

## *Conclusion*

Retail development can no longer be viewed solely through the lens of developer profits or municipal tax revenues. Whereas retail may have historically been looked at as a separate entity or only mildly related to things such as buildings, economic development, municipal finance, watersheds, and transportation policy, it has become increasingly evident that these things are all interconnected in an incredibly complex manner.

As suburbia and the automobile became a dominant force in the U.S. and the Cleveland region, it must have seemed like incredible progress, as people were able to escape urban pollution and congestion, to live in a big house on a plot of their own land. The personal freedoms granted by the automobile allowed people greater mobility, allowing retail to locate further from the urban core (and away from transit routes).

As time has passed, it has become apparent there are real costs to this pattern of development and that this pace cannot be maintained over time. The global population continues to grow and demand for resources is at an all time high. Land necessary to grow crops, provide habitat for wildlife, and naturally absorb rainfall is being turned into parking lots, shopping malls, and other impervious surfaces. The United States, a country that has historically seemed to have an infinite amount of land, now must come to terms with the fact that land is a finite resource. This has brought into light the concept of sustainability.

The Northeast Ohio region, despite seeing little or no population growth, has not been immune. Unchecked retail development on the region's periphery has continued at the expense of the core. Aging infrastructure goes without maintenance, surface runoff creates flooding and other problems, old retail facilities sit vacant, and Clevelanders spend more time idling in their cars, increasing physical health problems and polluting the air. In fact, the Cleveland-Akron-Elyria area was named the nation's sixth worst air pollution problem among the nation's metropolitan areas in a study done by the American Lung Association (using 2003-2005 data).<sup>331</sup>

It has been stated above that retail must "grow, morph, or die". Northeast Ohio finds itself in a similar predicament, in a rapidly changing world, at a time when the world must find a way to exist in a sustainable manner, Northeast Ohio must find a way to "grow" or "morph" itself into a sustainable region, or it will die.

This means making changes, including enacting some of the policies and practices found in this paper. This means involving the federal government, state government, regional organizations, local governments, businesses, households, and individuals. A more holistic approach that takes into account retail's effect on more than just a retailer's bottom line or municipality's tax base

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<sup>331</sup> Schwartz, Noaki. May 2, 2007. L.A. tops list of nation's most polluted. Yahoo News! via the Associated Press AP, Yahoo! News, May 2, 2007. [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070501/ap\\_on\\_sc/polluted\\_cities\\_11](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070501/ap_on_sc/polluted_cities_11) (accessed May 3, 2007).

must be taken. This means coordinated and improved planning that takes into account environmental, health, and economic concerns every step of the way.

The bulk of the effort will fall to municipalities in Northeast Ohio, as regional government entities in the area have little political power, and the federal and state governments have a much wider scope. Municipalities should use zoning to encourage density, place controls on retail, and encourage LEED certified, pedestrian friendly and aesthetically pleasing buildings. Zoning can also be used in the form of Pedestrian Overlay Districts and Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) to create a more sustainable land use pattern. Wetland setback ordinances should be enacted. Land can also be zoned for agricultural use or as open space. Local officials should also work to remove parking minimums, create Community Benefits Agreements, charge development fees, and stick clawbacks into projects that use public money. Efforts should be made to widen sidewalks, create bike lanes, calm traffic, and plant street trees. Local officials should also make a firm commitment to regional planning initiatives and consider their neighboring jurisdictions and the region as a whole when considering projects.

County government can use its funding to force municipalities to participate in regional initiatives. For instance, the county could make municipalities who refuse to participate in a countywide tax sharing agreement ineligible to receive county funds. Partnerships between counties could be used to set up a regional retail land bank or something similar. Watershed planning could be done at a regional level, including the purchasing of easements. Watershed planning goals must be backed by the force of law (and enforced).

At the state level, ODOT should increase funding for transit, and focus on maintaining older infrastructure over building new. NOACA should follow suit.

The federal government should increase funding for Amtrak and set up a national network of high speed trains. Federal funding (and state in some instances) can also be used to support alternative fuel development, high performance building practices, brownfield remediation, The Storefront Renovation Program, and innovative local initiatives. Land conservation and blight elimination should be priorities. Tax incentives should continue to encourage the renovation of historic buildings and re-use of “functionally obsolete” retail locations, such as the Euclid Square Mall. This should include turning some former retail sites to their natural state.

All levels of government should enact policies such as demanding that all buildings purchased with tax payer money be LEED certified. All levels of government, along with citizens, organizations, and businesses must also begin to think about the effects of the current state of regional retail development and begin to work to make it more sustainable in Northeast Ohio.