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## Area agencies share ideas about growth

"How much of our lives do we spend indoors?" Paul Goldsmith of Greenworks Studio asked a group of county planning partners.

"Sixty-five percent" someone shouted out in a questioning tone.

"Sixty-five? Going once. Anyone else?" Mr. Goldsmith asked,

"Ninety percent?" said another audience member.

"Yes. There's the winner right there," he said. "We spend 90 percent of our lives within buildings."

Mr. Goldsmith, the featured speaker at the Growing Smart Workshop, was trying to highlight one of the fundamental ideas behind planning and building conscientiously: We affect our environments - indoor or outdoor - and they affect us.

"This goes beyond fad or fashion at this point," he said about green building.

Mr. Goldsmith presented his ideas at two workshops Thursday. The morning session was directed at educating local urban leaders and decision-makers. The second program at night was geared toward rural leadership.

Overall, about 60 people from the community converged on Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Motherhouse to hear what Mr. Goldsmith - as well as Brad Garmon of the Michigan Environmental Council, Rob Peven of the Monroe County Planning Department, Monroe County Drain Commissioner Daniel Stefanski and Monroe County Health Department Director Dr. Rebecca Head - had to say about the future of Monroe County.

The focus of the workshops was looking at how just not to grow but grow smartly now and in the future. All of the speakers had suggestions on just how to do that.

Mr. Garmon, the Lands Program director for the MEC, discussed how to lessen the impact developments and individuals have on ground water. Focusing mainly on development density - the amount of homes or buildings in a particular area - he said backtracking wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

"It really isn't revolutionary," he said. "A lot of neighborhoods built around World War II are a model of this. It's traditional, where we used to see high density neighborhoods, with houses closer to each other and walkable streets. Downtown used to be a destination. Many

communities are trying to return to that."

Mr. Peven talked more specifically about Monroe County and land use.

"This is what I call the American dream - Monroe style," he said, gesturing to a slide with an aerial photograph of an agriculture subdivision development, the houses spread out and each homestead taking up at least several acres. "We have a three-car garage with two pickup trucks in the driveway, a large home here, an outbuilding and what's that back here? Another accessory building. This is really typical of some of the land use we've been seeing."

Although the size of the average household has been shrinking, the homes and square footage each takes up has been enlarged. Land in Monroe County once used for farming has been morphing into residential developments, Mr. Peven said. From 1990 to 2000, about 17,000 acres were taken from agriculture and converted to housing.

"That's almost the size of a whole township," he said.

Mr. Peven stressed the benefits of growth. However, when the county has the option to plan for growth, he said, why not do it smartly?

Mr. Stefanski zeroed in on how residents affect the land around them while Dr. Head discussed the effects planning - or, more accurately, poor planning - has taken its toll on individuals.

"A big piece of public health is not just saying, 'Change your way of life,' " she said. "It's also changing the community in order for those people to be able to. We can do this anywhere in Monroe."

The workshop was geared toward jump starting a collaborative planning effort throughout the county.

Partners in Planning, a group of departments within Monroe County, has been meeting for just over the past year. Royce Maniko, director of the Monroe County Planning Department, said the goal of the workshop was to get people thinking about different ideas local government and leaders can start implementing and how to create a comprehensive county plan for the future.

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