
**PART II:
OVERVIEW**

OVERVIEW

This section states the basis for updating the comprehensive plan, as well as detailing a number of trends that have impacted the County over the past several decades.

OVERVIEW

PURPOSE

The Comprehensive Plan for Shelby County, Illinois is to serve the following functions:

- I. It shall be the sole guiding document for making land use, zoning, development, or other related decisions at the county level over those portions of the county that are not incorporated, federally controlled or otherwise outside county jurisdiction.
- II. It shall be placed at the disposal of the members of the County Plan Commission for the purpose of providing direction for any decisions that may come before that body.
- III. It shall provide direction for the discretionary granting of zoning variations, special exceptions, rezoning requests and any other changes to the land use in areas under County zoning authority.
- IV. It shall be the basis for considering any future changes to the County's zoning and subdivision ordinances.
- V. It shall fulfill the County's obligation under the State of Illinois Local Planning Technical Assistance Act.

BACKGROUND

This document is the result of an effort on the part of the Shelby County Board to update and revise the County's Comprehensive Plan of 1964, so as to better address conditions facing local government, businesses, and citizens. The original plan was drafted around future implications to the County arising from the construction of the Lake Shelbyville Reservoir project by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE). The 1964 plan expected substantial residential and recreational development to occur along the shorelines of the lake, which would then result in expanded commercial and industrial growth throughout the County. This growth was expected to have substantial implications on county infrastructure, population, and facilities; the 1964 plan offered potential responses based on this scenario.

However, the plan did not anticipate the most significant decision by ACOE regarding the newly completed lake: creation of a permanent greenbelt surrounding the lake area on all sides to a distance of several acres. The greenbelt prohibited almost every type of development and dedicated hundreds of acres of County land to the federal government. As a result of this decision, developments in the County were far smaller than had been expected by the authors of the 1964 document; the existing comprehensive plan was limited as a guide to zoning and planning decisions facing county leaders.

Following a revision of the county zoning ordinance during 2003, the County Board determined that an updated Comprehensive Plan document would be useful in responding to future changes and growth in the County. It could also become a means by which local government would secure future prosperity by better responding to the concerns of local citizens and working to more fully develop local infrastructure and businesses.

PROCESS

In developing this update to the 1964 Comprehensive Plan, it was considered essential to solicit information and insights whenever possible from local residents from all parts of the county. The Board and the university team believed that a relevant and appropriate plan would benefit from hearing the different perspectives that are an inevitable product of so large a geographic area. It was also intended to avoid the fate of the original document, which tended to plan for events and trends that were not actually significant in the county or were overshadowed by unanticipated events.

The team utilized a system developed by Dr. Hopkins to develop a method for the planning process based on (1) identifying important issues to the County; (2) developing options to respond to those issues; and, (3) crafting the results into measures that can be acted on by community leaders and residents. This effort has been formalized into the current structured document that offers both short- and long-term possibilities for action.

Using this framework as a base, the information-gathering process began with a series of local stakeholder meetings. The meetings were designed to provide focus on important local issues with participation from County Board members as well as county officers including the Zoning Administrator and the County Engineer. These were held concurrently with a series of public meetings around the county devoted to understanding the issues of greatest importance to residents and leaders in each of the corners (near Findlay, Moweaqua, Stewardson, Cowden, and Oconee) followed by a central gathering in Shelbyville.

While this was occurring within the county, the team also gathered quantitative data from several primary sources including the Census Bureau, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Bureaus of Labor Statistics and Economic Analysis, and various agencies of the State of Illinois. Additionally, work was completed on a variety of GIS-based visual representations, including current as well as updated zoning maps covering the entire land area of Shelby County, and maps of such county features as population distribution, transportation systems, and municipal boundaries. These maps are contained in this report and are also on file with the County Zoning Administrator.

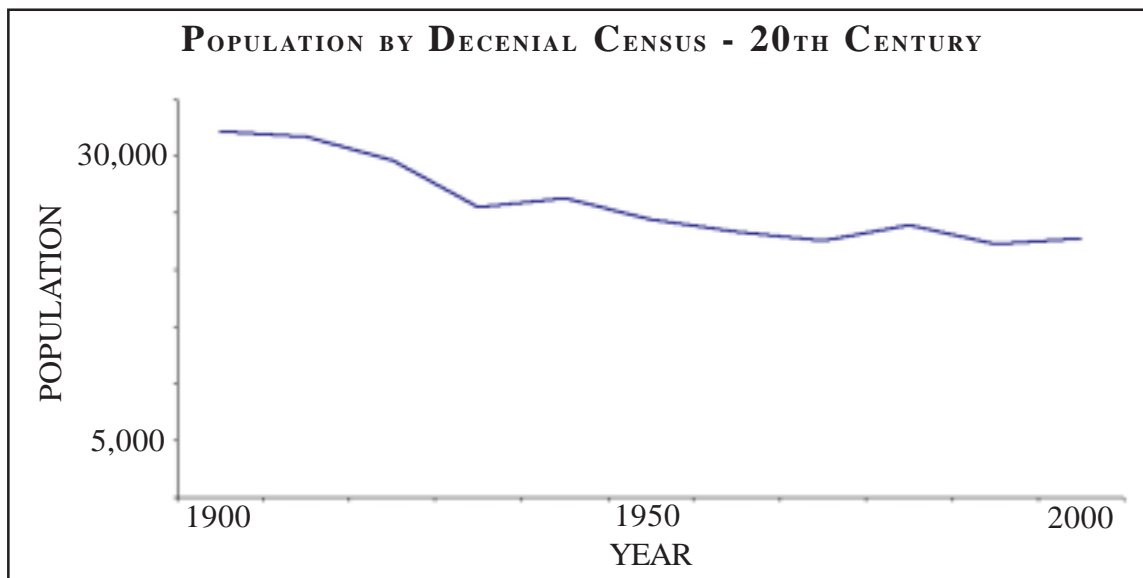
TRENDS / FORCES

Agricultural Consolidation

Over the five year period from 1997 to 2002 (the years of the last two Agriculture Censuses), the number of county farms declined ten percent, while the average county farm size simultaneously increased ten percent. This is a result of the consolidation of many smaller family based farms into a number of larger managed farms. The amount of county land in agricultural production, however, only decreased by one percent. As a result, there is not a significant threat to the agricultural economic base of the county, but the number of jobs connected to agriculture operations may decline in the future.

Population Stabilization

As the chart below, taken from the decennial census over the past century, indicates, Shelby County's population had been in decline until the early 1970s. It has since remained stable over the last thirty years. In comparison with rural counties in other parts of the country, which have lost sizable parts of their population in recent years, the relative stability of Shelby County's population indicates that local residents are committed to the area.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900-2000

Concentration in Towns

Even as the county remains overwhelmingly rural, an extremely high proportion of residents live in towns or villages of at least 250 people. As compared to neighboring Moultrie County, which also has a rural character, a small central town, and Lake Shelbyville, and where 46% of people live in towns of 250 or more people, in Shelby County 83% of the residents live in towns of 250 or more people. This can contribute to resentment and divisions between rural and town residents in the county, as discussed on the following page.

Lack of Lake-Based Development

Due to the placement of a greenbelt around Lake Shelbyville in the 1970s, large amounts of anticipated recreational development around the lake did not occur. This impacted the County's financial position as well as its expectations for job and business growth that would benefit local residents. It also undermined the County's current zoning ordinance and comprehensive plan. A result is that despite having this significant asset, the County has not been able to reap its full benefits.

Lack of Major Infrastructure

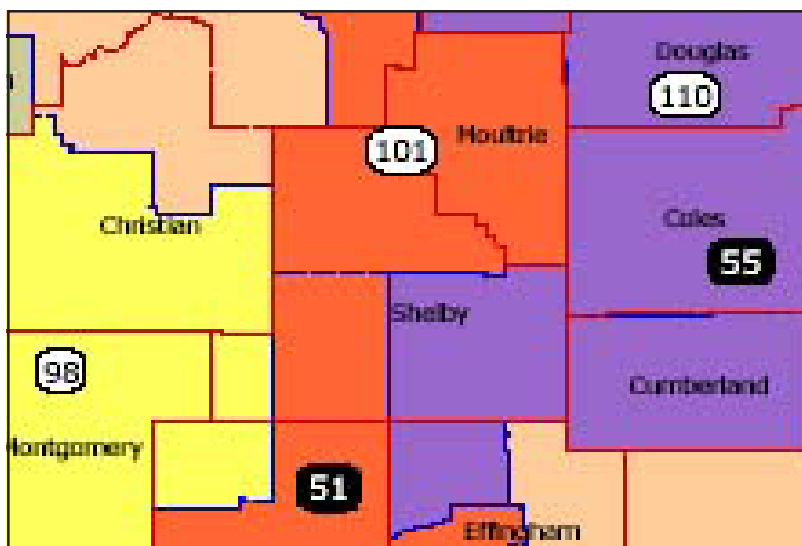
Over the past several decades, economic growth and development throughout the country have frequently been associated with proximity to major infrastructure. This specifically includes interstate highways as well as such things as power generation facilities, maritime facilities, commercial airports, universities, and heavy industries. Shelby County's lack of these kinds of assets has impaired growth, especially compared to its neighbors, many of which have several of them. This is a component of the DiME effect, as explained below.

Intra-County Divisions

There are a variety of dividing lines between different parts of the county. Among them are those between residents of towns and people living in rural areas, between Lake residents and non-Lake residents, between the north and the south, between Shelbyville and the rest of the county, between permanent residents and visitors, and between natives and recent arrivals. Despite these divisions, the County maintains a high-quality of life that is a credit to its people.

Fractured Political Representation and Allocation

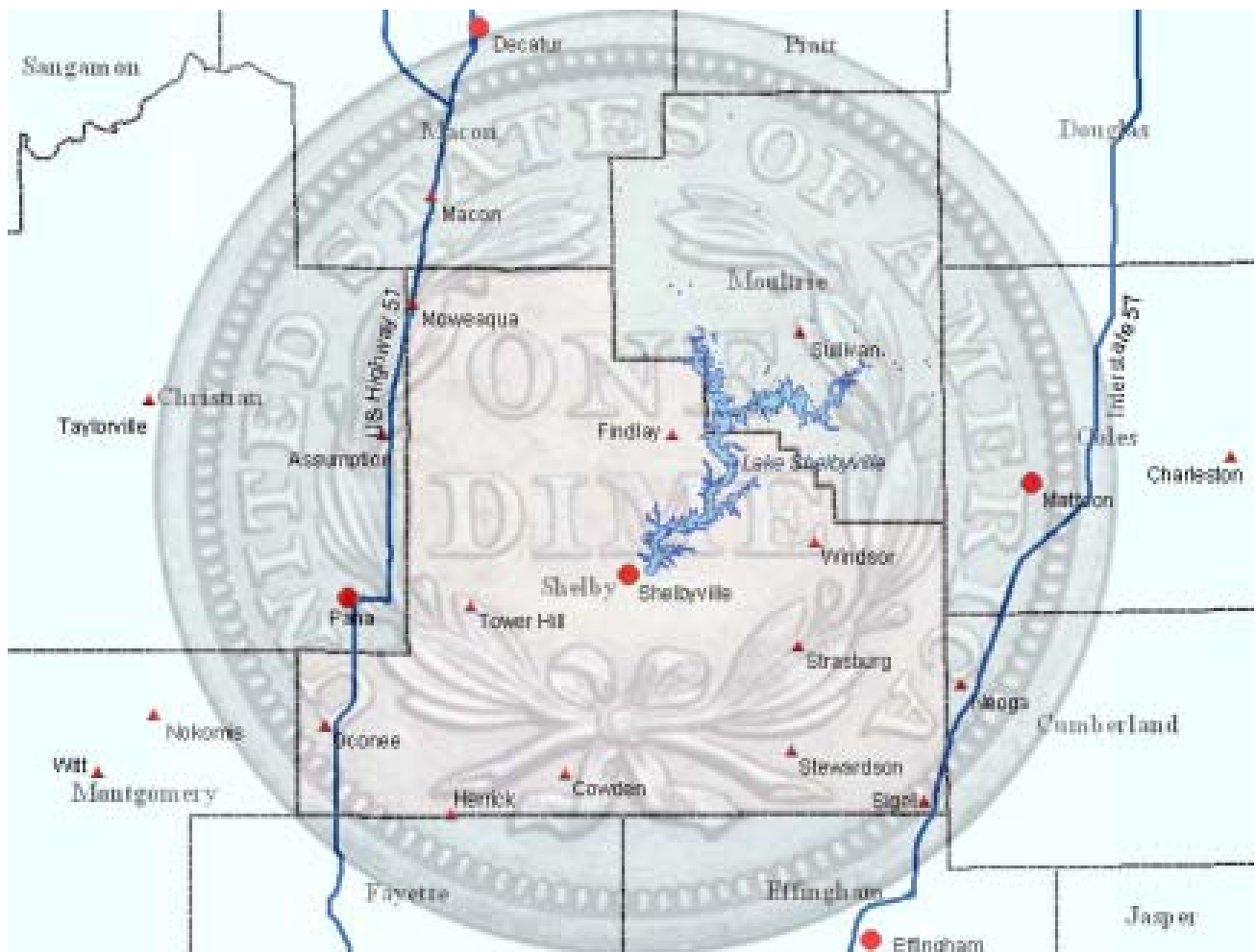
Shelby County is part of both the 17th and 19th federal Congressional Districts. They are also represented by two State Senate Districts and three State House Districts. A map of the state districts is shown below. As a result, the County is not the central focus of any legislator's attention in the state and federal governments. The County is thus frequently overlooked in the apportionment process, which limits public investment in infrastructure and economic development.



Source: The Center for Governmental Studies at Northern Illinois University, 2003. White circles are Senatorial districts and black circles are Representative districts.

DiME

Three of the most significant factors affecting Shelby County's patterns of land use, economic development, and population are not actually in the county. As seen by the image on this page, the cities of Decatur, Macon, and Effingham form a loose circle around the edges of the county, each pulling a section towards itself. Their preexisting retail corridors, light and medium industrial job base, and white-collar offices (along with those of secondary centers such as Pana to the west and Sullivan to the northeast) significantly impair county efforts to acquire new stores or other conventional job creating and revenue-generating economic opportunities. In addition, because each of the communities in the DiME is reasonably close to one or more smaller towns within the geographically large Shelby County, they work to fracture the sense of unity that is critical to creating and executing a viable countywide planning and development strategy. The missing "i" stands for interstate highway, a valuable asset to which all three surrounding cities have ample access. That the interstate system does not permit direct access to the County is a significant factor in a variety of circumstances within the planning framework, including several of the prominent issues discussed in this plan.



Source: Shelby County Working Group, 2004

