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INTRODUCTION: PLANNING PRESERVATION

More than one million acres of forests, farms, and other rural lands are converted to development every year. As a result, we reduce the reliability of our water supply, increase the cost of infrastructure, eliminate the habitat of our fellow species, heighten our exposure to wildfires, decrease our ability to grow food locally, and threaten the balance of town and countryside that we once considered an American ideal. Many people accept this wastefulness as an inevitable by-product of progress. This book recognizes those who do not.

Lasting Value celebrates selected cities, towns, and counties that excel at preserving natural areas, farmland, and other types of open space. These communities understand the multiple benefits of protecting their surrounding countryside, including watershed protection, local food security, outdoor recreation, and growth management. They plan the protection of their rural areas with as much care as they plan the development of their urban areas. They use permanent conservation tools to address the uncertainty that accelerates rural decline and sprawl. They achieve their preservation goals by partnering with private conservancies as well as public agencies and by using multiple implementation strategies, often of their own invention. They take sustainability seriously, preserving nature-friendly places so that future generations can enjoy some of the bounty given to us. In short, they are creating communities of lasting value.

The title of this book comes from a core mission of the American Planning Association (APA) to “help create communities of lasting value” (APA 2011). In its policy guide on sustainability, APA suggests numerous paths to securing a

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“promising and sustainable future for all children,” including open space acquisition and the preservation of wildlife habitat (APA 2000). APA’s policy on agricultural land preservation also supports the incorporation of farmland preservation into smart growth planning at the state and local levels (APA 1999). Similarly, other organizations promoting sustainability and smart growth include preservation as a key strategy component. For example, “preservation of open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas” is one of the 10 Smart Growth Principles advocated by the Smart Growth Network, a partnership of 43 organizations, including APA, the American Farmland Trust, Congress for the New Urbanism, the Local Government Commission, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Urban Land Institute (Smart Growth Network 2011).

Excellence in open space preservation requires farsightedness, commitment, and persistence from planning professionals, elected officials, and of course, the general public. In other words, it’s no walk in the park. But fortunately, the planning process is ideally suited to nurturing the components needed for success. Consequently, before presenting profiles of individual communities, in the remainder of this introduction I explore the planning process as a catalyst for preservation, a forum for developing goals and strategies, and a laboratory for creating implementation tools that fit the community.

Planning as Catalyst

The planning process invites people to understand their communities by joining citizen advisory groups, attending meetings, visiting websites, or perhaps just reading their local newspapers. A planning study can be a revelation to the uninitiated and a wake-up call for those who assume they know the score. Many communities featured in *Lasting Value* skillfully use the information-gathering and dissemination phases of the planning process to highlight the significance of rural resources, warn of threats to their natural heritage, and encourage action while open space is still available and affordable.

Highlighting Significance

Why should urban residents care what happens in the countryside? People pay closer attention to that question when it is answered as part of a planning process affecting the future of their communities. The cities and counties in the following chapters take full advantage of the planning process to underscore the diverse ways in which cities and suburbs rely on rural land for economic vitality, water management, recreation, habitat preservation, locally grown food, and a sense of place.