

Labor Leaders As Smart Growth Advocates

**How Union Leaders See Suburban Sprawl
and Work for Smart Growth Solutions**

**by
Good Jobs First
August 2003**

Labor Leaders As Smart Growth Advocates

How Union Leaders See Suburban Sprawl
and Work for Smart Growth Solutions

by
Greg LeRoy

Good Jobs First
August 2003

www.goodjobsfirst.org
✉ 1311 L Street N.W. Washington, DC 20005
☎ 202-626-3780 • e-mail: info@goodjobsfirst.org

Acknowledgments

Good Jobs First gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Ford Foundation, which made this research possible.

We also wish to acknowledge the assistance of the AFL-CIO Department of Field Mobilization which helped to arrange the interviews summarized here. Special thanks to the 50 labor leaders who took time out of their busy schedules to share their experiences and opinions with us. Thanks in particular to John Dalrymple of the Contra Costa County Central Labor Council and Don Turner, now retired, of the Chicago Federation of Labor, for their pioneering leadership on the issue.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the many forms of collegial support and inspiration we have received from smart growth advocates, including (but hardly limited to): Smart Growth America, the Growth Management Leadership Alliance and its many state-based affiliates, the Surface Transportation Policy Project, the Gamaliel Foundation and its affiliated groups, the Sierra Club, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Chicago Metropolis 2020, and the Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities.

Labor Leaders As Smart Growth Advocates

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Labor Leaders As Smart Growth Advocates	3
Finding #1: Labor Leaders See the Problems of Sprawling Development	
Finding #2: Labor Federations Have Advocated for Urban Reinvestment Policies, and Half Have Representatives on Planning or Transportation Boards	
Finding #3: Most Labor Federations Have Coalition History with Environmentalists	
Finding #4: Most Federation Leaders See Cumulative Harm to Union Members from Sprawl	
Conclusion	8
Survey Methodology, Characteristics of Respondents, and Project Background	9
Appendix A: Survey Questions and Answers	11
Appendix B: Labor Federation Jurisdictions Covered by the Survey	14
Appendix C: National AFL-CIO Convention Resolution on Suburban Sprawl and Smart Growth	16

Executive Summary

Organized labor is not frequently associated with land-use issues that are considered the domain of environmentalists, such as suburban sprawl and smart growth. However, a survey of union federation leaders – 39 central labor council leaders and 11 state labor federation leaders – reveals that all of them see serious problems in their regions being caused by suburban sprawl, all of them have experience advocating for urban reinvestment policies that have collectively come to be called smart growth, most have coalition history with environmental groups, and most see sprawl causing cumulative harm to union members.

Labor Leaders See the Problems of Sprawling Development

- 82 percent believe there is a mismatch between where most of the new jobs are being created and where most affordable housing is located.
- 80 percent believe that air pollution is a bigger public health problem today than it was 5 to 10 years ago, and 72 percent believe that their health or the health of someone in their family has been harmed by environmental pollution.
- 80 percent believe that some suburbs in their metro area use exclusionary zoning to keep low- or middle-income families out.
- 76 percent believe that their regional infrastructure systems – like roads and sewers – do not treat older areas fairly compared to newer areas, and 74 percent believe that the property tax system is not fair to all cities in the region.

Labor Federations Have Advocated for Urban Reinvestment Policies

- 88 percent have lobbied state or local legislatures for more funding to repair and rehabilitate existing schools, and 62 percent have lobbied for school funding formulas that would improve funding for schools in older areas.
- 84 percent have supported a campaign to stop a factory shutdown in an older area and 42 percent have supported a campaign to save an inner-city hospital.
- 82 percent have helped fight a “big box” retail project such as a Wal-Mart.
- 66 percent have lobbied state or local legislatures to preserve or expand mass transit operating budgets, and 76 percent believe that regional transportation authorities should have more flexibility in how they allocate transportation dollars between highways and transit. In response to a hypothetical question, 52 percent said they believe that one out of three workers who drives to work in their area would switch to transit if the transit system gave them a choice.

- 66 percent have lobbied state or local legislatures to increase funding for the rebuilding of aging infrastructure, and 42 percent have lobbied for more funding to clean up brownfields (contaminated land).
- 48 percent have sponsored or participated in affordable housing construction.

Most Labor Federations Have Coalition History with Environmentalists

- 62 percent have participated in coalitions with environmental groups on environmental issues.
- 68 percent have worked on political campaigns with environmental groups.
- 18 percent personally belong to one or more environmental groups, more than U. S. adults generally.

Most Federation Leaders See Cumulative Harm to Union Members from Sprawl

- 76 percent believe that the dispersion of jobs into the suburbs is undermining union density in their area (i.e., the share of the workforce that is unionized).
- 78 percent think that the growing political power of the suburbs – especially with redistricting based upon the 2000 census – is bad for their state’s working families political agenda.
- 72 percent have cities in their metro area that are pushing for privatization of public services because they have lost a lot of their tax base.

The survey is not based upon a random sample and is not a poll of union leaders in general. It is significant, however, because it collects the experiences and opinions of 50 union *federation leaders*, that is, officers of central labor councils (which are metropolitan bodies composed of local unions in one or more counties) and state labor federations. An emphasis was placed on urbanized areas where the greatest numbers of union members work and reside but not exclusively; some respondents are in “right to work” states with low rates of unionization. The leaders come from a diverse range of unions – 23 in all – and have held office in the federations for an average of 9 years (7 years median) in addition to their own pre-federation years of experience and leadership.

Federations are the vehicle through which local labor unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO formulate joint positions on public issues and advocate for them. As such, these federations embody the distilled political positions of millions of organized workers. And federation leaders, because of their breadth of experience in representing union members’ many interests, are influential opinion leaders within organized labor.

Labor Leaders As Smart Growth Advocates

Fifty detailed interviews with union federation leaders – 39 central labor council leaders and 11 state labor federation leaders – reveal that all of them see serious problems in their regions that are caused by suburban sprawl, all of them have experience advocating for urban reinvestment policies that have collectively come to be called “smart growth,” most have coalition history with environmental groups, and most see sprawl causing cumulative harm to union members.

Finding #1: Labor Leaders See the Problems of Sprawling Development

Asked about many of the key issues associated with sprawling regional development patterns, labor leaders demonstrated a keen sense of the problems. All of the respondents reported symptoms of sprawl in their metro areas.

- 82 percent believe there is a mismatch between where most of the new jobs are being created, and where most of the affordable housing exists. *(A jobs-housing mismatch is a common symptom of sprawl, paralleling the spatial mismatch between concentrated unemployment and poverty in urban cores and high job growth in distant suburban fringes.)*
- 80 percent believe that air pollution is a bigger public health problem today than it was 5 to 10 years ago, and 72 percent believe that their health or the health of someone in their family has been harmed by environmental pollution. *(Low-density sprawling growth, including distant jobs, means a smaller share of workers uses public transportation and average commutes grow longer, causing more air pollution.)*
- 80 percent believe that some suburbs in their metro area use exclusionary zoning to keep low- or middle-income families out. *(Such practices, historically driven by racial politics and suburban desires to limit their costly school-age populations, also result in low-density land use and auto dependency.)*
- 76 percent believe that their regional infrastructure systems – like roads and sewers – do not treat older areas fairly compared to newer areas. *(Newer suburban areas have been favored historically by federal and state highway policies, and newer areas rarely pay the true incremental costs of new water, sewer and utility lines.)*
- 74 percent believe that the property tax system is not fair to all cities in the

region. *(The erosion of tax revenues caused by urban disinvestment means older areas have to raise their tax rates to sustain services. That favors property owners in newer areas, who have lower rates.)*

- 70 percent say that when cities in their metro area compete for jobs and tax base, newer areas have unfair advantages. *(The cumulative effect of sprawl is to create a playing field heavily tilted in favor of newer suburbs.)*

One West Coast leader spoke passionately about the need for a *regional* perspective. “We need to forget about our boundaries and look upon [transportation] as an area that needs the utmost cooperation,” he said. “If your big toe hurts, you hurt all over. Forget about who gets credit for it – just get it done!”

Finding #2: Most Labor Federations Have Advocated for Urban Reinvestment Policies, and Half Have Representatives on Planning or Transportation Boards

Asked about their lobbying and program histories, all of the federation leaders reported that within the last five years, they have advocated for some urban reinvestment policies that cumulatively have come to be called “smart growth.”

- 88 percent have lobbied state or local legislatures for more funding to repair and rehabilitate existing schools, and 62 percent have lobbied for school funding formulas that would improve funding for schools in older areas. *(The loss of tax base greatly affects schools. Declining school quality, in turn, is a primary cause of middle-class flight from cities. The school-funding disparities caused by sprawl have become so bad that about half of the states’ supreme courts have issued rulings intended to correct them, and many states have changed how their schools are funded.)*
- 84 percent have supported a campaign to stop a factory shutdown in an older area and 42 percent have supported a campaign to save an inner-city hospital. *(Because of their massive ripple effects, plant closings or relocations have enormous impacts on urban areas. Hospital closures are concentrated in low-income areas with large populations of Medicaid- and Medicare-dependent patients.)*
- 82 percent have helped fight a “big box” retail project such as Wal-Mart. *(Big box retailers pirate most of their sales from existing retailers, crippling downtown business districts that are both walkable and served by public transit.)*
- 66 percent have lobbied state or local legislatures to preserve or expand mass transit operating budgets, and 56 percent have lobbied to preserve or expand mass transit capital budgets. *(The size of the route structure and frequency of service*

are key determinants of transit ridership.)

- 76 percent believe that regional transportation authorities should have more flexibility in how they allocate transportation dollars between highways and transit, and 52 percent, in response to a hypothetical question, believe that one out of three workers who drives to work in their area would switch to transit if the transit system gave them a choice. *(Sprawling development denies most commuters a choice about how to get to work; a principal tenet of smart growth is to provide that choice.)*
- 66 percent have lobbied state or local legislatures to increase funding for the rebuilding of aging infrastructure, and 42 percent have lobbied for more funding to clean up brownfields (contaminated land). *(A “fix it first” agenda for better maintenance of existing roads, water and sewer lines is a top smart growth priority. Reclaiming contaminated land that already has infrastructure, is accessible by transit, and may be located near neighborhoods with high unemployment, is very much smart growth.)*
- 48 percent have sponsored or participated in the construction of affordable housing through programs such as the AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust. *(In June 2003, the Trust announced a new \$400 million apartment-construction program.)*

We also found that half (50 percent) of the federations have officers who sit on regional planning or transportation boards, and are therefore to some degree formally involved in regional development issues. (This is in addition to the seats, designated by the federal Workforce Investment Act, that labor leaders already hold on regional and state Workforce Investment Boards.)

Some leaders spoke with great sophistication about their experiences on such boards, making it clear that their federations are deeply enmeshed in regional development issues. For example, one Midwestern leader spoke in great detail about converting public housing to scattered sites, capping a brownfield, and building a 500-acre mixed-use project downtown. A West Coast leader recalled extensive dealings in infrastructure, housing, and port redevelopment projects.

Finding #3: Most Labor Federations Have Coalition History with Environmentalists

Asked about their history with environmental groups, most labor federation leaders reported that they have worked jointly with environmentalists on environmental and/or electoral issues, in some cases quite extensively. Specifically:

- 62 percent report they have participated in coalitions with environmental groups on environmental issues within the last 5 years.
- 68 percent say they have worked on political candidate campaigns with environmental groups.
- 66 said they want help getting contact information for environmental groups working on smart growth issues in their area.
- 18 percent of those interviewed said they personally belong to an environmental organization. *(This is higher than the national average. A Gallup poll in 2000 found that 5 percent of Americans belong to large national or international environmental groups and 9 percent belong to local, regional or state groups; the cumulative total is unstated.)*

Responses to these questions varied widely, and provoked some of the most detailed discussions of the interviews. Those that reported coalition history, when asked for specifics, most often cited chapters of the Sierra Club as strong partners (on regional issues as well as national issues such as fair trade.) Some others cited state chapters of the League of Conservation Voters. Also cited were a very diverse range of region- and state-specific organizations.

Some of the longest-standing relationships described have been around factory health and safety for workers (such as toxic Right to Know legislation) and cleaner air for neighbors. Although the issue of utility-plant construction has sometimes caused differences, the need to retrofit power plants and modernize refineries and other factories to reduce emissions and the likelihood of spills has proven to be a strong labor-environmental cause.

Two West Coast respondents provided detailed histories of how their CLCs, together with their local Building Trades Councils, have for years consciously advocated for land-use policies such as “greenbelts” or growth boundaries that have helped to shape development patterns in their areas. The net result has not been to reduce growth or construction activity, but rather to direct it in ways that increase the supply of affordable housing, include mixed-use construction (for example, housing or offices built above retail), give more commuters access to transit – *and* increase the likelihood that construction activity will be unionized. Another West Coast leader said the CLC had unsuccessfully backed an open space preservation ballot initiative, knowing it would redirect growth in a positive way, and regretted that the message had not won out.

Overall, the relationships reported vary widely. A few leaders reported that they, or

one of their fellow officers or staff, even sit on the boards of environmental groups. Others, who reported no coalition history, said it was a conscious decision based upon their assessment that local environmental groups are ineffective; a few cited bad history that had soured relations. Other federations expressed a desire to do more coalition work with environmentalists, but reported that the groups in their area are small and lack staff, limiting the possibilities. One said she finds environmentalists to be far more effective on state issues, and opined that they are missing an opportunity by overlooking local coalitions.

Finding #4: Most Federation Leaders See Cumulative Harm to Union Members from Sprawl

In addition to the broad harms of pollution and regional imbalances, federation leaders also reported some specific harm they see sprawl causing union members.

- 76 percent believe that the dispersion of jobs into the suburbs is undermining union density in their area (i.e., the share of the workforce that is unionized). *(For example, exurban/suburban industrial parks are often populated by non-union manufacturers; and suburban office buildings are less likely to have unionized janitorial services.)*
- 78 percent think that the growing political power of the suburbs – especially with redistricting based upon the 2000 census – is bad for their state’s working families political agenda. *(The AFL-CIO’s non-partisan rating system for elected officials spans many issues, including workplace rights as well as other priorities such as housing, transit, safety, healthcare and pensions. Elected officials from newer suburban areas typically rate lower on such working families issues than those from urban cores.)*
- 72 percent have cities in their metro area that are pushing for privatization of public services because they have lost a lot of their tax base. *(As disinvestment at the core proceeds, services are cut, maintenance is deferred, and privatization may be considered.)*

Union leaders’ perceptions of suburban issues are as complex and varied as the suburbs themselves. Some readily drew the distinction between newly-developing outer-ring suburbs and older inner-ring suburbs that in many ways resemble inner cities. Others, in areas of the country that are dominated by post-war growth, saw fewer distinctions. Some see more union organizing occurring in suburbs now, and consider that an optimistic sign. “Those were never our areas, but now we can make some of them our areas,” said a Midwestern leader.

Conclusion

Unions are urban institutions and union members live disproportionately in older cities and inner-ring suburbs that are most harmed by sprawling disinvestment. So perhaps it is not surprising that labor federation leaders have as much sprawl awareness and smart growth history as this survey discovered.

However, unions are rarely publicly associated with the issue of smart growth; it is a movement that has been dominated by environmentalists, public officials, transit advocates, community organizations and policy groups. For whatever reason, unions are thought to focus narrowly on the immediate workplace interests of their members. The labor movement's work for the broader public interest, on issues such as those covered here, remains little known.

Similarly, within organized labor, few labor leaders think of themselves as advocates for urban reinvestment or smart growth. The everyday crush of serving constituents and providing mutual support dominates most leaders' days. And the emergencies associated with the recent surge of plant closings and collective bargaining problems caused by the nation's health care cost crisis add to their workload.

But our findings clearly suggest that those who consciously call themselves smart growth advocates have a large material basis for coalescing with labor leaders – and vice versa. When the issues are stripped of their planning jargon, labor leaders understand regional growth and development problems and they have a lot of experience working to solve them.

Survey Methodology, Characteristics of Respondents and Project Background

Survey Methodology

The survey was administered to the labor federation leaders between August 2002 and August 2003, using a uniform questionnaire. Assistance in identifying respondents was provided by the AFL-CIO Department of Field Mobilization; its Union Cities program coordinates shared activities among central labor councils. The survey covered 39 central labor councils (out of 580 that exist nationwide) and 11 state labor federations (out of 51). An emphasis was placed on areas with large urban centers where most union members work and reside, but not exclusively; some respondents are in “right to work” states with low rates of unionization.

All but 7 of the interviews were conducted by telephone: 5 respondents asked to fill out the questionnaire on paper and fax or mail it back, one respondent answered via e-mail attachment, and 1 interview was conducted face to face. All of the direct interviews were conducted by the author. In 44 cases, the respondent was the principal elected officer of the federation; in 2 cases, the respondent was the second-ranking officer of the federation; and in 4 cases, a senior staff member with close knowledge of the federation’s history was interviewed. In at least three of the six cases in which the respondent was not the principal officer, he or she was the chief lobbyist or political director of the federation.

In addition to the questions summarized in this report, the questionnaire contained a small number of open-ended questions designed to allow respondents to elaborate on their experiences and beliefs. Those responses also inform this analysis.

Characteristics of Respondents

The federation leaders interviewed have extensive experience in the labor movement. The average number of years they have held office in their federation is 9 and the median is 7. We did not ask the leaders how many years they had previously worked in their original unionized occupation and union leadership positions, but labor federation leaders typically have a great deal of experience rising from say, shop steward to local union president to federation leadership, 10 to 20 years or more.

The leaders also come from a wide variety of unions. Most numerous are the Service Employees International Union (7), the United Food and Commercial Workers (6), the International Association of Machinists (5), the American Federation of Teachers (4), the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (4), the

International Union of Electrical Workers/CWA (3), the Communications Workers of America (3), the Office and Professional Employees International Union (2), and the International Association of Fire Fighters (2). Fourteen other unions are also represented in the sample.

Although it is not possible to make strict sectoral breakdowns because some unions span different kinds of occupations, we estimate that roughly two-fifths of the leaders come out of the service sector including retail and healthcare, a fourth from the public sector, a fourth from manufacturing, and tenth from the Building Trades.

Project Background

The content of this survey is informed by work done by Good Jobs First since 1999 with union leaders on smart growth. That work includes the development of the first-ever curriculum and conference for union leaders on sprawl and smart growth, “Smart Growth, Good Jobs” in 2000 for leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor. A distilled version of that curriculum was published the following year, “Talking to Union Leaders About Smart Growth,” as well as a 2002 article in the labor journal *Working USA* entitled “Smart Growth for Cities: It’s a *Union* Thing.” In addition, Good Jobs First staff has trained and advised hundreds of labor leaders in more than a dozen states on regional growth issues.

**Appendix A:
Survey Questions and Answers**

	Yes	No	Don't know / No answer	% Yes	% No	% Don't know / No Answer
In the last five years, has your CLC/state federation:						
helped fight a "big box" retail project such as a Wal-Mart?	41	9	0	82%	18%	0%
sponsored or participated in the construction of affordable housing through programs such as the AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust?	24	26	0	48%	52%	0%
lobbied state or local legislatures to preserve or expand mass transit operating budgets?	33	17	0	66%	34%	0%
lobbied state or local legislatures to preserve or expand mass transit capital budgets?	28	21	1	56%	42%	2%
lobbied state or local legislatures for more funding to repair and rehabilitate existing schools?	44	6	0	88%	12%	0%
lobbied for school funding formulas that would improve funding for schools in older areas?	31	19	0	62%	38%	0%
supported a campaign to save an inner-city hospital?	21	28	1	42%	56%	2%
supported a campaign to stop a factory shutdown in an older area?	42	7	1	84%	14%	2%
lobbied state or local legislatures to increase funding for the rebuilding of aging infrastructure?	33	15	2	66%	30%	4%

	Yes	No	No answer / Don't know	% Yes	% No	% Don't know / No Answer
lobbied state or local legislatures to increase funding for cleaning up brownfields (contaminated sites)?	21	29	0	42%	58%	0%
Do you or another officer of the CLC sit on any regional planning or transportation boards or commissions?	25	24	1	50%	48%	2%
In the last five years, has your CLC participated in any coalitions with environmental groups on environmental issues?	31	19	0	62%	38%	0%
Has your CLC worked on any political candidate campaigns with environmental groups?	34	16	0	68%	32%	0%
Do you personally belong to any environmental groups?	9	41	0	18%	82%	0%
Would you like help getting contact information for environmental groups working on smart growth issues in your area?	33	17	0	66%	34%	0%
Do you believe that your health or the health of someone in your family has been harmed by environmental pollution?	36	11	3	72%	22%	6%
Do you believe that air pollution is a bigger public health problem today than it was five to ten years ago?	40	7	3	80%	14%	6%
Do you believe that public transit is adequately funded in your metro area?	3	46	1	6%	92%	2%

	Yes	No	Don't know / No answer	% Yes	% No	% Don't know / No Answer
When cities in your metro area compete for jobs and tax base, do you believe that newer areas have unfair advantages?	35	14	1	70%	28%	2%
Do you believe that your regional infrastructure systems - like roads and sewers - treat older areas fairly compared to newer areas?	6	38	6	12%	76%	12%
Do you believe that the property tax system in your metro area is fair to all cities in the region?	8	37	5	16%	74%	10%
Do you have cities in your metro area that are pushing privatization because they have lost a lot of their tax base?	36	12	2	72%	24%	4%
Do you believe that in your metro area, there is a mismatch between where most of the new jobs are being created, and where most of the affordable housing exists?	41	5	4	82%	10%	8%
Do you believe that some suburbs in your metro area use exclusionary zoning to keep low or middle-income families out?	40	6	4	80%	12%	8%
Do you believe that one out of three workers who drives to work in your area would switch to transit if the transit system gave them a choice?	26	20	4	52%	40%	8%
Do you think that the dispersion of jobs into the suburbs is undermining urban density in your area?	38	12	0	76%	24%	0%
Do you think that the growing political power of the suburbs - especially with Census 2000 redistricting - is good or bad for your state's working families political agenda?	Good	Bad		Good	Bad	
	4	39	7	8%	78%	14%

Appendix B:

Labor Federation Jurisdictions Covered by the Survey

The following labor federations were surveyed:

Central Labor Councils/Area Labor Federations

Allegheny County Labor Council (Pittsburgh)
Atlanta Labor Council
Baltimore Council of AFL-CIO Unions
Central New York Labor Federation
Chicago Federation of Labor
Cincinnati AFL-CIO Labor Council
Cleveland Federation of Labor
Contra Costa County Central Labor Council
Dayton, Springfield, Sidney, Miami Valley AFL-CIO Regional Labor Council
Denver Area Labor Federation
Greater Hartford Labor Council
Harris County Central Labor Council (Houston)
Kent Ionia Labor Council (Grand Rapids)
King County Labor Council (Seattle)
Knoxville-Oakridge Area Central Labor Council
Los Angeles County Federation of Labor
Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO (D.C.)
Milwaukee County Labor Council
Monterey Bay Labor Council
North Shore Labor Council (Lynn, Mass.)
Northwest Oregon Labor Council
Northwest Central Labor Council (Indiana)
Omaha Federation of Labor
Pioneer Valley Labor Council (Springfield, Mass.)
Rochester-Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation
San Antonio AFL-CIO Council
San Francisco Labor Council
San Mateo County Central Labor Council (Calif.)
San Diego Imperial Counties Labor Council
South Bay AFL-CIO (San Jose)
South Florida AFL-CIO
South Central Federation of Labor (Wisconsin)
Southeastern Connecticut Central Labor Council

Southern Arizona Central Labor Council
St. Paul Trades & Labor Assembly
St. Louis Labor Council
Toledo Area AFL-CIO Council
Westchester/Putnam Counties AFL-CIO Central Labor Body
Wichita/Hutchinson Labor Federation of Central Kansas

State Labor Federations

Georgia State AFL-CIO
Illinois AFL-CIO
Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO
Maryland State and D.C. AFL-CIO
Massachusetts AFL-CIO
New Hampshire AFL-CIO
New Mexico Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO
North Carolina State AFL-CIO
Oregon AFL-CIO
South Carolina AFL-CIO
Wisconsin State AFL-CIO

Appendix C:

National AFL-CIO Convention Resolution on Suburban Sprawl and Smart Growth

(The following resolution was passed unanimously at the national AFL-CIO convention in December 2001. It was submitted officially by the Contra Costa County Central Labor Council and the Chicago Federation of Labor and belatedly by the Cleveland Federation of Labor.)

Whereas the issues of urban sprawl and smart growth have become major public and political issues, as demonstrated by the recent passage of hundreds of ballot initiatives, ordinances and laws; and

Whereas urban sprawl strains all working families by creating overly-long commuting times, fueling air pollution responsible for skyrocketing children's asthma rates, creating a lack of affordable housing near jobs, eroding public services, and denying workers a choice about how to get to work; and

Whereas sprawling big-box retailers such as Wal-Mart undermine unionized neighborhood grocery retailers that provide family-supporting wages and benefits; and

Whereas unionized, inner-city hospitals have been disproportionately shut down, partly because of the concentration of inner-city poverty caused by sprawl; and

Whereas the abandonment of our cities, caused by sprawl, undermines their tax base and thereby harms the quality of public services, which in turn creates pressure for privatization of those services; and

Whereas the same tax-base erosion is a fundamental cause of school funding inequities and classroom crowding, which fuel pressure for school vouchers; and

Whereas the rise of "edge cities" on the fringe of urban areas has harmed the collective bargaining strength of janitorial and building maintenance unions and dispersed the hospitality industry, harming the wages of restaurant and hotel employees; and

Whereas sprawling development on urban fringes creates new jobs beyond public transit grids, leaving commuters no choice about how to get to work, and undermining public transit ridership; and

Whereas anti-union manufacturers flee cities for outlying areas as part of their union-avoidance strategies, making jobs inaccessible for many people who need them most, including dislocated workers who have been victimized by deindustrialization and

NAFTA; and

Whereas many other unions have suffered as a direct result of the disinvestments, corporate flight, and tax-base erosion caused by sprawl; and

Whereas many unions have long worked to defend urban institutions that benefit all working families; and

Whereas unions of transit workers have for decades advocated to improve public transportation that improves air quality and gives working families a commuting choice; and

Whereas many locals of the United Food & Commercial Workers have joined community coalitions against Wal-Mart and other anti-union “big box” retailers; and

Whereas the AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust has used Building Trades pension-fund investments to construct tens of thousands of units of low- and moderate-income housing, helping address America’s affordable housing crisis; and

Whereas many other central labor bodies and state labor federations have long advocated for policies now collectively called “smart growth,” such as affordable housing, better public transit, school rehabilitation, and the reclamation of brownfields; and

Whereas organized labor rightfully deserves credit for these many achievements, but has so far been largely overlooked in this national debate; and

Whereas “smart growth” is an ambiguous and evolving term that applies to several different kinds of policies, and many competing interest groups are now seeking to define it;

Now, therefore be it resolved that the AFL-CIO authorize and direct its leadership to actively engage in the emerging public and political debates surrounding urban sprawl and smart growth, asserting labor’s rightful role in the national debate about the future of America’s cities for the benefit of all working families.