

Victor Institute for Responsible Land Development and Use

The complexity of land use and development issues makes these issues particularly difficult for local decision makers. When communities face the challenges of balancing several competing interests—private, environmental, regulatory, institutional, and policy—all at the same time, solutions can be elusive. The Victor Institute for Responsible Land Development and Use can offer valuable help.

The Victor Institute plays a facilitative role by bringing together three key groups—the private sector, government agencies, and educational institutions—to plan and implement environmentally sustainable land use and development.

The Victor Institute as a part of MSU Extension also serves a valuable education and outreach function by providing access to a wide range of MSU resources and research-based information. With this information, community officials and private developers are able to make better resource and development decisions.

University-based research and resources can be used to build vital local capacity that identifies potential development sites and various types of appropriate development. This new capacity can then be used to create more viable options and greater choices in making informed land use and development decisions.

“Bringing together the right resources to solve problems at the local level is our primary goal,” asserted Phil Davis, Ph.D., the first director of the Victor Institute. “We want Michigan citizens to enjoy enduring quality-of-life benefits by enhancing the effectiveness of their development and redevelopment processes. More

livable communities and wiser use of valuable natural resources will result.”

Dr. Davis brings more than 20 years of experience in integrated resource management to his new MSU position; he received both his master’s and doctoral degrees from MSU.

The Victor Institute is housed in MSU Extension where a long history of excellence in statewide outreach education resides. In partnership with MSU Extension, the Victor Institute uses an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach to assist conservation of limited land resources, and helps communities reuse and redevelop contaminated or underutilized urban sites. The Institute can facilitate acquisition by communities of appropriate tools, techniques, and processes to plan and implement responsible land use and development.

Given the importance of wise land use planning and redevelopment to the health of the state’s urban centers and rural communities, the Institute plays a pivotal role in marshaling resources, facilitating informed decision making, and providing critical information to local communities.

“The Institute addresses a serious information gap between those with interests in siting new developments, those with interests in redeveloping existing developments, and those with interests in greenfield preservation,” stated Dr. Davis.

In the future, the Victor Institute will develop educational and training programs in land redevelopment for stakeholders and community leaders, and mobilize diagnostic teams to evaluate problems and frame opportunities for responsible development. The Institute will also conduct research on the dynamics of land use decision making and best practices for responsible land use.

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An advisory board of directors, comprised of both public and private sector representatives, drafts the Institute's annual action plans. The current action plan calls for the Institute to identify best practices, sponsor demonstrations, and analyze current research on redevelopment practices that promote responsible land and water resource management.

The Victor Institute was established with an endowment fund that supports research and outreach aimed at responsible land use and development. The goal of the Institute is to educate decision makers and stakeholders about the wide range of alternatives available to local communities as they grapple with complex land use and development issues. The Institute does not, however, take positions on specific developments.

"It is mandatory that we act intelligently and responsibly now on behalf of future generations who will be the ultimate benefactors of our stewardship," Dr. Davis concluded.

The Mission Statement of the Victor Institute

The mission of the Victor Institute is to support the wise and responsible use, development, and redevelopment of Michigan's land resources that respects the value and integrity of natural ecosystems by providing research-based information to all stakeholders in the development and redevelopment processes.

This mission will be accomplished through the conduct of education, research, and outreach efforts to:

- 1. Provide tools and information to enable decision makers make informed decisions;*
- 2. Provide a forum for discussion of appropriate land development and use; and*
- 3. Achieve optimal development through the wise use and allocation of resources.*

Michigan State University Extension *Bringing Knowledge to Life!*

Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) has helped Michigan citizens improve their lives through delivering education services to local communities since 1912. From its beginning, MSU Extension has focused on bringing vital educational programs to the people of the state where they live and work. Field personnel supported by campus faculty serve every county across the state by providing core programs that focus on agriculture and natural resources; children, youth, and families; and community and economic development.

An important goal of MSU Extension is to help people better understand their environments, make the best possible decisions for their use of valuable resources, and enhance the quality of life for families and communities across the state. With personnel in all 83 counties and offices in 82, MSU Extension has one of the most extensive service networks of any service provider in the state.

Extension personnel provide a critical link between the public and the vast resources of Michigan State University, and employ a wide variety of information systems to deliver educational information to communities. MSU Extension personnel work through community groups and statewide agencies as well as enlisting thousands of volunteers to bring knowledge to Michigan citizens.



Phil Davis, Ph.D., Director

Victor Institute Personnel

Phil Davis, Ph.D., a Michigan native, received both his master's and doctoral degrees from MSU (Wildlife Ecology and Resource Development, respectively), and has over 20 years of public and private sector experience in integrated resource management. He is a Certified Mediator and Certified Wildlife Biologist. He is also a member of the Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution as well as a roster member of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Dispute Resolution.

Michael Thomas, Ph.D., has conducted research and outreach on a wide range of issues including environmental impact assessment methodologies; ecologically-based land use planning; GIS-based, computer-aided decision support systems for resource planning and management systems; and terrestrial and wetland ecology and ecosystem restoration. He received his Ph.D. from Michigan State University in Resource Development.

Lillian Randolph, Detroit Director of Community and Economic Development Programs for the Center for Urban Affairs for Michigan State University and Community Development Agent with Wayne County Extension, has planned, coordinated, and implemented community outreach, extension education, and technical assistance that support community based initiatives in Detroit and Wayne County since 1995. She has a master's degree from MSU in Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture.

Mark Brederland, District Extension Agent with the Michigan Sea Grant College Program, has worked in the Southeast Michigan area on a variety of Great Lakes waterfront and conservation issues. His experience also includes a detail with the International Joint Commission's Great Lakes office in Windsor, Ontario from 1992 to 1995. A native of southeast Michigan, he has a B.S. in biology from Taylor University (Indiana) and an M.S. degree in environmental science from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

Jeremiah Asher, Research Associate, concentrates on technologies applied to land use planning and urban development. He has a B.S. from Michigan State University in Resource Development. His current projects include brownfields redevelopment, interactive watershed management, Township Planning System (TIPS), and Smart Places.

Judy von Bernuth, Administrative Assistant, works with all of the personnel to organize and maintain the activities of the Victor Institute. Her experience includes conference planning, fundraising, account management, and general office management. She received a B.S. from Colorado State University.



Victor Institute Personnel
Jeremiah Asher, Mark Breederland,
Michael Thomas, Judy von Bernuth,
and Phil Davis (from left to right).
Lillian Randolph was not available
for the photograph.

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Related Web resources:

www.msue.msu.edu

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