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For Immediate Release
May 12, 2005

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Local Governments and the Public Take *Another* Hit-- Joint Finance Committee Repeals the Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Law

In a move that is a blow to communities across the state planning for their growth and economic well-being, the Joint Finance Committee voted to repeal the state's "Smart Growth" Comprehensive Planning law and the funding for the planning grants program on Wednesday.

The state planning law, which was enacted in October 1999, requires local governments to involve the public in local planning efforts. Local plans must also address a number of elements, including economic development, utilities, transportation and intergovernmental cooperation. Such plans allow communities to decide where growth occurs, where treasured resources will be protected and to better plan for the cost effective delivery of services like sewer, water and school locations.

"Without the Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Law, communities are free to create plans devised behind closed doors without public input—just like the current Joint Finance Committee and legislature apparently make their decisions," said Steve Hiniker, Executive Director for 1000 Friends of Wisconsin. "This is bad for local citizens and it's bad for Wisconsin."

The Joint Finance Committee also recommended cutting aid to local units of government to develop local plans. The grants program has been enormously popular: during the most recent 2005 grant cycle a pool of local government applicants representing roughly a third of the state's population requested a total of over \$5.5 million for planning activities.

As of this year, nearly 800 Wisconsin communities (towns, villages and cities) representing more than 40% of the state's population have received planning grant funding through this program.

"The Legislature likes to tell local governments to work together to cut costs," said Hiniker. "Well, Joint Finance's actions don't support their rhetoric. Their vote sends a message: 'You should plan together and work together but we won't give you any money, any resources, anything, to help you do this.'"

"We know that planning saves tax dollars," said Lisa MacKinnon, Policy Director for 1000 Friends of Wisconsin. "When communities grow more efficiently and pool resources in the process, taxpayers benefit. In the long run, communities and the state should save money as a result of the comprehensive planning process. The inability of the Joint Finance Committee to see this speaks poorly of their vision."

Gathering Waters Conservancy, an organization that supports the state's land use community, is similarly dismayed. "The smart growth law has given communities important tools to make locally-based land use decisions," says Althea Dotzour, Outreach and Policy Coordinator. "Some communities have invested months of efforts in successful and innovative planning. This vote dishonors local decision-making efforts."

"We call on the full legislature to restore the Smart Growth program and funding for grants to ensure that all Wisconsin communities participate in an open planning process that promotes growth, healthy communities and saves taxpayer dollars," concluded Hiniker.

Six members of the Joint Finance Committee voted against the repeal. They are Senators Cowles, Decker, Olsen, and Taylor and Representatives Colon and Pocan. We appreciate their willingness to stand up for stronger communities and citizen involvement in local decisions.