

THE ROLE OF URBAN FORESTRY ON THE URBAN-RURAL FRINGE

HIGHLAND, ILLINOIS

An Abstract of a Thesis

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By

Kevin C. Williamson

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ABSTRACT

The urban-rural fringe is a significant geographical location when considering sprawl. Specifically, in this region it is where human resources are limited compared to the metropolis, yet crucial decisions regarding the future use of land, natural resources, and ecosystem services, on which all economies ultimately depend, must be made. Because of this fact, small communities engage in comprehensive planning on sophisticated levels, increasingly dependent on the volunteer and community development to engender a vision of the future, management plans and implementation.

Historically, in the tide of sprawl, the ecosystem and its undervalued services has been de-emphasized for the sake of economic development in the name of human-centric business retention and expansion, industrial parks, capital improvement projects, and various financing schemes divorced from the economic model nature provides. Because of globalization forces of different magnitudes and subtleties, what is proving to be sound economic and political policy is protection and investment in the environment for the superlative and perfected economic engine of all life on earth that it is.

This applied thesis describes how the community of Highland, Illinois, which lies on the urban-rural fringe of St. Louis, invested in its ecosystem with an urban forestry program. During an 11-month internship, the author participated in the formulation of a Forestry Management Plan (FMP) as a part of a comprehensive plan. The steps took to organize and implement the FMP are described as well as the community, regional and global implications of local governments attaining this new level of economic development and ecological literacy. The implication of this study is that urban forestry must evolve into ecosystem management and that local governments must account for the

values of ecosystem services, such as those provided by the urban forest, in their fiscal year responsibilities. Finally, economic development must evolve into more than the accumulation of wealth.