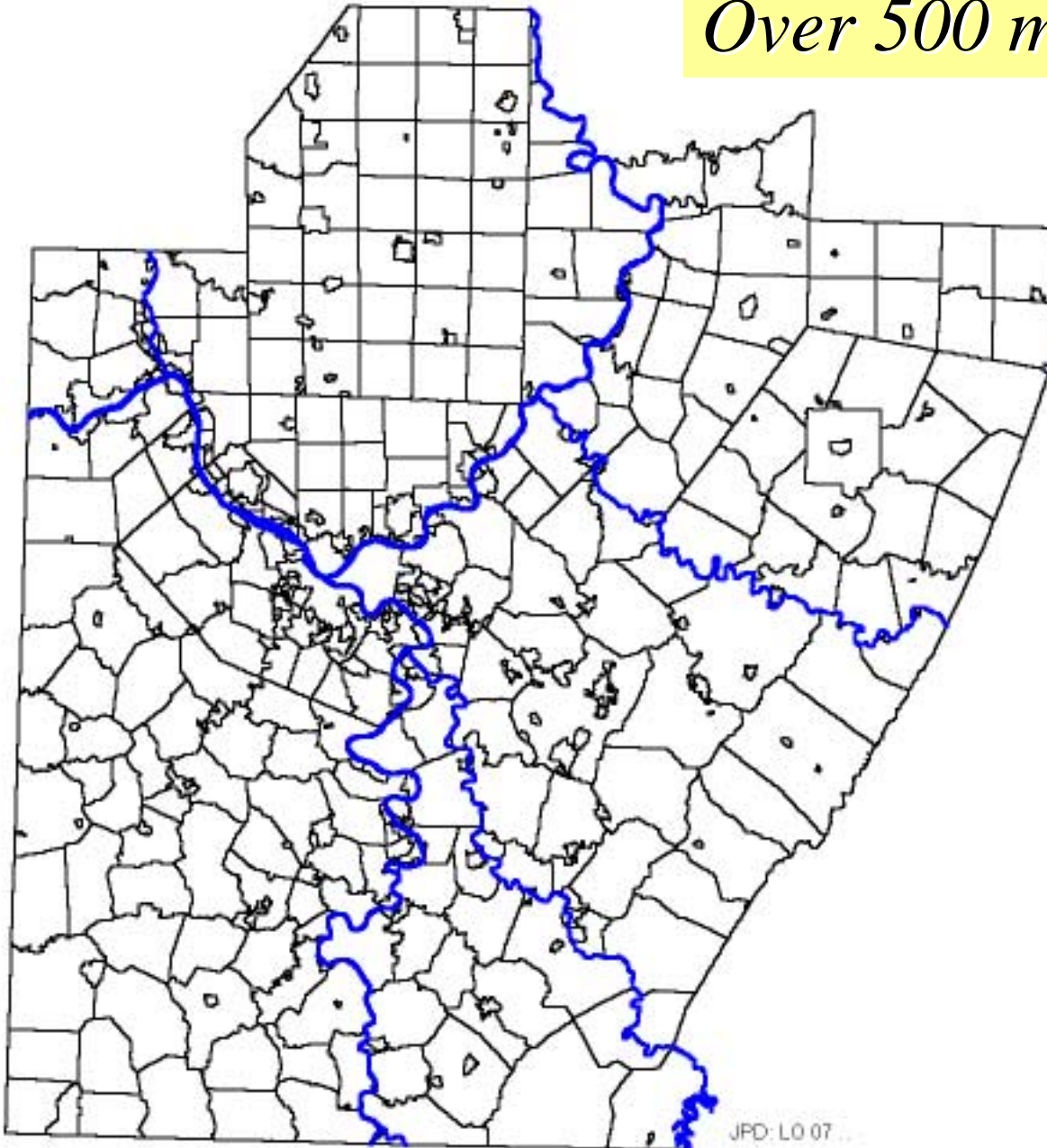




**Nine Counties**

Southwestern Pennsylvania's Rivers

*Over 500 municipalities.*



REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS REPORT  
SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA  
A PROJECT OF SUSTAINABLE PITTSBURGH



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# SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA REGIONAL INDICATORS REPORT

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# 10 KEY FINDINGS

## IN SEARCH OF SUSTAINABILITY ... AND REGIONAL IDENTITY

*Our review of regional sustainability and demographic trends has led us to highlight the following conclusions.*

### **Brain Drain is Real.**

There are more than one-fifth fewer people in the 20 to 34 age bracket today than there were in 1990—a tremendous loss of talent that must be reversed.

### **Sprawl is Out of Control.**

Urbanized land grew by 42.6 percent between 1982 and 1997—even though population was shrinking in that period by 8 percent.

### **Some Parts of Nature are Recovering.**

Mussels and Great Blue Herons, which had virtually disappeared from our region, have made a comeback, and our air is cleaner than it has been in many decades.

### **Use of Resources is Becoming Less Efficient.**

What we know about energy use suggests that it is continuing to rise, and our recycling efforts are barely keeping up with our growing garbage production.

### **Poor Families Face a Looming Housing Crisis.**

The gap between what a low-income family can afford and what a reasonable apartment costs is growing.

### **The Economy is in Surprisingly Good Shape.**

Wages are keeping up with inflation, unemployment has been low (even when rising nationwide), and houses have remained affordable for purchase by median income families.

### **Too Few of Us Are Engaged as Citizens.**

Our whole state's "social capital" is on the low side, and many of us don't vote ... the region needs a sharp upturn in volunteerism and civic engagement, if it wants to improve itself.

### **Some Citizens Face Stark Inequities.**

The region remains highly segregated, and minorities continue to experience some harshly discriminatory conditions.

### **We Know Too Little about Equity in General.**

We know equity is important to a sustainable region, but we know very little about it, relative to its importance.

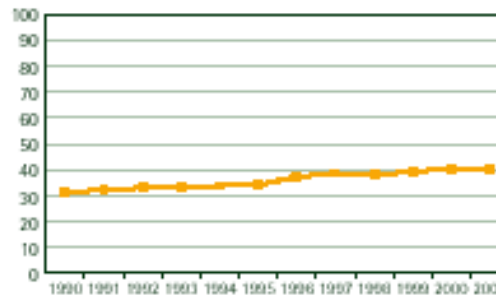
### **We Know Too Little About Many Critical Trends.**

Energy consumption, community connectedness, regional cooperation, adult learning, access to healthcare, culture and amenities ... these are just some of the issues that we know too little about, as a region, because indicator information about them is either nonexistent, or hard to find.

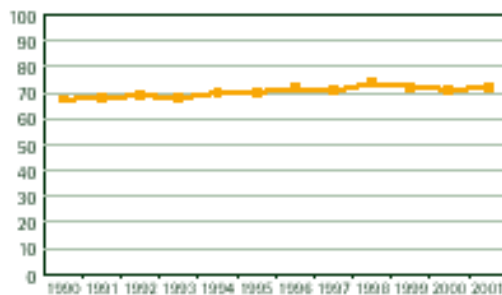
# COMPASS INDEX OF SUSTAINABILITY

## SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA 1990-2001

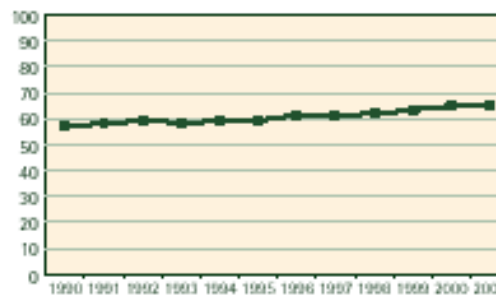
**NATURE INDEX**



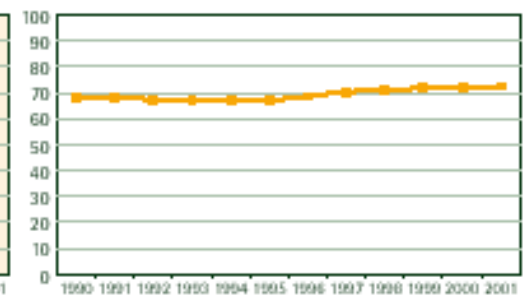
**WELL-BEING INDEX**



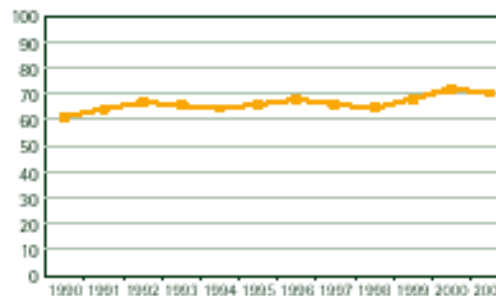
**OVERALL SUSTAINABILITY INDEX**



**ECONOMY INDEX**



**SOCIETY INDEX**



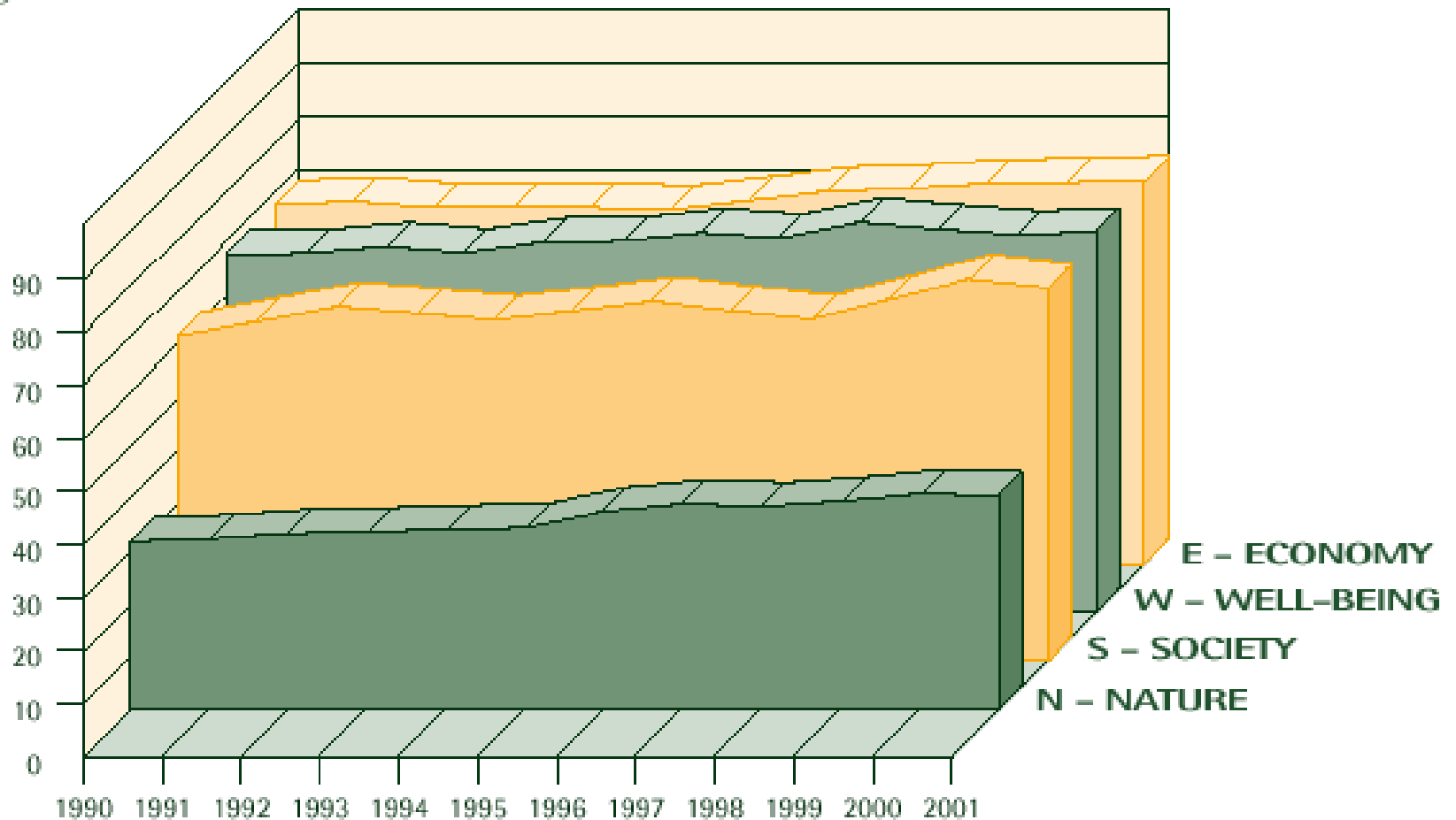
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# COMPASS POINT SUBINDICES

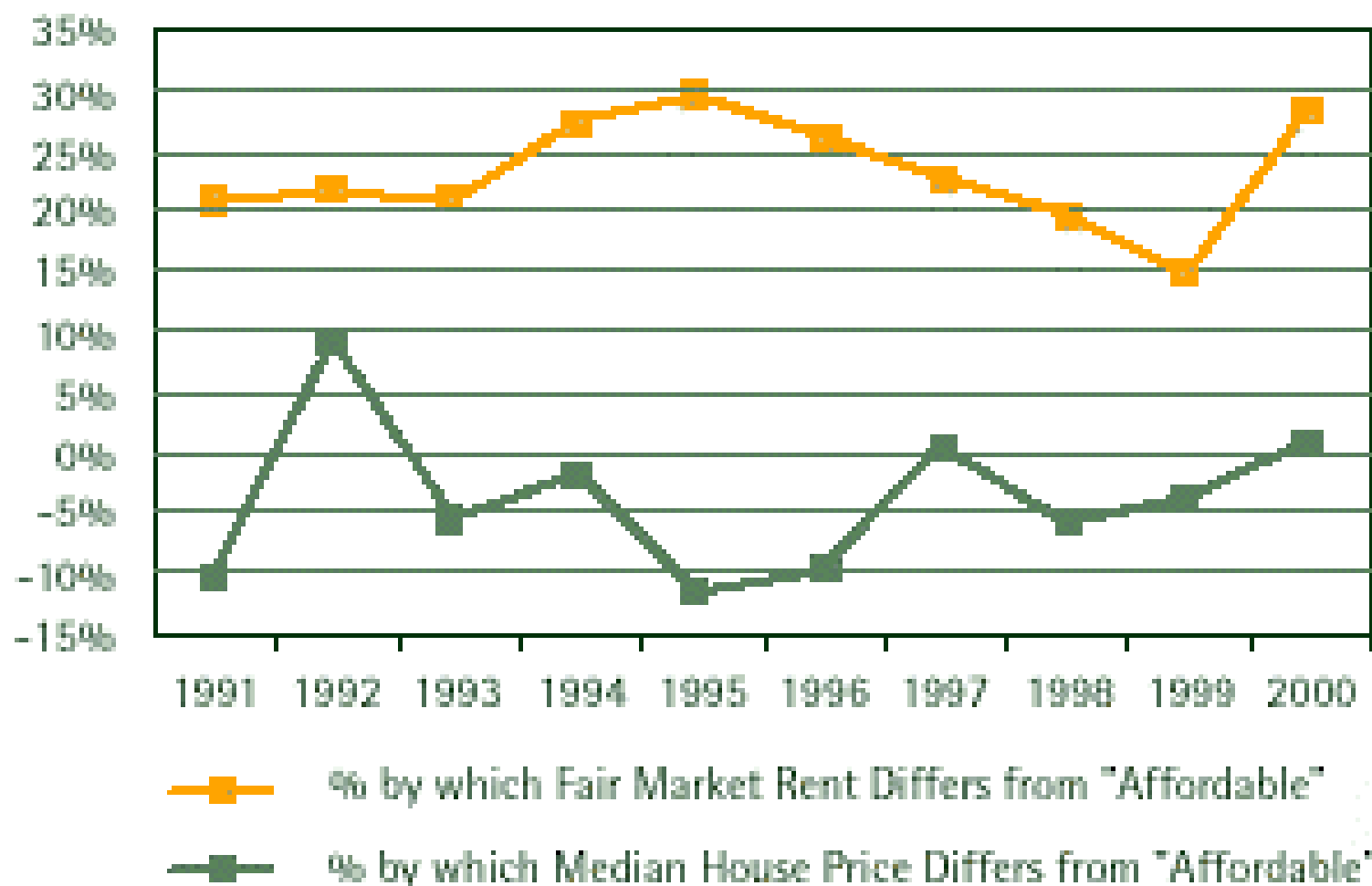
SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

1990-2001



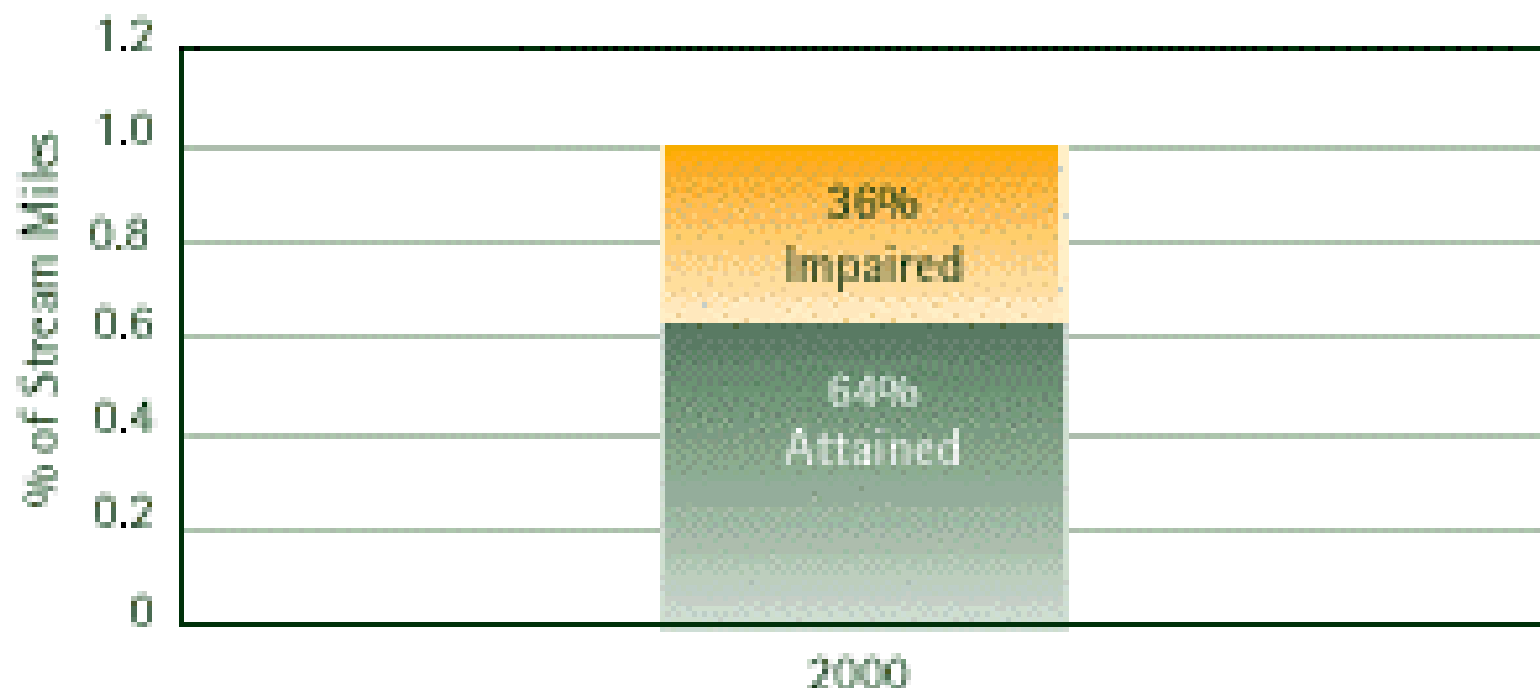
## AFFORDABILITY OF RENTS & MORTGAGES

*Percentage Difference 1991-2000 (Southwestern PA)*



## STREAM WATER QUALITY

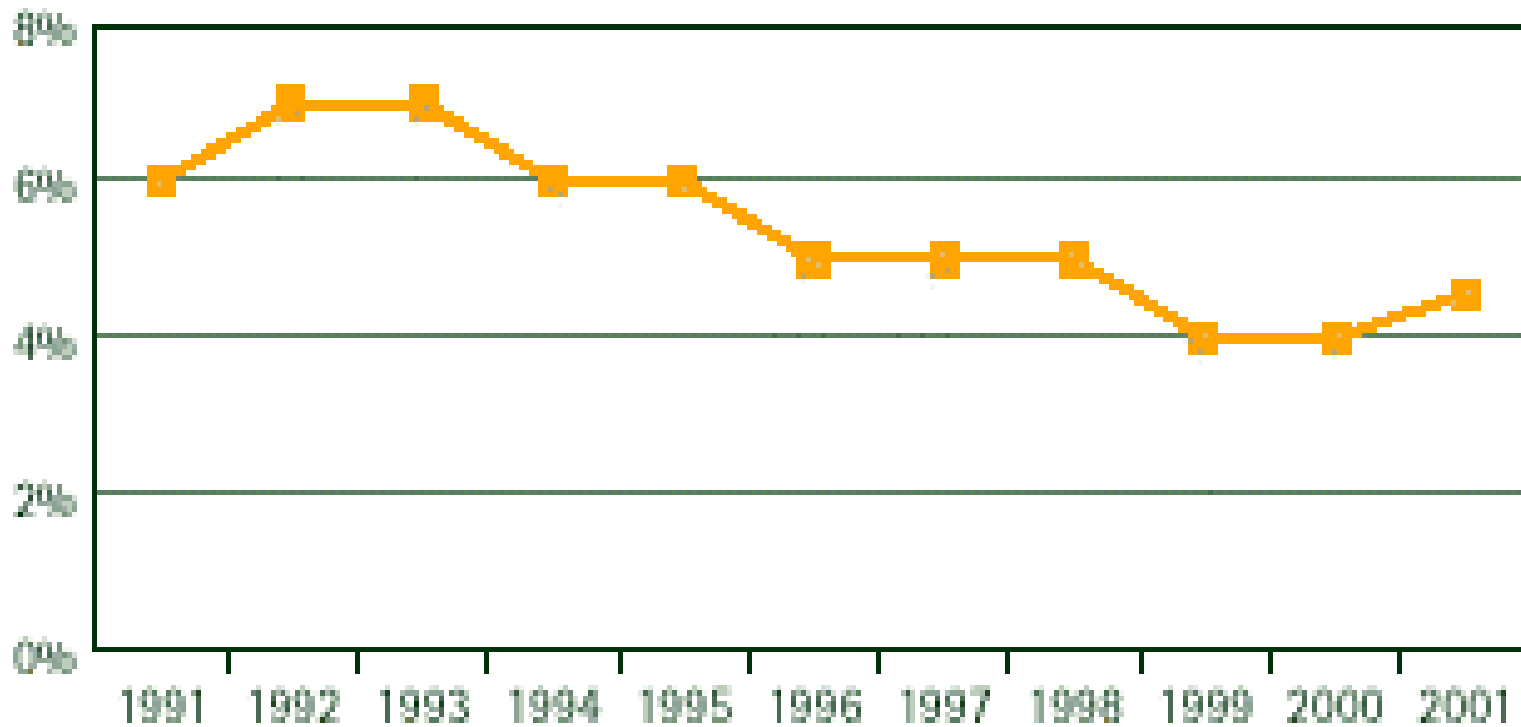
*Percent of SWPA Stream Miles that have Attained Water Quality Standards or are Impaired*



**NOTE:** *Only 25% of all streams have been assessed.*

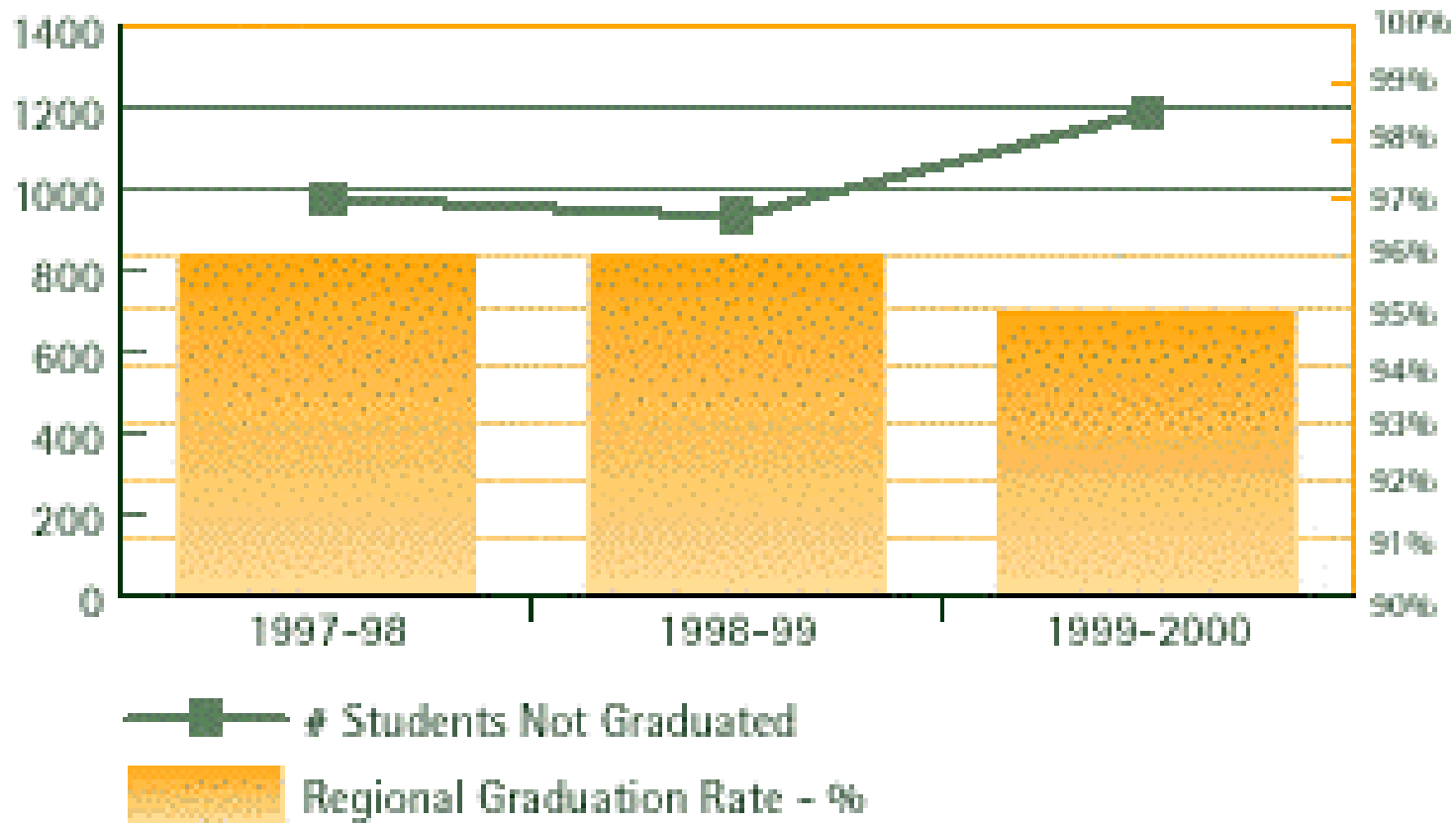
## UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

*1991-2001 (Pittsburgh MSA)*



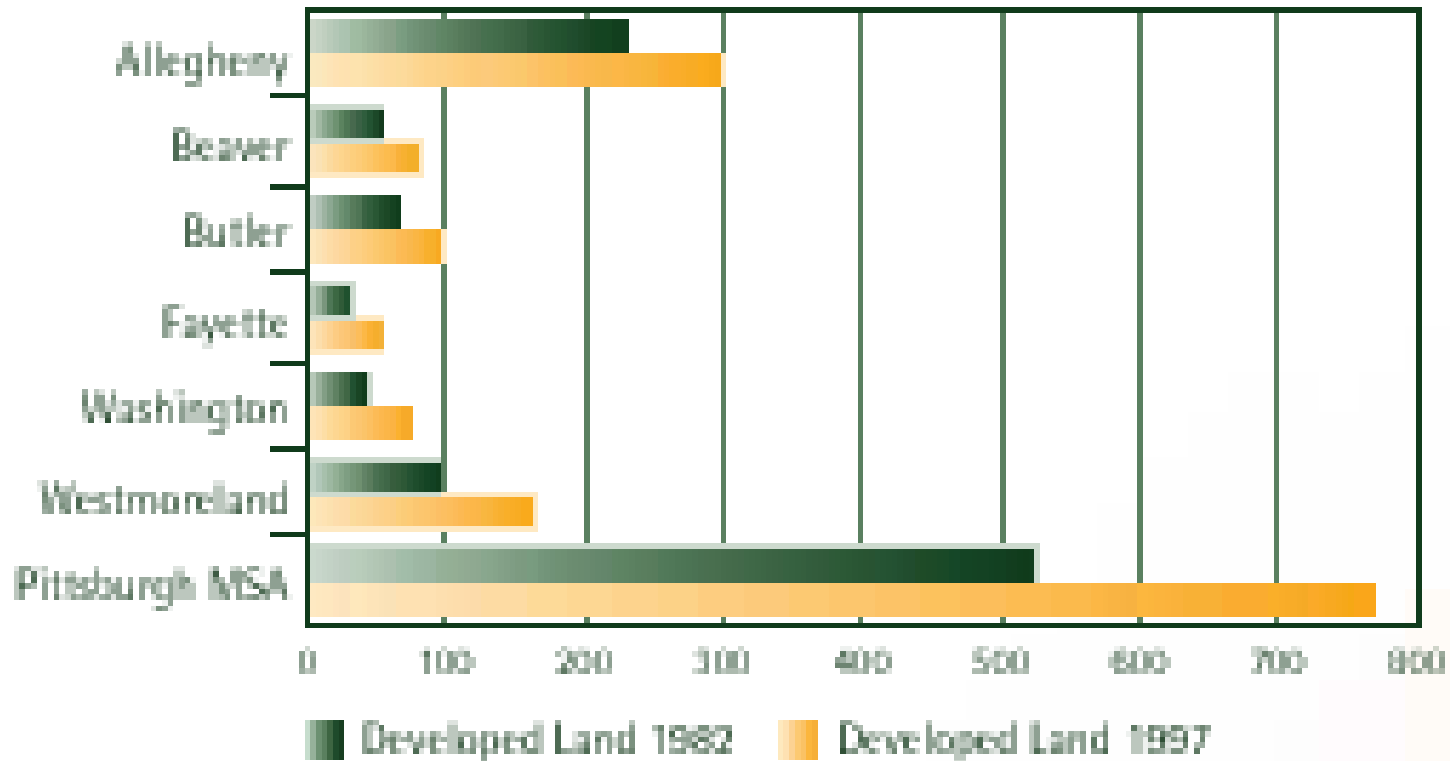
## HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

*Number of Students Not Graduating & Percentage of Seniors Graduating—School Years 1997-2000  
(SWPA Region)*



## LAND CONSUMPTION

*Acres of Developed Land 1982 vs. 1997  
(Southwestern PA)*



**GOAL:** EFFICIENT, EQUITABLE LAND USE

**STATUS:** THE REGION IS SUFFERING EXTREME SPRAWL

## INDICATOR

Percent change in land consumed

## TREND

Sharply worsening

## WHAT WE MEASURE

We are looking here at the spread of buildings and roads across regional land. Specifically, we measure the percent change in the number of acres developed in our region between 1982 and 1997 — the years for which we have data—and consider that data in the light of population trends.


## WHAT IT MEANS

In the six-county region, between 1982 and 1997, we built on, paved, or otherwise developed nearly half again as much land as we had previously developed during the foregoing centuries. What's more, we are now growing in less efficient ways: Since our population has dropped overall by

1.5 percent in the past decade, while development has continued, we are obviously consuming land with extreme inefficiency. The result is serious sprawl: increasing land use and decreasing population densities, especially in the urban core (35,000 people left Allegheny County last year, while Butler is surging).

## WHAT IT CONNECTS TO

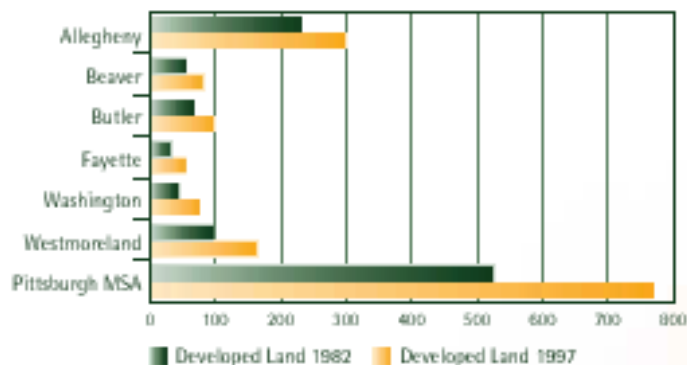
Sprawl is a reckless driver of other trends away from sustainability. It reduces community cohesion (neighbors leave and people spread out) while increasing environmental impact (people drive great distances and cover more land). Sprawl contributes to reduced air quality, reduced health, reductions in habitat, and reductions of the property values in urban neighborhoods—while generally creating a less attractive region, whether for business or recreation.



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## LAND CONSUMPTION

Acres of Developed Land 1982 vs. 1997  
(Southwestern PA)



*We need a fuller accounting of the costs of sprawl: the losses of nature's services when it cleans our water and filters our air and supports diverse plants and animals; the losses of the rural way of life; loss of farmland; the changing of our social values; the changes in the kinds of work that we do; and many other hidden costs.*

## WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

We need to know the alternatives to sprawl. We need a plan for using our land in ways that allow us to develop, while still preserving our heritage—the heritage of the communities that we grew up in, and also the nature that we inherited. We need a fuller accounting of the costs of sprawl: the losses of nature's services when it cleans our water and filters our air and supports diverse plants and animals; the losses of the rural way of life; loss of farmland; the changing of our social values; the changes in the kinds of work that we do; and many other hidden costs.

## EQUITY ANALYSIS

Sprawl strongly impacts equity issues. It brings with it large suburban shopping centers, which draw business out of the

older Main Streets and reduce services available to those without cars or the time and money to drive them. By increasing car travel, sprawl reduces air quality, especially in the urban core. By reducing habitat, it pushes access to nature farther away from downtown. As a result, sprawl especially hurts those with lower incomes, who often live in older urban areas. But many of sprawl's negative effects—tax increases to fund infrastructure, traffic congestion, poor aesthetics—are very equitably distributed. Everyone suffers from sprawl.