

Zoning districts typically delineate the minimum allowable area of new lots (i.e. "lot size"), thus creating a range of possible lot sizes within the various residential zoning districts. Therefore, a range of figures are provided to illustrate this. In instances where only one lot area is stipulated under the zoning code, that figure is repeated to show that the range of lot sizes is limited.

Commercial and Industrial Development

Commercial and industrial capacity was calculated in building square footage, since that is how zoning regulations control commercial and industrial development and, unlike residential lots, these lots vary widely in size, from less than 2 acres for a small retail development to over 100 for large industrial campuses. Again, in contrast to residential development, most people tend to envision new commercial and industrial development in terms of the size of the structures, rather than the size of the lots.

Zoning districts typically delineate the maximum allowable coverage of new buildings in commercial and industrial zones (i.e. "lot coverage"), thus forecasting the "built" square footage of new structures in a particular district.

5. Demographic Considerations

To arrive at potential buildout, two different techniques were used: one for residential buildout and one for commercial/industrial buildout. Not only does this continue the distinction made between the two categories in the calculation of zoning capacity (potential residential lots for residential versus potential square footage for commercial/industrial) but it also reflects the differing quality and comprehensiveness of available data.

Residential Buildout

Calculating residential buildout was a straightforward mathematical exercise taking the forecasted population for a given municipality from the Regional Population Forecast: County, City, Town, and Village Projections for the Genesee/Finger Lakes Region out to the year 2040 (G/FLRPC, 2003) (the years 2020 and 2040 were chosen). The difference between the forecasted population in these two years and 2000 (the most recent Census) was calculated. In many municipalities in the region, population is actually forecasted to decline, making an accurate buildout analysis within the realm of this project impossible. The theoretical implications of population loss is a complete cessation of building and, in fact, the demolition of excess dwelling units. In reality, however, that usually doesn't occur.

Thus, in municipalities where population growth is projected to increase, the difference between present and future population was divided by the average projected household size to arrive at the estimated number of new households in a given municipality. The number of households was assumed, for the purposes of this study, to be equivalent to the number of residential building lots, since generally one household will occupy one lot.

The result is an estimate of the number of new housing units that will be demanded in any given municipality given current trends in population growth and standing local zoning ordinances.

The following series of formulae demonstrate how the residential figures for each municipality (see tables on pages 11 through 46) were determined:

Step 1

$$\begin{array}{r} 2020 \text{ Forecasted} \\ \text{Population} \end{array} - \begin{array}{r} 2000 \\ \text{Population} \end{array} = \begin{array}{r} \text{Population} \\ \text{Change} \end{array}$$

Step 2

$$\frac{\begin{array}{r} \text{Population} \\ \text{Change} \end{array}}{\begin{array}{r} 2020 \text{ Average} \\ \text{Household Size} \end{array}} = \begin{array}{r} \text{Estimated num-} \\ \text{ber of new} \\ \text{households} \\ \text{(dwelling units)} \end{array}$$

Step 3

$$\frac{\begin{array}{r} \text{Estimated number} \\ \text{of new households} \\ \text{(dwelling units)} \end{array}}{\begin{array}{r} \text{Estimated number of} \\ \text{lots (zoning capacity)} \end{array}} \times 100 = \begin{array}{r} \text{Estimated percentage of} \\ \text{lots (zoning capacity)} \\ \text{developed by 2020} \end{array}$$

Commercial and Industrial Buildout

Because the base data of average household size and population forecasts do not exist in a comparable form for commercial and industrial development, G/FLRPC used the data from the five most recent Land Use Monitoring Reports. These reports, produced annually by G/FLRPC, compile all building permits, by municipality, issued throughout the region in a calendar year. The information is requested by commercial, industrial, or residential permit, and square footage of commercial and industrial projects permitted.

The municipal permit data was ranked by amount of new commercial and industrial square footage constructed over the five year period. This ranking was divided into five categories:

- E – Low rate of construction
- D – Low to Moderate rate of construction
- C – Moderate rate of construction
- B – Moderate to high rate of construction
- A – High rate of construction

Therefore, certain municipalities in the region exhibited low rates of commercial and industrial construction activity while others showed high rates of this type of non-residential growth. These growth factors can then be applied forward, to show how much non-residential growth might take place by 2020 and 2040.

Although it was felt that this was the only pragmatic method for arriving at non-residential build-out, there were three main challenges with this method.

1. The Land Use Monitoring Reports only cover a five year period with any degree of comprehensiveness, meaning that trends are based on a short time span
2. Even in those five years, with the most complete response rate ever to the Land Use Monitoring Report survey, many municipalities still do not return the survey or return it incomplete (i.e. simply giving the total number of permits issues and not breaking them down by type or square footage in any way.)
3. Within those short five years, huge changes were seen from year to year in many municipalities. A given town might have 100,000 square feet of commercial growth one year, and zero the next.

Despite these issues, it was felt this was the only practical method to proceed with the commercial and industrial build out. Because of the base data issues, the annual average growth rates for commercial and industrial development were reduced significantly. Even with this conservative forecast, many municipalities still show extremely long build out time frames for commercial and industrial development. This suggests places tend to be “over zoned” for this type of development.

6. Analysis and Conclusions

Based on this analysis, it appears that many municipalities have excess zoning capacity. Many are legally zoned for thousands of residences and hundreds of thousands of square feet of commercial and industrial space. This level of development may not be what the community truly desires for its future.

Communities may want to consider changes to their zoning based on the following:

- Likely growth scenarios (many communities are extremely optimistic with their zoning given current development trends)
- Optimal siting of specific land uses with consideration of constraints, transportation, infrastructure, commercial district viability, fiscal impacts of land use, and impacts on adjacent land uses (including those in nearby municipalities)
- Density requirements, especially in areas served by water and sewer where higher densities should be encouraged
- Promoting walking, bicycling, and transit use through appropriate setbacks, parking requirements, building placement, density, and mix of uses.
- Stormwater and drainage management

In recent years, many communities have rejected the view that growth and development is an unmitigated good. More and more municipalities realize that while growth does add to the tax base, it can also impose costs, financial and otherwise, on the community. Therefore, it is recommended that communities perform a buildout and fiscal impact analysis as part of their comprehensive planning process.

There is a crucial need for better and more uniform land use data. This includes, at a minimum, digital real property parcels on a county-wide level and digital floodplain maps at a county-wide level. An additional, and beneficial, level of data would be to link the land use regulation (i.e. zoning) with the parcel of property. Currently, in the majority of cases, even those with