

# Growing Pains: A Sprawl Commission Investigation



by  
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## **Acknowledgments**

A huge thank you to Ed O'Donnell for his review and recommendations. Ed is a Policy Scientist and Instructor at the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration. Ed specializes in public sector planning.

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## **Growing Pains** **A Sprawl Commission Investigation**

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**Lesson Description:** This lesson features a simulated commission that has been charged with the task of making recommendations for dealing with issues surrounding sprawl. The lesson is designed to promote an understanding of the processes of working within a commission engaged in examining public policy.

**Grade:** 9-12

**Time Required:** 2-3 class periods.

**Benchmark[s] Addressed - Civics Standard 4 [Participation]:** Students will understand the process of working within...a commission engaged in examining public policy....

**Essential Questions Addressed:**

- What are the roles of a commission and how do they fulfill their responsibilities?
- How might citizens participate effectively in a commission engaged in examining public policy?
- How might those who develop public policy deal with the issues surrounding sprawl?

**Enduring Understanding:** “The process of working within commissions usually involves the processes of information gathering.” [Delaware Social Studies Clarification Document]

**Vocabulary:** public policy, development, sprawl, ecosystem,

**Materials:**

- Class Copies of **Handout 1:** *Background Information on Deltaware.*
- Class Copies of **Handout 2:** *Map of the State of Deltaware.*
- Copies of **Handout 3:** *Simulation Roles (cut out the various roles and make the role descriptions available to those who are playing them).*
- Copies of **Handout 4:** Letter of Appointment to Commissioners (enough for those assigned the role of playing GID Commissioners).
- Copies of **Handout 5:** Letter from GID Commission Inviting Testimony (enough for those assigned the role of playing stakeholders B-G).
- Class Copies of **Handout 6:** *A Citizens Primer – Development in Deltaware* (pp. 11-14 of this lesson).
- Optional: enhance the lesson by encouraging students to piece together visual or media presentations (e.g. PowerPoint) when they testify before the commission. Poster paper, markers, scissors, trifold presentation boards, computers etc. may be worth considering.

### **Procedures:**

1. Have students read **Handout 1: Background Information on Deltaware** and view **Handout 2: Map of the State of Deltaware**. Handout 1 explains the map.
2. Assign students to the roles described on *Handout 3: Simulation Roles*. Distribute copies of the appropriate role descriptions and ask students to read them. Explain how the success of this lesson will depend significantly on the degree to which each student assumes and plays his or her role.
3. Set-up the Problem. Distribute copies of **Handout 4: Letter of Appointment to Commissioners** to those who will play the roles of Commission members. Distribute copies of **Handout 5: Letter from GID Commission Inviting Testimony** to those stakeholders (see Groups B-G on Handout 3) who will be testifying about development in Deltaware.
4. Place students in expert groups. Distribute copies of **Handouts 6-8** and ask students to consider the information found on these handouts as resources for building their case on growth in Deltaware. Their task is to
  - a. identify their group's stance on development and growth.
  - b. defend their stance.
  - c. formulate recommendations that the commission might consider.
5. Tell students to organize their testimony around the most persuasive points that their group can uncover. The points that each group highlights should relate to the concerns of their specific group. Ultimately, they should recommend policies to the commission and support their recommendations with evidence from Handouts 6-8.
6. Presentations: Ask each group to prepare a brief presentation. The presentations should inform and persuade the commission to adopt policies related to growth.

\*Note: Handout 9 contains proposals that have actually been considered or adopted for dealing with the issues related to development and sprawl. Give students time to generate their own ideas before exposing them to this Handout. You may want to withhold this handout or share it with the students during the debriefing of this lesson and ask them which of the ideas have the most potential for dealing with growth related issues.
7. Have stakeholders testify, commission members ask questions.
8. Commission convenes to make recommendations.

### **Debrief:**

- Based on your experiences in this simulation, what are some of the roles that a commission plays? How do commissions fulfill their responsibilities?
- How might citizens participate effectively in a commission that examines public policy?
- How might those who develop public policy deal with the issues surrounding sprawl?

**For the Teacher:** View a List of Delaware Boards, Commissions on Which Citizens Might Serve at <http://www.state.de.us/gic/phonelist/boards/index.shtml#TopOfPage>  
Applications to serve available at <http://www.state.de.us/governor/boards-comms.shtml>

## Handout 1

### Background Information on Deltaware

Deltaware is the smallest state in the country – both in terms of population and area – and most of its residents have enjoyed a relatively high quality of life over the years. People find Deltaware attractive because of its low taxes, scenic beauty, good schools, affordable housing, and proximity to the beach. But, Deltaware is now experiencing some growing pains.

The state has only three counties, each with its own government. The county governments get all of their powers from the state but have historically shared decision making when it comes to land-use decisions.

The northernmost county in the state – **North County** - is the most heavily populated, serving as home to 62% (523,943) of the state's overall population. It is also the most industrial and commercial region. However, the southern part of North County was quite rural until recently. Southern North County now finds itself in the middle of a population boom involving growth of 122% in the last ten years. Many newcomers to this region are moving from the northern part of the county to take advantage of the lower cost of real estate. Others are coming in from other states. Large, “new construction” homes cost less than the smaller and older ones in the northern part of the county.

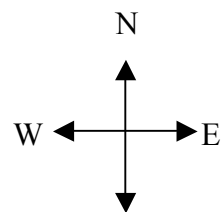
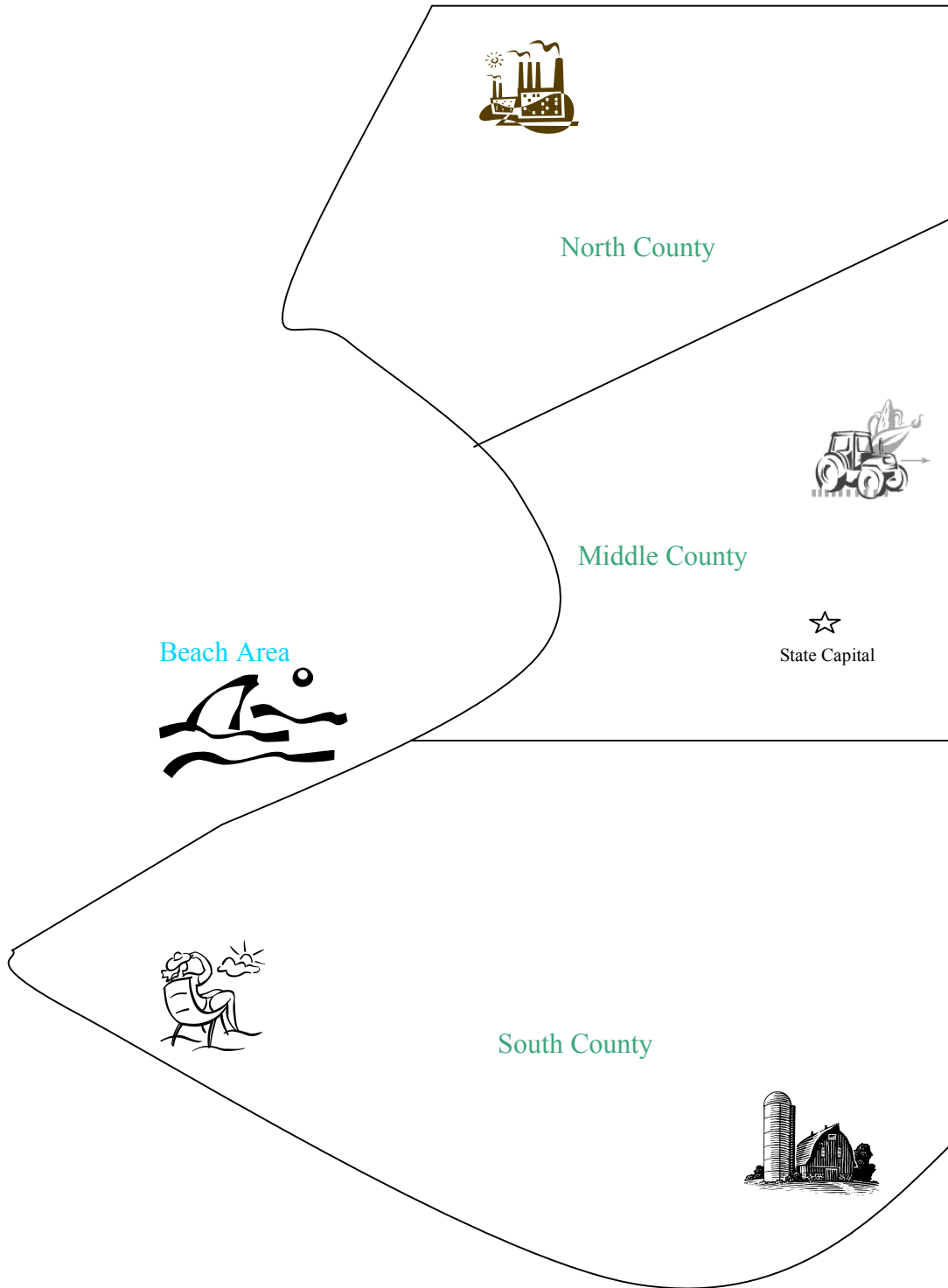
**Middle County** is largely rural and home to a major military base and the state capital. Of the three counties in Deltaware, Middle County has the smallest population as well as the slowest population growth (29%). Still, that growth is significant. The population of Middle County has risen from 110,993 to 143,258 over the last 15 years. The northern part of Middle County, in particular, is experiencing rapid growth as people from out of state and northern North County push further down in search of the large, affordable homes and good schools in Middle County.

**South County**, meanwhile, consists of a large rural area in the eastern part of the county and a major beach resort in the western part of the county. South County is the largest county in terms of area but ranks second to North County with a population of just over 176,000 people. South County has experienced a 56% population boom in the last ten years. Most of this increase is a result of retirees moving into the state because of its low taxes or other from out of state who are buying up vacation homes. In fact, there are a whopping 37,000 people whose primary residences are in other states but who own vacation homes in South County. These “vacation homeowners” are not included in the population statistics for South County.

Overall, the population of Deltaware has grown an amazing 27% in the last 15 years, ranking it the 13<sup>th</sup> most rapidly growing state in the country. The benefits of this growth have been significant. However, many residents of the state are now complaining about growth related issues such as traffic, pollution, overcrowding, and the loss of scenic areas. In a recent poll, Deltaware residents identified sprawl as the #1 problem facing the state.

In response, the Governor of Deltaware has created a special “Growth in Deltaware” commission to investigate sprawl. The charge to the commission is to formulate recommendations on how to best address the issue of sprawl. The commission has called for public hearings to hear various perspectives on the subject that might guide its recommendations.

# Handout 2: Map of the State of Deltaware



## Handout 3

### Simulation Roles

- **Group A: Growth in Delaware Commission (GID)** – your charge is to investigate the issue of sprawl in Delaware and formulate recommendations on how to best address the issue. The GID commission has called for public hearings to gain various perspectives on the subject that might guide its recommendations. Most of you work full time for organizations that might benefit indirectly from development activities.

#### Stakeholders

- **Group B: Developers** (*Home Builders Association*) – you don't understand why you are labeled as the "bad guys." You provide for one of Delawareans most basic needs – shelter! Moreover, development generates \$1 billion per year from new taxes, fees, and wages. The real estate boom is a key reason why Delaware is not facing a recession right now. In fact, growth has made a lot of people rich - including homeowners who have seen their property values rise to historic levels. You are proud of the prosperity that you have brought to Delaware and see absolutely no reason to limit future growth.
- **Group C: Conservation group** (*Delaware Conservancy and Nature Society*) - you are committed to protecting and preserving the natural environment and Delaware's "priceless and irreplaceable natural resources." You see the earth as a system of interconnected ecosystems. If one part of the ecosystem is damaged, the other parts will suffer. You are committed to promoting the responsible use of those ecosystems. Limiting sprawl is essential to preserving the health of the state.
- **Group D: Farmers** – Developers are now offering farmers between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per acre in Delaware. You own farms that might be multimillion dollar properties and don't want government regulations impacting how much you might make off the sale of your land. You believe that property rights guarantee that you should be able to use and dispose of property in a manner of your own choosing. At the same time, you are proud of your work as a farmer and enjoy rural life.
- **Group E: Citizens Enlisted to Avert Sprawl Everywhere (CEASE)** – you belong to a citizens group in Delaware that represents the interests of those living in areas affected by sprawl. Some of you have lived in Delaware all your lives; others moved here more recently but have made Delaware their permanent home. Members of CEASE point out that you chose where you live because of the quality of life that it offers you – the scenery, recreation, low taxes and crime rates, good houses and schools, and little congestion. From your perspective, growth and sprawl are ruining everything that attracts you to Delaware. Development has gotten out of control and you want to see significant limits placed on it.
- **Group F: Coalition to Promote Positive Growth (CPPG)** – your organization is headquartered in South County and supports the development that is taking place. It has brought unprecedented levels of prosperity to those who live and work there. Although most of the complaints about sprawl come from those who live in South County, 85% of the land there is undeveloped. Seven times as many people live per square mile in North County compared to South County. The Coalition has adopted a slogan – "*Improving Our Quality of Life: One Acre at a Time.*"

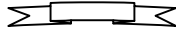
- **Group G: Representative of State Agencies** (service providers) – you represent a range of government agencies that are responsible for providing important services to the residents of the state such as building and maintaining roads (Department of Transportation), providing police protection (State/County Police), emergency medical services, educational services (Department of Education), and recreational services. You want to make sure that continued growth does not make it impossible for state agencies to provide quality services in an effective manner.



## Handout 4: Letter of Appointment to Commissioners



# Office of Governor



State of Deltaware

Dear Citizen

You are hereby appointed to serve on the State's new *Growth in Deltaware (GID) Commission*. Your task is to investigate the impact of development in Deltaware. After completing your investigation, I ask that the *GID Commission* make recommendations that might guide Deltaware's development policy.

Your service on this commission extends to the date when it submits its final recommendations.

On behalf of the citizens of Deltaware, I thank you in advance for your participation on the GID Commission and for the valuable service that you are rendering to our state.

Sincerely yours,

Governor Rachel A. Muir

# **Governor's Commission on Growth in Delaware**

Dear Citizen

At the request of Governor Rachel A. Muir, a Growth in Delaware (GID) Commission has been formed and charged with the task of investigating issues surrounding development in Delaware. Following its investigation, the GID Commission will issue a series of recommendations designed to influence public policy and maintain Delaware's quality of living. Staff support will be provided by the Office of State Planning.

The GID Commission's first order of business will be to gather information on the subjects of growth, development, and sprawl. Specifically, we will be looking into how development is impacting Delaware – both positively and negatively. Additionally, we will be inviting recommendations relating to what might be done to maintain the quality of life that Delawareans have come to enjoy and to make Delaware a place that those who live and work outside the state might view as “THE place to live.”

You have been identified as one who might offer a valuable perspective on growth in Delaware and how it is impacting the citizens of this state. Consequently, we ask that you prepare a presentation in which you highlight either the benefits or costs of growth, development, and sprawl. We also invite recommendations relating to these issues. The most persuasive recommendations are likely to find their way into the final recommendations of this Commission.

On behalf of the Governor and the entire GID Commission, I thank you in advance for your participation in this process. Let us work together to make Delaware the kind of place in which we all want to live.

Sincerely,

Chair, Growth in Delaware Commission

# A Citizen's Primer



## Development in Deltaware

## Section A: Costs and Benefits of Growth

☺ Benefits of Development	Costs of Development ☹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic development</li> <li>• Tax &amp; sewer fee revenue. Developers claim that they generate \$1 billion per year in tax and wage revenue.</li> <li>• Property transfer fees go to county government (\$36 million for South County in 2005).</li> <li>• Jobs (e.g. construction, teachers)</li> <li>• Property values increase</li> <li>• Increase in consumer purchases (especially in South County outlets).</li> <li>• Property rights are respected (farmers &amp; developers are afforded the rights to use and dispose of their land in a manner of their own choosing).</li> <li>• More affordable housing in rural areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of scenic vistas.</li> <li>• Deforestation (trees help to clean-up the air, provide oxygen).</li> <li>• Wetlands are paved over. This leads to flooding.</li> <li>• Pollution (air and water) – caused by septic systems and traffic. Nitrates (found in human waste and fertilizers) escape septic systems, seep into waterways where they act like fertilizers (algae grows, reduces oxygen supply, and prevent sunlight from filtering down into the water). Nitrates also enter waterways as a result of stormwater runoff containing lawn fertilizers.</li> <li>• Smog causes increased respiratory problems.</li> <li>• Fish kill caused by pollution. Recent national coastal assessment listed Deltaware’s Inland Bay’s as in “poor condition.”</li> <li>• Loss of agriculture as farms disappear. Deltaware lost 13% of its farmland between 1990-2005. State has 520,000 acres of farmland remaining (40,000 of that is already approved for housing development).</li> <li>• Pressing need for public safety services. New developments are located in remote areas that police, fire, and other emergency service providers find difficult to serve.</li> <li>• Traffic - travel time to work, automobile accidents.</li> <li>• Battered roads due to heavy traffic.</li> <li>• Noise from construction, traffic.</li> <li>• Overcrowded schools (some schools are 409 over capacity). One district’s student population has tripled since 1990. It has had to build 5 new schools during that time (other schools had to be expanded expanded), is currently building 2 more, and will probably need 4 more by 2013.</li> <li>• Money needed for roads, schools, sewage systems.</li> <li>• Increased rates for public services (sewage, water, electricity, education etc.).</li> <li>• Family impact - divorced parents living in overcrowded school areas send their children to spouse’s home even though they have custody rights so that they can attend less populated schools.</li> </ul>

## Section B: Impact Data

<b>Deltaware Population Changes in the Last 10 Years</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Ten years ago</b>	<b>Now</b>	<b>% Increase</b>
<b>State as a Whole</b>	666,168	843,524	*27% (13 <sup>th</sup> highest in US)
<b>North County</b>		523,943	
Southern North County	18,578	41,243	122%
<b>Middle County</b>	110,993	143,258	29%
<b>South County</b>	113,229	*176,323 <small>(does not include 37,000 homeowners who live out of state.)</small>	56%

### Impact Data

- 84,000 new homes built in Deltaware in the last 15 years (28,000 in South County alone where 100,000 more are planned).
- \$2.7 billion – amount the state needs over next 6 years to build roads.
- Sewer rates have been raised 40% over the last 10 years.
- Public school enrollment is up 22% over the last 15 years.
- \$125 million - school construction costs more than doubled over the last 15 years
- \$90 million –estimated cost of dealing with flooding caused by development.
- Pollution clean-up costing hundreds of millions.
- School tax increases (as high as 44% in 10 years).
- 1 million fish died.
- Road building cost \$2-10 million per mile.
- 24 new schools built in Deltaware over the last 15 years (construction costs rose from \$61-125 million).
- State has spent \$103.6 million to preserve farmland in the last 10 years (involved purchase of 79,995 acres or 15% of the state’s land).
- The largest development in Deltaware history is planned for a rural area just outside the beachtowns (2,700 homes in an area that has 270 residents right now).

## Section C

### Dynamics of Government in Deltaware

- *State government* legislates restrictions on growth; *local/county* governments & developers sometimes ignore or defy those restrictions. Later, the state has aided the overpopulated areas after development problems arise.
- Land use decisions are typically made by *local* governments.
- Most costs of roads, schools, police, flood control, environmental programs, prisons, and social service centers are *state* responsibilities. Local government approves development but the *state* typically has to pay for the road construction and repairs that are needed to service those developments.
- Local governments approve development but school *districts* have to pay the millions of dollars needed by school districts to expand schools and school services.
- State of Deltaware pays for 86% of roads in the state (other states average 9%).
- Campaign finance: developers and conservationists contribute to candidates (developers gave approximately \$500,000 last year). Deltaware does not require donors to identify their affiliations so the amount may actually be higher.

## Handout 9: Ideas for Dealing with Growth

- Set aside “rural” areas in which state government will not pay for roads if development takes place.
- Establish targeted growth areas that control sprawl. State can refuse to pay for roads or sewage systems outside targeted growth areas.
- State can set aside land for preservation but local towns/municipalities sometimes annex areas and open them up for development.
- Give the state the power to veto unwanted development plans.
- Pass legislation that allows limited development on certain acreage (e.g. no more than 1 home on 4 acres). Opponents think such action will reduce value of their property. South County now permits 2 homes per acre.
- Establish “primary funding areas” (PFA) in population centers where government will help pay for roads, schools, sewage treatment etc. but won’t pay for them in places developed outside of the PFAs.
- Prohibit development of farmland unless owner can prove he cannot get a reasonable rate of return on the land through farming.
- Create independent boards or committees that may not issue building permits unless there is proof that the development would not cause “undue” impacts on water and air quality, traffic congestion, the ability of local authorities to provide adequate services, and the “scenic or natural beauty of the land.”
- Require campaign donors (e.g. developers) to identify their affiliations.
- State can purchase farmland (has spent \$103 million since 1996 to put 80,000 acres in permanent agricultural preservation) while letting farmers continue to farm on that land. Stipulate that the land can only be sold to a farmer.
- Exempt farmland from property taxes.
- Charge developers for any public services that have to be provided to new housing developments.
- Place limits on the number of community septic systems permitted in the state.
- Create incentives for developers to turn “brownfields” (i.e. old industrial sites), rather than farmlands, into development sites.
- Impose “impact fees” on new homes (\$2,000-10,000 per home). Use the revenue from these fees to fund schools, roads, parks, libraries, emergency medical services, fire departments etc.
- Require towns to submit Comprehensive Development Plans before annexing new land. Plans must demonstrate impact of development and how the local municipality plans to address the impact.
- Give the state the power to reject local growth plans.
- Increase tolls, the gas tax, vehicle registration and license fees, the 2.75% charge on purchase of new vehicles. Eliminate the E-Z Pass discount on the state’s newest highway.

## Definitions of Sprawl

- Sprawl is dispersed, auto-dependent development outside of compact urban and village centers, along highways, and in rural countryside.
- Sprawl is characterized by housing not located within walking distance of any retail or services (e.g. schools, libraries).
- Sprawl is the unplanned extension of urban areas into rural arable areas.
- Sprawl is the inability to participate in community life because you are unable to live where you work.
- Sprawl is the spreading out of a city and its suburbs over more and more rural land at the periphery of an urban area. This involves the conversion of open space (rural land) into built-up, developed land over time.
- Sprawl is a form of low-density development that uses land in a wasteful manner, saps the vitality of traditional downtowns, encourages the use of automobiles, and occurs along highways and in the rural countryside.

## Visualizing Sprawl

