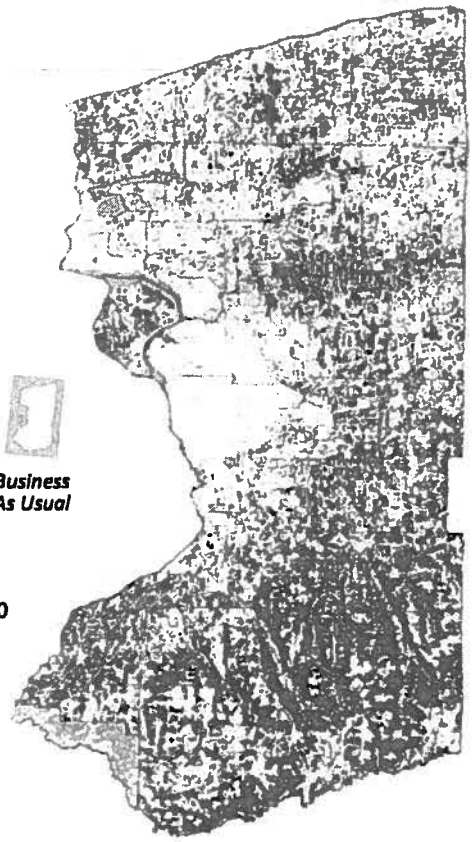




729 miles	496 miles	261 miles

HOW DO OUR CHOICES PLAY OUT? *WILL WE* PROTECT FARMLAND, PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS?

Our Values



To **protect farms, parks and natural areas** means that development would be avoided on woodlands, wetlands, farmland and other open space. This approach would instead concentrate development within urbanized areas to protect the environment, strengthen our local food system, and conserve energy.

In the Business As Usual Scenario, outward development pressures would consume nearly 94 square miles of current and potential prime farmland over the next forty years. New homes in outlying areas would also consume natural habitats, like woodlands, wetlands, and other environmentally sensitive areas. Large homes that require a long commute to work would mean that the average household would use even more energy than is used at present.

In the three citizen-created scenarios, a majority of new jobs and homes would be located in areas that are already developed, lowering the pressure on outlying rural land and drastically decreasing the amount of farmland and environmentally sensitive areas lost to development. Protecting open space, prime farmland and environmentally-sensitive lands has multiple benefits, including preserving scenic values, making our food system more secure and self-sufficient, making fresh, healthy local food more readily available, and maintaining the "environmental services" and habitat that wetlands, stream corridors, woodlands and other open spaces provide.

Percent of **Open Space Conserved** from Development	**33%**
Current and Potential Prime **Farmland Lost** to Development (Acres)	**58,093**
Acres of **Development** on Environmentally-Sensitive Areas	**71,411**
Energy Savings Per Household (Compared to Existing Conditions)	**-2.4%**

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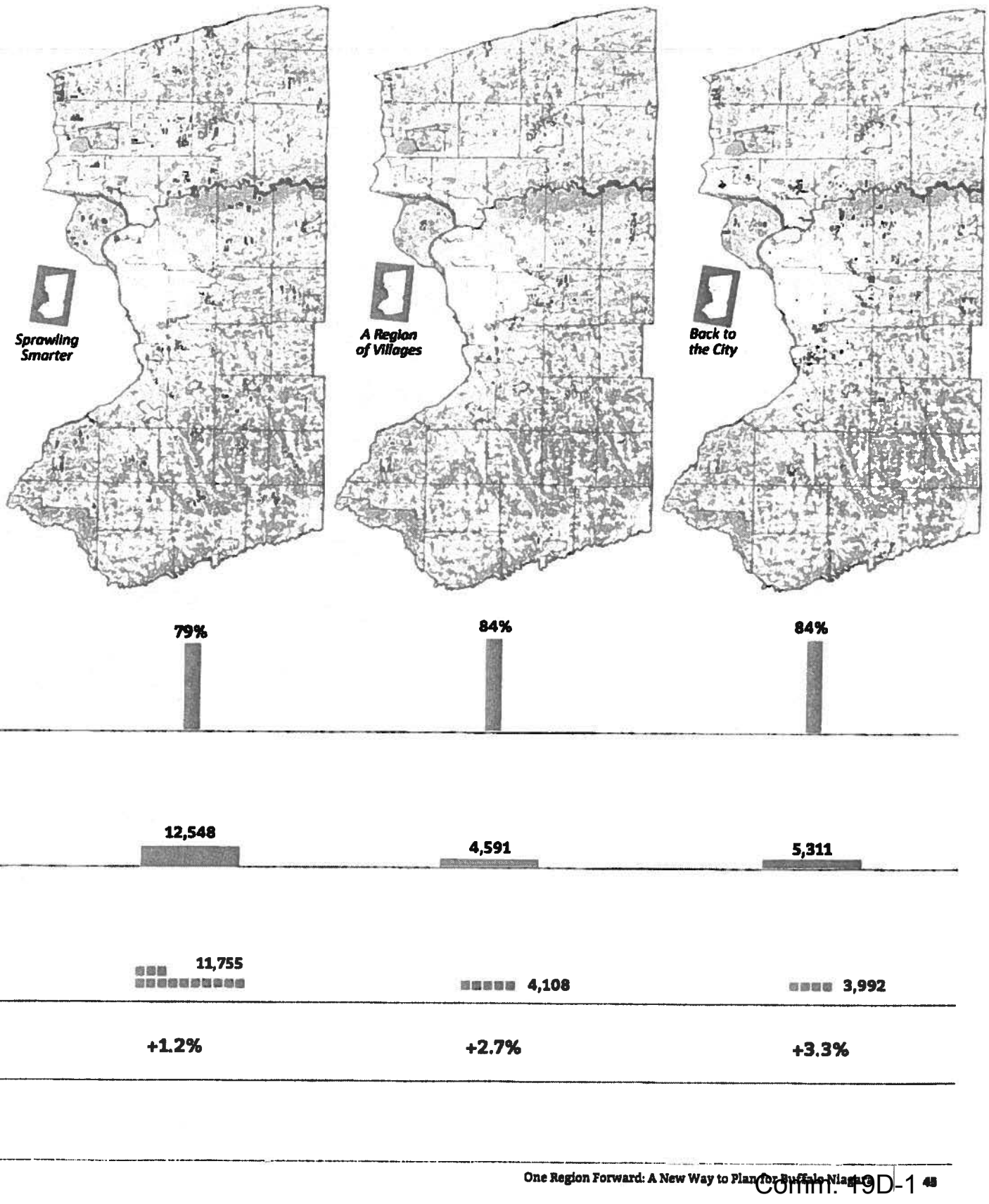

Sprawling Smarter
A Region of Villages
Back to the City
79%
84%
84%
12,548
4,591
5,311
11,755
4,108
3,992
+1.2%
+2.7%
+3.3%

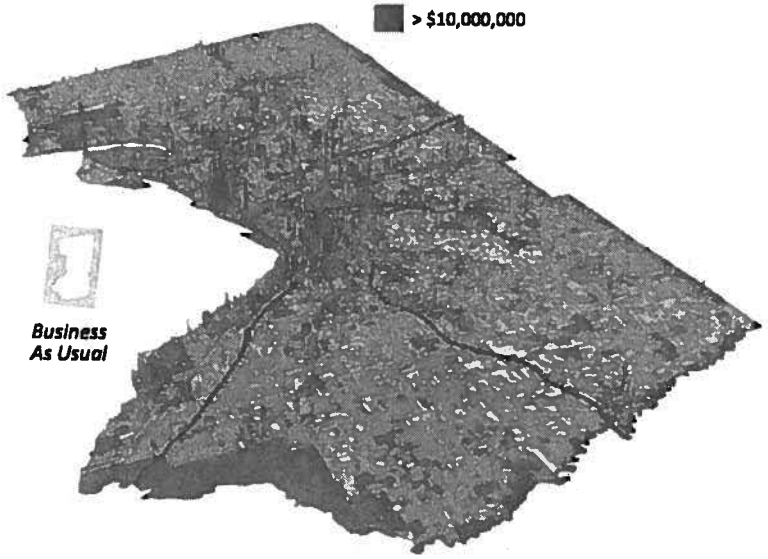
HOW DO OUR CHOICES PLAY OUT? *WILL OUR* LOCAL GOVERNMENTS BE FISCALLY SOUND?

Our Values

Total Property Value per Acre

- 0
- $1 - $50,000
- $50,000 - $100,000
- $100,000 - $200,000
- $200,000 - $500,000
- $500,000 - $1,000,000
- $1,000,000 - $2,000,000
- $2,000,000 - $3,000,000
- $3,000,000 - $4,000,000
- $4,000,000 - $5,000,000
- $5,000,000 - $10,000,000
- > $10,000,000

To have **fiscally sound local governments** means that any new development would eventually be able to pay for associated infrastructure costs through newly generated tax revenue. By focusing development in areas that are already well served by infrastructure, governments can limit their costs and focus investments in other critical areas.



Business As Usual

In the Business As Usual Scenario, the continued outward growth of homes and jobs would require huge investments in new infrastructure. Because lots are larger and homes are farther apart, infrastructure like roads, sewers and water would have further to go and cost more. While there would be an increase in new tax revenue generated, the cost to build and maintain the new infrastructure would be far greater, meaning municipalities would saddle future generations with large, unfunded liabilities.

In two of the three citizen-created scenarios, tax revenues from new development would be greater than the cost of infrastructure. By investing in our central cities, as well as town and village centers, costs are kept down, while tax revenue is generally higher. Even though the Back to the City Scenario generates the least amount of new tax revenue due to some urban areas having a lower assessed values, cost of infrastructure is drastically lower, meaning that surplus funds can be invested in other public amenities. There is also a greater chance that remediated industrial sites would be put back on the tax roll.

Total **Tax Revenue** of New Development	**$11.9 Billion**
Total **Cost to Build and Maintain Infrastructure** of New Development	**$18.8 Billion**
Cost to Revenue Ratio	**-36.9%**

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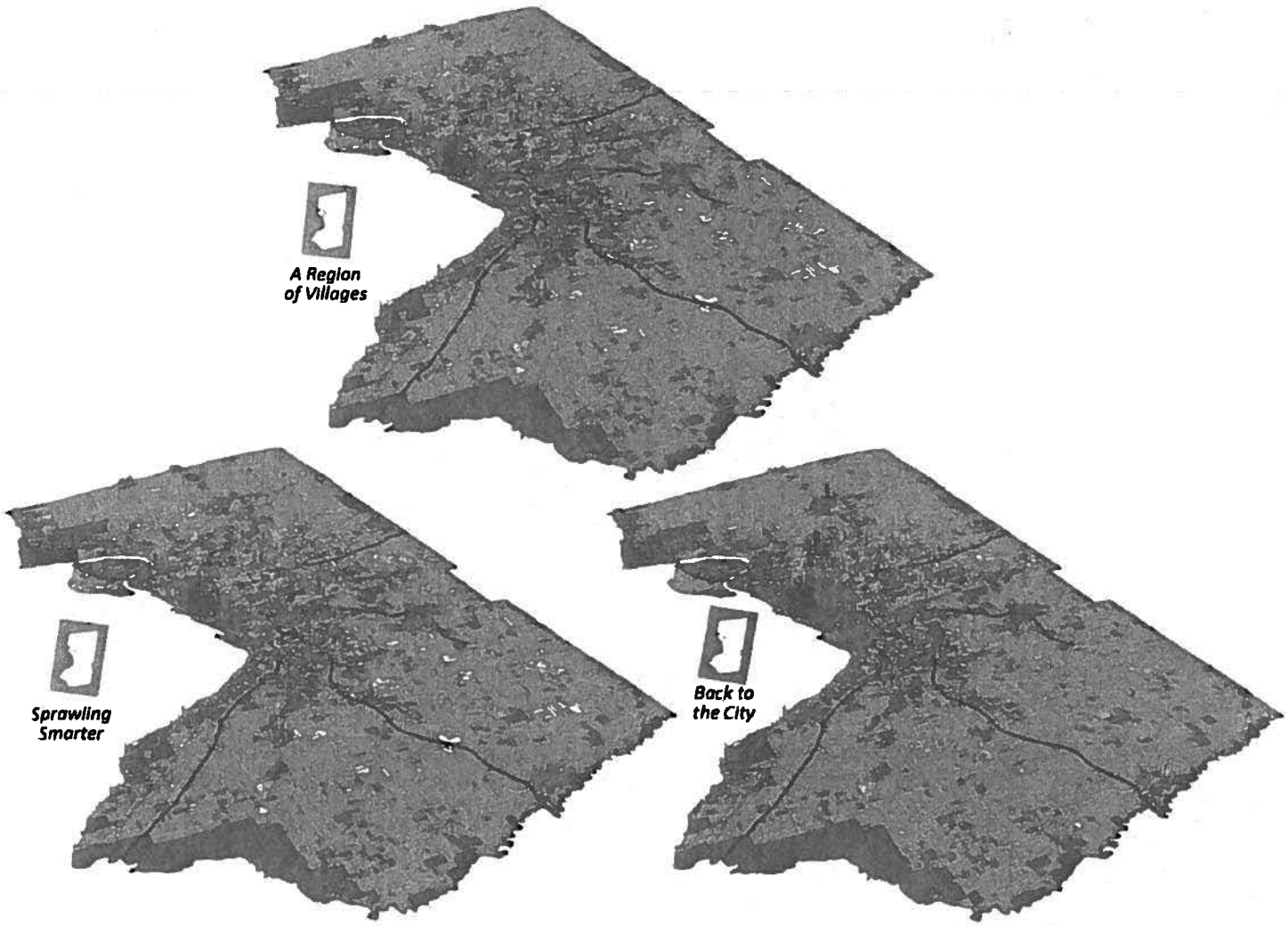

A Region of Villages	Sprawling Smarter	Back to the City
$11.0 Billion	**$12.2 Billion**	**$10.3 Billion**
$11.9 Billion	**$10.0 Billion**	**$7.0 Billion**
-7.7%	**+22.5%**	**+48.3%**