# Getting to Smart Growth

## 100 POLICIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

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## Cover Credit

Peter Calthorpe Associates. Watercolor image of The Crossings development in Mt. View, California.


## About the Smart Growth Network

The Smart Growth Network is a network of private sector, public sector, and non-governmental partner organizations seeking to create smart growth in neighborhoods, communities, and regions across the United States. Partners in the network include the American Farmland Trust, American Planning Association, Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Center for Neighborhood Technology, Congress for the New Urbanism, Conservation Fund, Environmental Law Institute, George Washington University Law School's Center for Sustainability and Regional Growth, Institute of Transportation Engineers, International City/County Management Association, Local Government Commission, Local Initiatives Support Coalition, National Association of Counties/United States Conference of Mayors Joint Center for Sustainable Communities, State of Maryland, Multi-Family Housing Association, National Association of Counties, National Association of Local Government Environmental Professionals, National Association of Realtors, National Growth Management Leadership Project, National Neighborhood Coalition, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council, Northeast-Midwest Institute, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Scenic America, Surface Transportation Policy Project, Sustainable Communities Network, Trust for Public Land, Urban Land Institute, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Individual membership information, publications and information about smart growth are available online at www.smartgrowth.org.


International City/County ICMA Management Association
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# *Getting to Smart Growth:*

## 100 POLICIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Smart growth is development that serves the economy, community, and the environment. It provides a framework for communities to make informed decisions about how and where they grow. Smart growth makes it possible for communities to grow in ways that support economic development and jobs; create strong neighborhoods with a range of housing, commercial, and transportation options; and achieve healthy communities that provide families with a clean environment.

In so doing, smart growth provides a solution to the concerns facing many communities about the impacts of the highly dispersed development patterns characteristic of the past 50 years. Though supportive of growth, communities are questioning the economic costs of abandoning infrastructure in the city and rebuilding it farther out. They are questioning the necessity of spending increasing time in cars locked in traffic and traveling miles to the nearest store. They are questioning the practice of abandoning brownfields in older communities while developing open space and prime agricultural land and thereby damaging our environment at the suburban fringe. As these quality-of-life issues become increasingly important for American communities, local and state policymakers, planners, developers, and others are turning to smart growth as one solution to these challenges.

They are not alone. In the early 1990s, numerous national organizations similarly recognized the problems facing communities. In 1996, they came together to form the Smart Growth Network, which is now a broad coalition of 32 organizations that support smart growth (see Acknowlegements). As a first step, the network examined the breadth of characteristics of successful communities and from that process, developed the ten principles for smart growth (see box). These principles illustrate the characteristics associated with healthy, vibrant, and diverse communities that offer their residents choices of how and where to live. They also suggest options for forming policy direction at local levels to implement smart growth.

The ten principles were a first step in articulating the goals of smart growth. To introduce communities to the benefits and techniques associated with these goals, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Network wrote and distributed three primers: *Why Smart Growth*, *Best Development Practices*, and *Pedestrian- and Transit-Friendly Design*. The fourth primer in the series is Getting to Smart Growth: 100 Policies for Implementation. While many state and local governments have been able to successfully implement policies that have

## SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES

**1.**
Mix land uses

**2.**
Take advantage of compact building design

**3.**
Create a range of housing opportunities and choices

**4.**
Create walkable neighborhoods

**5.**
Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place

**6.**
Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas

**7.**
Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities

**8.**
Provide a variety of transportation choices

**9.**
Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective

**10.**
Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

created healthy, livable communities, more work is needed. For many other communities, there is a wide gap between recognizing the benefits of smart growth and developing and implementing policies to achieve it. The primary purpose of this fourth primer is to address this gap.

*Getting to Smart Growth: 100 Policies for Implementation* aims to support communities that have recognized the value and importance of smart growth, and now seek to implement it. It does so by highlighting and describing techniques to help policymakers put the ten smart growth principles into practice. The policies and guidelines presented in this primer have proven successful in communities across the U.S., and range from formal legislative or regulatory efforts to informal approaches, plans, and programs. They do not represent the only means to achieve the principle identified, but they do represent real and innovative ways for communities to realize smart growth.

Perhaps most critical to successfully achieving smart growth is realizing that no one policy or approach will transform a community. The policies described here should be used in combination with each other to better achieve healthy, vibrant communities. A first step in the process of evaluating and determining how communities want to grow, is for communities to recognize the importance and value of modifying the way they grow. This can be achieved through a community- or region-wide discussion that honestly examines the development challenges facing the community and evaluates the benefits and downsides of both current and alternative growth strategies. In most cases, this collaborative process will result in some measure of popular and political support for a community's vision on how and where to grow. Once this foundation is in place, a course for implementing this vision can be determined. It is in this context, then, that the following 100 policies can be considered as parts of a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach to achieving healthy, vibrant, and diverse communities that offer bona fide choices of how and where to live.

Admittedly, putting the smart growth principles into action requires changes to the way communities function. It requires that local governments, lenders, community groups, zoning officials, developers, transit agencies, state governments, and others agree to a new way of doing business. This shift, however, will be eased by a process, such as the one described above, which clearly illustrates the myriad economic, community, and environmental benefits that are gained from a smart growth approach. After all, regardless of his or her role in the development process, each of the individuals involved in shaping how and where a community grows stand to benefit from the improved quality of life that smart growth can provide.

This primer includes ten sections corresponding to each of the ten smart growth principles, plus an appendix. Each "principle" section discusses the role of the principle in a holistic smart growth approach. Ten specific policies are then highlighted for each principle, supplemented by a series of "practice tips" that either illustrate their application in a community, or identify additional resources to aid communities in implementation. Finally, an appendix describes the most likely level of government for implementation of each policy, and the other principles that each will help achieve.

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Photo: Joe Schilling

*Chapter One*

# Mix Land Uses

Mixing land uses—commercial, residential, recreational, educational, and others—in neighborhoods or places that are accessible by bike and foot can create vibrant and diverse communities. In large part, a mix of uses attracts people to shop, meet friends, and live in urban neighborhoods like Georgetown in Washington, D.C., or small towns like Wiscasset, Maine. Mixed land uses are critical to achieving the great places to live, work, and play that smart growth encourages.

However, in many communities, current development patterns mandate a separation of land uses. Conventional suburban development—which is primarily low-density, single-use development—is a significant departure from the way towns were built in the early 20th century. During that time, land uses were more integrated, enabling many people to walk to a

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corner store, school, or work. Where once walking to school as a child was the standard practice, today land uses and other changes in development patterns combine to make walking or bicycling the mode of transportation for only 13 percent of all trips made to school.[1] While the separation of land uses was originally intended to protect communities from polluting industries and businesses, it has led to a pattern of land development in which stores, housing, and schools are often placed so far apart that they can be reached only by car. Improved environmental regulation and private sector innovation mean that many businesses are now cleaner than they were eighty years ago when zoning was first introduced to separate land uses, thereby eliminating much of the need for their strict separation from homes and schools.

Though the need to separate uses has diminished, it remains a common practice that creates inconvenience for American households who spend a growing share of their day traveling between home, work, shopping, and school. Separate uses levy larger social costs, as well, by fundamentally changing the character of communities and undermining the viability of opportunities for people to walk to shops or work, and to meet and chat with their neighbors on the way. In fact, one-fourth of all trips that people make are one mile or less, but three-fourths of these trips are made by car,[2] in part a result of inhospitable pedestrian streetscapes (see Principle 4) and of a lack of other transportation options (see Principle 8). Where once locating uses near each other posed an environmental risk, a new environmental challenge has emerged instead from such separation of uses. Air pollutants from cars—now the primary means of access and mobility in this auto-oriented land-use pattern—are responsible for 20,000 to 40,000 cases annually of chronic respiratory illness.[3] In addition, auto dependency requires more roads and more parking, thus increasing the total amount of impervious surface in communities and causing more polluted stormwater runoff to enter our rivers, streams, and lakes.

Integrating homes and retail make walking for short trips more viable at The Crossings in Mt. View, California.

Photo: Smart Growth Network

Smart growth supports the integration of mixed land uses into communities as a critical component of achieving better places to live. When homes are located within walking distance to grocery stores or quality employment centers, alternatives to driving—such as walking or biking—once again become viable, thereby enabling more Americans to take advantage of this convenient lifestyle. A mix of land uses also provides a more diverse and sizable population and a wider commercial base to support public transit. Mixed land use can enhance the vitality and perceived security of an area by increasing the number of people on the street. Furthermore, a mix of land uses helps streets, public spaces and retail stores again become places where people meet, thus helping to revitalize community life.

Mixed land uses also convey substantial fiscal and economic benefits. Commercial uses in close proximity to residential areas often have higher property values and therefore help raise local tax receipts. Businesses recognize the benefits associated with areas able to attract people because of different uses. More economic activity exists when there are more people in an area to shop. Lend Lease Real Estate—a leading resource for real estate investors, financiers, and builders—has reported for the past five years that the nation's best commercial real estate markets are cities with

vibrant, traditional downtowns or with twenty-four-hour suburbs. This trend reflects the value for businesses, which locate in these communities because they are better able to attract skilled workers. In addition, Lend Lease Real Estate repeatedly cites the appeal of investment opportunities in areas that offer a multidimensional environment convenient to work, shopping and recreation.[4] In short, there are economic benefits to investing in areas that offer a mix of uses.

## 1.

### Provide incentives through state funds to encourage residents to live near where they work.

Teachers, police officers, and fire officials, plus many other professionals, are often unable to afford living near their places of employment. Instead, they are forced to endure longer and longer commutes. Many areas across the country are experiencing increased traffic congestion as a result. Localities can address this issue by analyzing the current distribution of housing and jobs, and by targeting areas of imbalances. Areas in need of additional housing can benefit from, for example, the use of density bonuses, increased residential zoning, joint development around transit, and affordable housing tax credits, to encourage housing construction. Similarly, areas that are principally residential can encourage businesses to locate there by creating tax increment finance districts, providing economic development incentives, and improving the supply and quality of infrastructure needed to support businesses. Special attention should be given to matching the skills of current residents with the requirements of incoming jobs.

Another way to encourage a positive jobs–housing balance is for governments and businesses to work together to provide incentives for people to live near their employment. When employees take advantage of these incentives, their commuting patterns change radically, and walking and biking become more viable transportation alternatives, thus providing additional support for the mix of retail and civic uses located between home and work.

## 2.

### Adopt smart growth codes to parallel existing conventional development codes.

Changing existing conventional development codes that prohibit mixed-use development so that they facilitate smart growth developments can be a time-consuming and politically difficult process. State enabling legislation that enables local zoning, for example, may not permit the wholesale change to the underlying framework that drives and directs development. Nevertheless, by providing a policy framework that permits and encourages smart growth development, local governments enable developers to construct mixed-use properties without having to endure a long approval process.

Creating a smart growth code that can serve on a parallel basis with existing codes can, in fact, help remedy this challenge. Parallel codes make it legal to develop innovative projects by right, such as those that include a mix of uses or that employ different approaches to parking, while still allowing developers to use conventional codes if they so choose. In addition, to communities that are considering full-scale modification of their zoning and planning practices to support smart growth, parallel codes provide a means of testing the benefits of those modifications on a small scale. For example, Lee County, Florida has used the parallel codes approach in several areas slated for redevelopment.[5]

States can have a tremendous impact on the viability of mixed-use construction by creating model smart growth codes that munici-

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development is implementing a pilot "Live Near Your Work" Program to encourage employees of Maryland businesses and institutions to buy homes near their workplace. This initiative will stabilize the neighborhoods surrounding the state's major employers by stimulating home ownership in targeted communities. The state contributes $1,000, the employer contributes $1,000, and the local government contributes $1,000. Together, these funds can be used for a down payment or toward closing costs associated with a purchase. For more information, refer to www.op.state.md.us/smartgrowth/lnyw.htm.

palities can adopt in parallel to their conventional codes. The state of Wisconsin, for example, developed a model traditional neighborhood design code and required that localities with populations greater than 12,500 adopt the code or one similar to it. Wisconsin permits these codes either to be used as the sole regulatory framework for the community or to exist in parallel with the conventional code, thus giving developers a choice of what kind of project they want to develop.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Fort Myers Beach, Florida, adopted an optional smart growth code in parallel to the conventional existing code. This parallel smart growth code allows buildings to be constructed with zero setbacks and with canopies to shade the sidewalk, and eliminates some of the open space requirements, to permit more compact construction. This parallel code approach was written to allow a quick comparison of the "old" and "optional" codes, and has been wildly successful. While some viewed this format as cumbersome and lengthy, it served its purpose of convincing landowners that the optional smart growth code was in their best interests.[6] This optional code can be downloaded at www.fmbeach.org/ordinances/96-20.htm. The American Planning Association also offers model smart growth codes that encourage mixed-use neighborhoods through its Growing Smart effort. For more information, visit www.planning.org/plnginfo/GROWSMAR/gsindex.html.

## 3.

### Use innovative zoning tools to encourage mixed-use communities and buildings.

Despite the obstacles that conventional approaches to planning and zoning represent—such as master plans that continue to require uses to be separated—a number of zoning tools and incentives can be used to encourage the type of mixed-use developments that support smart growth. Overlay zones—which permit a special application of land use and building design standards in a targeted area—and planned unit developments (PUDs) are two examples of tools that can be used to create smart communities when they are implemented along with complimentary design guidelines. Planned unit developments, which allow planners to evaluate the nature and location of uses and buildings on an entire site, provide for flexibility in zoning requirements. While these tools may require a lengthier approval process than more traditional tools, they nevertheless can be used to encourage smart growth in the short run while the master plan and zoning codes are being revised. Political support for mixed-use smart growth developments can help overcome some of the project-approval burdens associated with these tools.

Many of the most well-known, first generation, mixed-use traditional neighborhood developments, such as Kentlands in Gaithersburg, Maryland, were built using PUD ordinances. Their success has made it easier over time for their communities to adopt more far-reaching policies to support smart growth. Other cities use overlay zoning to encourage mixed-use infill. For example, San Diego has established an "urban village overlay zone" that encourages mixed-use development. This overlay zone is responsible in part for creating a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development in the Hillcrest neighborhood which combines shopping, offices, restaurants, and homes.[7]

## 4.

### Facilitate financing of mixed-use properties.

Financiers view mixed-use development as complex and difficult.[8] They are concerned that most developers do not have the knowledge base to be able to manage mixed-use development properly, so they often fund only projects that are suggested by large sophisticated developers, and even then they may support only a small portion of the entire project. For example, Denver Dry Goods—a redevelopment of an old Denver department store into market-rate and affordable housing, office space, and retail—required twenty-three different sources of financing.[9] When lenders do support these projects, they may require higher rates of return and quicker payback periods.

Surprisingly, mixed-use infill projects have an advantage over mixed-use greenfield projects, as they are often easier to finance

because the surrounding markets and competition make it easier to evaluate potential success. In addition, infill areas often have existing prototype buildings that the new project can be compared against. Large greenfield projects, on the other hand, usually require more difficult, sophisticated phasing and large corporate revenue streams to back up their loans. In areas where single-use buildings are the norm, new mixed-use buildings may not have comparable projects nearby that can help in determining their value. For those reasons, the project may be undervalued, which in turn requires the developer to provide more equity or to pay prohibitively high interest rates.

If local government perceives that financing is a barrier to developing new mixed-use buildings in its community, it can provide support by offering credit assurance, equity investment in the project, or soft second loans to the developers who are pioneering this type of development. Localities can also work with private developers, foundations, and pension funds to identify new sources of financing for mixed-use redevelopment projects. The city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, for example, became an investment partner with private developers in a mixed-use entertainment area in downtown Albuquerque. City-owned land in a targeted area was used for development, allowing the city to become an equity investor in the project. Other investments in the project were further divided into varied time tranches to accommodate the financing needs of different parties: the city holds a long-term position, a local foundation gets midterm return on its investment, and conventional financiers and developers receive the project's short-term returns.[10]

## 5·

### Zone areas by building type, not by use.

Traditional zoning relies on the separation of uses as a means of managing development. In combination with complimentary building codes, this approach carefully dictates both the look and use of all buildings in a community. An alternative approach that encourages a better mix of uses is one that limits regulation to building type and that allows building owners to determine the uses. As such, the look and layout of a street is carefully controlled to reflect neighborhood scale, parking standards, and pedestrian accessibility, but building owners and occupants are allowed maximum flexibility to determine how the buildings will be used.

This approach allows for a dynamic change in uses over time as the needs of the community and of the building owner evolve. With regulations in place to monitor the impacts (such as parking, noise levels, and hours of business) of different building uses, for-

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In Port Wentworth, Georgia, interstate truck traffic has turned the old main street into a major transportation corridor. The impacts of this, combined with expected pressures for growth, have led the city to seek to redevelop its town center on 2,100 acres of adjacent, largely vacant, privately owned land. The master plan for the new center uses a building-type zoning code. Port Wentworth designated ten different street classifications—ranging from lane to boulevard to a frontage street—and determined the most appropriate structures to line the streets. The city has paid attention to the scale of the street, by accommodating taller and denser buildings along wider, more commercially oriented streets, and smaller detached homes along lesser-traveled neighborhood streets. Once the buildings are constructed, it is largely up to the building owner to determine what is an appropriate use. As a result of this plan, the large estate-type homes slated for a frontage along neighborhood boulevards may accommodate single-family residences, multifamily residences, or limited commercial uses as long as parking and other requirements, which are applied to all such structures, are met. Other street types will feature near-lot-line attached structures, which may serve as row houses, live-work units, and other commercial mixed-use units.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Resources exist to aid communities in putting greyfields to full and profitable use as mixed-use centers. The Urban Land Institute provides guidance on redeveloping commercial strips (see www.uli.org for more information). Also, *Greyfields into Goldfields: From Failing Shopping Centers to Great Neighborhoods* from the Congress for the New Urbanism and Price Waterhouse Coopers is an excellent resource for technical direction and tools.

mer residential areas may, for example, accommodate office space for doctors, day care centers, or small convenience stores. Residential areas would not, however, be suitable for a big box retailer because of the building and parking standards in place. As a result, a neighborhood preserves its residential feel while providing more needed services within walking or biking distance.

## 6.

### Use flex zoning to allow developers to easily supply space in response to market demands.

Communities are fluid places, often changing character over time. The most vibrant areas across the country, like Newbury Street in Boston, demonstrate this natural evolution, as former homes are converted to shops and restaurants thus accommodating the service needs of residents that flock to distinctive, vital, pedestrian-friendly areas. While commercial space is located on ground floors, buildings often still retain a residential component on side streets and in upper-floor apartments that create a natural mixed-use, walkable area.

Photo: Tom Knibbs

**The Mizner Park shopping complex in Boca Raton, Florida, converted to a mixed-use, Main Street design.**

Flex zoning in areas of transition between commercial and residential streets can help communities accommodate this natural expansion and contraction of different uses as market needs change. Flex zoning permits the developer or building owner to change the use of the building (assuming that building codes are met for the new use) without undergoing a lengthy variance or approval process. As a result, buildings are better able to capitalize on fluctuating market demands and can accommodate retail, office, or residential space as needed. In conjunction with zoning by building type and mass, zoning for flexible uses creates a neighborhood feel by managing the look of the building, while also providing opportunities for dynamic retail change and small business development within. Flex zoning also allows developers or building owners to adapt to market changes and thus make their units more profitable.

## 7.

### Convert declining shopping malls and strip commercial streets into mixed-use developments.

As shopping malls and strip retail centers become obsolete, communities can explore ways to reuse the space—which often are very large tracts of land—as mixed-use developments. Underperforming regional shopping malls average fifteen acres and are one of the largest sources of land holdings in existing communities.[11] These "greyfields" constitute prime opportunities for infill development. Left untouched, these areas not only represent an enormous loss of potential tax revenue, but they may also signal the disinvestment and decline of the surrounding community. Recycling these valuable sites helps a community maximize the value of its resources and capitalize on their advantages: access to a ready market; working water, sewer, and road infrastructure; and proximity to transit and existing transportation networks.

Cities like Boca Raton, Florida, have successfully renovated abandoned retail areas into vibrant mixed-use developments. Boca Raton's Mizner Park was a large-scale retail space that was redesigned to conform to a traditional main street configuration.[12] Its success lies in its mixed-use character: shops are located at street level, with apartments and offices above. Many more such opportunities exist. Price Waterhouse Coopers estimates that

Photo: Michael Shopenn

**The award-winning Eighth & Pearl development in Boulder, Colorado, puts homes in close proximity to shops.**

there are 140 regional malls in the United States that are abandoned. In the near future, another 200 to 250 malls are expected to be vacated.[13]

## 8.

### Provide examples of mixed-use development at scales that are appropriate to your community.

Mixed-use development looks different in various settings. Because there is no one specific model that communities can draw on to evoke an image of how mixed-use development would work in their area, communities that cannot easily envision it may be skeptical of such development and may initially oppose it, thereby creating delays and challenges for developers. By creating clear concepts through prototype designs, and by providing clear examples of what is considered appropriate or desirable mixed-use for their area, a local government or a community group can shape the projects that developers propose.

The planning department of Boulder, Colorado, for example, provided developers with prototype designs of the type of projects that the community wanted built. The clear information and graphics indicated that the city wanted communities that would ensure that the mix of uses that were provided, and the increased density that resulted, would be aesthetically pleasing.[14] The designs have been successful. The mixed-use development at Eighth and Pearl Streets so successfully integrated residential units, local businesses, and professional offices that it received a 2001 Charter Award from the Congress for the New Urbanism.

## 9.

### Create opportunities to retrofit single-use commercial and retail developments into walkable, mixed-use communities.

Declining retail malls are not the only opportunity to create mixed-use communities. Fully occupied, desirable office and retail structures can be made more so by integrating complimentary uses into the site. The addition of residential, civic, retail, office, education, or hotel uses into single-use facilities is needed to build effective mixed-use developments. A number of developments that are called mixed use may, however, offer only one or two types of uses. This type of development is especially true for commercial projects that include offices and hotels and that do little to facilitate the interaction between the two. Such developments may be equally guilty of integrating vital uses and failing to provide easy access between them. This practice not only fails to capitalize on the vitality that a creative mix of uses can generate, but it also affects the transportation options that site users have available to them. Research has shown, for example, that people who work in walkable mixed-use developments are more likely to take transit or to carpool to work because they can walk to lunch and to the stores and services they need everyday.[15] Using overlay zones, civic building location policies, and tax and other incentives, communities can encourage developers to retrofit retail and office centers into true mixed-use communities. The vitality and sense of community that accompanies the "twenty-four-hour" centers that leaders in real estate investment seek can only come from a balanced mix of office space, housing, and retail that are accessible to each other.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The Legacy Office Park in Plano, Texas, is typical of conventional office parks because it has large single-use buildings surrounded by parking on large campuses. However, the office park is being retrofitted into a mixed-use, walkable town center community by adding retail and apartments to make it more attractive and convenient to its tenants. The Town Center plan will introduce apartments, shops, and restaurants and parks into a pedestrian-friendly street plan that will integrate the existing office space into a complete community. For more information on Legacy Town Center, refer to www.postproperties.com or www.shopsatlegacy.com.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The state of California offers "Jobs-Housing Balance Grants" to employment center communities that have the permitted greatest increase in the number of housing units in comparison to a previous three-year average. The competitive grant program also offers bonus points for infill and affordable housing projects. The communities can use the grants for a wide variety of community projects. For more information on Jobs-Housing Balance Grants, see www.hcd.ca.gov/ca/jhbig.

## 10.

### Reward communities that create a balance between jobs and housing.

Parts of a region that are home to an overwhelming number of jobs, but which suffer from a shortage of housing units, are ideal opportunities to create mixed-use development projects. In addition to creating more vital, active communities, this approach can help to mitigate the growth in traffic congestion from long commutes by workers who do not live near their jobs. The effects of adapting communities to mixed-use development will be most evident in areas that are currently dominated by office, retail or light industrial properties.

States can encourage communities to create more mixed-use structures by rewarding those that have balanced community job locations and housing needs. States can give smart growth grants to communities as a reward for increasing the amount of housing permitted in job-rich locations or for expanding employment opportunities through new retail, office, or light industrial structures within or in close proximity to residential areas. Communities may use these funds to support infrastructure needs or the development of public amenities in these new areas.

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*Chapter Two*

# Take Advantage of Compact Building Design

Americans are consuming more land than ever before. During the last two decades of the 20th century, Americans developed land three times faster then we grew as a nation. Between 1982 and 1997, the amount of urbanized land used for development increased by 45 percent, from approximately 51 million acres in 1982 to 76 million acres in 1997. During this same period, however, population grew by only 17 percent.[1] This rapid land consumption is due in large part to the growing size of homes and retail space on a per capita basis. According to the American Housing Survey, the median new house size grew from 1,725 square feet in 1993 to 1,928 square feet in 1999—a 12 percent increase in size in just six years[2]—despite a shrinking average household size of just 2.61[3] persons. Some of this growth is the result of

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consumer demand, but some of it is also due to nonmarket incentives, such as zoning and tax breaks, that encourage larger homes. Similarly, in the last 30 years, the amount of retail space has grown four-fold from five square feet per person to 20 square feet.[4] As more land is used for construction of homes and retail, less is available on a regional basis for preservation as recreational areas or for agricultural uses.

Smart growth encourages communities to determine how and where they want to grow. An important part of achieving smart growth, compact building helps create the convenient neighborhood centers that people want. Compact building design also presents opportunities to absorb growth and development in a way that uses land more efficiently. By using smaller building footprints for new construction, compact design leaves undeveloped land open to absorb and filter rainwater, which in turn reduces flooding and stormwater drainage needs and lowers the amount of runoff pollution. Other benefits accrue as well.

Compact communities help achieve the density of population needed to support viable transportation alternatives. It is estimated that people will willingly walk to destinations—services as well as transit stops—located within a quarter to one-half of a mile radius. Thus, a minimum density of six to eight households per acre around bus stops would support bus service, and fifteen to twenty households per acre would support rail transit. The experience in California demonstrates that creating more compact communities, which doubled household density, had the effect of reducing vehicle travel by 20 to 30 percent, as people are able to use convenient and cheaper alternatives to the car.[5] Furthermore, compact neighborhoods require fewer linear feet of utility lines—like water, sewer, electricity, phone service, and others—than dispersed communities do. As a result, local governments find that it is cheaper to provide and maintain many services to compact communities.

Communities may accomplish more compact design by incorporating structured rather than surface parking or by encouraging buildings to grow up rather than out, for example. The obstacles to compact design in a conventional zoning context are formidable. Minimum lot size requirements and prohibitions against multifamily or attached housing are just two common practices that make it difficult to achieve more compact communities. These regulations may reflect a community's desire to attract larger high-cost homes and the increased tax revenue they represent, or the negative associations many people instinctively have to development that is labeled "higher density." Regulations may also reflect, however, a lack of familiarity among community members with examples of high-quality, high-value compact building design and the benefits associated with them. As a result, many of America's favorite town centers and neighborhood meeting places—such as downtown Annapolis, Maryland, or the town plaza in Napa, California—would be illegal to build today. As the public becomes more informed about density and the benefits it can convey, the following policies may be of use in incorporating compact building design into the American streetscape.

## I.

**Use public meetings about development options to educate community members on density and compact building options.** Local government officials and developers who propose compact development face opposition from a public that is unfamiliar with high-quality compact development. To make smart growth work, the public will need to see how good design and compact building will create communities with convenience, privacy, recreation,

and manageable traffic. Public involvement and education at the beginning of the process is the key to reducing citizens' resistance to compact neighborhoods.

Visual imaging is one technique to help educate residents and developers on the demand for and benefits of compact communities. A perception exists among builders and developers, for example, that people prefer low-density developments. However, a study done at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill concluded that, when given visual surveys rather than conventional opinion surveys, the public prefers development that would be classified as "high density."[6] Visualization technology can be used at public meetings to gauge citizens' interest in a variety of development options or to help community members envision changes to an existing street by modifying a scanned photograph. Such opportunities represent an important learning tool in which community members begin to realize that the determinant of whether or not they favor a type of development is often not how dense it is, but how well it is designed. The Local Government Commission in California helps communities create these "Community Image Surveys" to educate their citizens about issues related to planning and design. Private planning consultants offer similar types of visual preference tools. By using tools that focus on the impacts and benefits of this alternative development approach, local communities can overcome much of the uncertainty and lack of familiarity among citizens regarding compact communities.

**The Crossings in Mt. View, California, features ready access to parks and playgrounds throughout this compact, transit-accessible community.**

Photo: Calthorpe Associates

## 2.

### Ensure ready access to open space in compactly developed places.

Useful urban green spaces are characterized both by parks used for recreation and by preservation areas used for habitat and environmental protection (with the uses combined, when possible). Well-planned and well-maintained parkland is essential in smart growth communities where compact building design may reduce the size of private yards. Parks should be designed for a variety of people and purposes—such as civic plazas, formal gardens, childrens' playgrounds, ballfields, and regional parks. Open space in smart growth communities should also accommodate the ecological functions of undeveloped land, mature trees, and natural migratory corridors. Urban green space can provide habitat protection for birds or small animal species, can host trees that provide shade and filter the air, and can help recharge drinking water aquifers. These open spaces are less formal, and their design will be dictated in large measure by their natural features.

The need for open space, sunlight, and nature persists in all parts of a smart growth community. In Boston, for example, officials replaced a parking garage with underground parking and a park on top; the new Park at Post Office Square now provides a recreational opportunity in the crowded financial district. By clarifying the function and value of the open space created in compact areas,

**PRACTICE TIP:**

For more information on how to design good public parks, see the Project for Public Spaces' Web site at www.pps.org.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Envision Utah, a public-private planning organization in the Salt Lake City area, conducted a series of meetings to address the future growth of the region. The attendees, given maps of the Salt Lake City area and counters that reflected future population, were asked to place the population counters where they thought growth should occur. Aside from the team that located the new population on platforms over the Great Salt Lake, most groups realized that they needed to place future population growth in compact development if they wanted to preserve farmland or natural areas in the region. Surveys conducted after the workshop showed overwhelming support for a compact growth scenario in the region.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In the Uptown District in Dallas, Columbus Real Estate (now Post Properties) built apartment buildings that wrap around structured parking lots. This gives the residents convenient access to their cars and apartments without breaking up the walkable nature of the community. In addition, the developer said that residents could market their apartments as having covered parking—a great asset in hot Texas summers.

communities can meet the environmental and recreation needs of those who live, work, and play there.

## 3.

### Encourage developers to reduce off-street surface parking.

While compact building design can increase the viability of other modes of transportation, most communities are still highly dependent on the automobile and should therefore plan to accommodate parking. Conventional approaches to parking—particularly large surface spaces between the street and the front door of the home or business—not only represent inefficient uses of valuable urban land but also undermine the walkability that compact communities would otherwise support. Additionally, these large paved surfaces increase the amount of stormwater that quickly runs off into storm sewers and surface water, thus increasing the risk of flooding and washing pollutants into our streams, rivers, and lakes.

It is estimated that for each car on American roadways today, eight parking spots exist—many of them on surface parking lots.[7] Communities can better plan for parking and reduce the need for surface lots by using several tools. They can allow on-street parking to qualify towards the amount of parking a building owner needs or encourage buildings that need parking at different times of the day to share parking spaces. Communities can work with employers to offer the option of financially compensating employees who do not use the company parking lot. They can also reduce many of the negative impacts of parking by building parking structures. As structured parking is more expensive than surface parking ($10,000 per space to build and maintain structured parking versus $1,400 per space for surface),[8] localities may need to encourage its construction with financing incentives such as city funds, the use of special tax districts, or tax increment financing. In so doing, jurisdictions can free up valuable land in compact urban centers for property development that will generate tax proceeds, thereby offsetting the additional costs. Montgomery County, Maryland, for example, charges a special parking assessment on new development near the Bethesda Metro station. Developers who opt not to comply with requirements for structured parking must pay a fee that is used by the county to build and maintain its own multi-story parking lots in the area.[9]

Photo: Smart Growth Network

**Materials and creative treatment of facades allow high-density buildings to be integrated into the revitalized Lower Downtown (LODO) district of Denver, Colorado.**

## 4.

### Match building scale to street type in zoning and permit approval processes.

Communities can highlight more opportunities for compact building design by creating stronger links between street width and building scale. People feel more comfortable in neighborhoods in which buildings and landscape properly frame the street area. Buildings that are closer to the lot line, for example, frame a street and calm its traffic, which makes walking more pleasant. A similar relationship exists for buildings lining large arterial roads. For example, a wide boulevard that currently accommodates one-story buildings along each side may become more visually pleas-

ing and well proportioned if four-story buildings line it instead. By clearly defining this balance between street type and building scale, a community can encourage more compact communities and, as a result, can better absorb new growth and development.

Rezoning existing commercial strips to require taller buildings on the street rather than behind large parking lots is a good start for rebuilding declining commercial strips into vital town centers. Not only does this strategy transform inhospitable pedestrian environments, but it also creates more space for office, residential, and retail uses. When more people and uses are drawn to an area, they create a pleasant, walkable environment that offers a sense of place and increases demand for more stores, restaurants, offices, and homes.

## 5.

### Establish model state-level design standards and codes to encourage compact building design that can be adopted by local communities.

Developers and neighborhoods face enormous challenges when they seek to create more compact development. More often than not, current planning and zoning requirements set minimum lot sizes, setbacks, and parking requirements in a way that makes it illegal to construct compact buildings. Additionally, zoning standards limit the density in many conventional neighborhoods and business centers to a level that precludes development that would be considered compact. Rather than being encouraged, developers who want to build compact smart growth communities are instead forced to endure the time-consuming and expensive process of securing variances to the prevailing code.

Local governments may be unaware of the extent to which their current planning documents prevent compact communities. They may also lack the resources necessary to modify their zoning and building codes once they have recognized the need to do so. State governments can help by creating model codes that specify the design standards, zoning requirements, and codes necessary to create smart growth communities. This practice of state-generated model codes is not uncommon; many states have developed codes (which generally reflect conventional suburban development standards) that can be directly adopted by small communities. States that want to encourage smart growth may offer smart growth model codes that localities can adopt as easily as they can adopt conventional development codes. The state of Oregon provides a useful example with its publication *Model Development Code and Users Guide for Small Cities*,[10] and with its dedicated state staff to help educate and assist local governments that want to develop codes to promote compact communities.

## 6.

### Use density bonuses to encourage developers to increase floor-to-area ratio (FAR).

Density bonuses can promote many smart growth features in communities while also creating the land-use intensity that more efficiently supports public services. Density bonuses have been used to provide a variety of amenities including parks and plazas and structured parking. The basic premise is that a developer is granted the opportunity to increase the size of a building beyond that which is allowed by zoning, in exchange for providing a public amenity from which the community can benefit. The level of the bonus is designed to cover the cost of providing the amenity. In order for the community to get what it wants, however, this tool needs to be designed carefully, as there have been many cases in which open spaces provided through density bonus programs have been ill conceived and underutilized. Explicit design stan-

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Building height to street width ratios can be found in a variety of new urbanist or traditional neighborhood design guidebooks including, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk's 1991 book entitled, *Towns and Town Making Principals*. For more information on redeveloping commercial strip centers read the Urban Land Institute's 2001 publication entitled, *Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Strips*, written by Michael D. Beyard and Michael Pawlukiewicz.

**PRACTICE TIP**

For more information on density bonuses see Marya Morris' *Incentive Zoning: Meeting Urban Design and Affordable Housing Objectives*, an American Planning Association's Planning Advisory Service Report (no. 494) in 2000.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, reviewed its zoning requirements and found that the addition of a variety of new zoning changes made the buildings on its most desirable streets illegal. If these neighborhoods would have been destroyed in a disaster, they could not have been rebuilt as they were. In the process of revising the zoning code, Milwaukee stripped the code of many of the modifications. The resulting code is very similar to the zoning code enacted over fifty years ago.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

For more information on constructing compact homes with privacy, see Steven Fader's *Density by Design*, published in 2000 by the Urban Land Institute.

dards, clear building criteria, and an engaged review board can ensure that the amenities are provided at the highest quality level. As a result of the use of density bonuses, not only do residents benefit from higher density development in targeted areas, but they also benefit from complimentary amenities that support a more compact community.

The use of density bonuses around the country illustrates the wide range of amenities that can be secured. The city of Bellevue, Washington, used density bonuses to secure public plazas and ground floor retail space in its downtown redevelopment project. Near the Ballston Metro station in Arlington, Virginia, bonuses were used to create housing and retail space in buildings that would have otherwise been exclusively office space, thus creating a lively twenty-four-hour neighborhood. Density bonuses in Montgomery County, Maryland have relieved the added cost of an inclusionary housing ordinance (see Principle 3, Policy 1 for more information).

## 7.

### Ensure a sense of privacy through the design of homes and yards.

Opposition to compact communities is sometimes based on the perception that buildings within these communities will be ugly and poorly designed and will offer little or no privacy to residents. Certainly, the threat of poor design is not limited to compact buildings, but careful design can improve the relationship of the compact building to the community around it and serve the unique needs of those that reside or work within the community. When buildings are designed appropriately, residents and building users can benefit from the amenities that accompany attractive, compact communities, without sacrificing personal privacy.

Well-designed projects balance both the need to engage the street, by having the primary facade "open" to the street, and the need to ensure a level of privacy for building occupants. Apartments can be designed to provide center courtyards for residents to enjoy a sanctuary from the public. Narrow lot housing provides private spaces in side or back yards that offer a private refuge. Additional consideration in building construction can ensure that neighboring houses that overlook these private areas have windows mounted higher in the wall to allow light in while limiting views of neighbors' yards.

## 8.

### Employ a design review board to ensure that compact buildings reflect desirable design standards.

Attractive design is critical to balance the many competing demands placed on compact building design for efficiency, privacy, and accessibility. A design review function can be a means not only to preserve the community character that exists, but also to ensure that new development reflects an appropriate and complimentary style. Use of a design review board can help alleviate fears of compact building design and help interpret a community's preference for new development. As a result, review boards can help ensure that any amenities received from developers in exchange for incentives are well-designed assets to the community. Design review is found in most historic districts, but a community need not have a historic designation to benefit from this process. Developers can also benefit from a well-executed design review process because it can reduce time and uncertainty of the project approval process.

While design review can help ensure that the proposed projects meet the community's vision for how it wants to grow, it cannot

take the place of inadequate or poor planning and zoning. It is important that concurrence between the planning and zoning already exist and that they both reflect the community's wishes. Since value judgments are inherent in the design review process, it is critical that all potential stakeholders are represented in the review board and that the guidelines developed by the review board are approved by interested members of the community.

## 9.

**Offer incentives that encourage local communities to increase density.**

Local governments may avoid higher density development for fiscal or other reasons. State and regional governments can provide financial incentives to encourage local governments to approve compact building proposals with higher local densities. Financial incentives are a way to pass on to compact communities the cost savings that those communities generate for higher levels of government. Thanks to compact local design, the state and federal government pay less on a per unit basis for education, school busing, transportation, and water and sewer services than they would under conventional development patterns.

The many sources of funding flowing from state and regional governments include federal transportation funds, urban development block grants, and state income tax revenues, to name a few. These funding sources can be allocated on a priority basis to compact communities, thereby encouraging others to follow this example. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission awards bonus regional transportation dollars to communities that build high-density housing near mass transit facilities (See Principle 8, Policy 1 for more detail).

## 10.

**Support regional planning efforts to encourage compact communities.**

Residents are the best able to determine how and where their neighborhood or jurisdiction grows. The impacts of these development decisions, however, have a dramatic effect on regional growth, traffic congestion, environmental quality, and quality of life. Plans for incorporating higher densities into communities must be coordinated with transportation investments, parks and open space, and school planning, among other things. As such,

**PRACTICE TIP:**

For more information on design review see Rachel Cox's *Design Review in Historic Districts*, a 1997 publication of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Gary Hack's "Ten Commandments of Design Review" (available at *www.city-comforts.com/hack.html*), or Mark Hinshaw's *Design Review*, published by the American Planning Association's Planning Advisory Service (no. 454) in 1995.

**Detached single family homes in Northwest Landing in Dupont, Washington, share an adjacent park and are built on lots of only 2500 square feet – roughly 1/2 the size of a typical housing subdivision parcel.**

Photo: Smart Growth Network

communities can benefit from coordinating efforts at the regional level to identify areas targeted for more compact development. By encouraging each locality to recognize both the local benefits and the regional implications of this development approach, more support can be built across the region as a whole for compact communities.

Regional coordination can also help communities alleviate the concerns some residents may have about absorbing more than their "fair share" of the growth in the form of higher-density developments. The distribution of these clusters of development around the region, particularly when coordinated with regional transportation planning and transit nodes, can have a significant positive impact on open space preservation and air quality while also reducing traffic congestion. Regional coordination can also help tie the compact building decisions of localities to the benefits, in the form of land preserved on the urban fringe, that these decisions help achieve. These lands—whether they are used for agricultural or recreational purposes—provide economic and quality of life benefits to all members of the region. Making this link clear to area residents will help generate stronger support for creating more compact, vibrant communities.

1 William Fulton, et al., "Who Sprawls Most? How Growth Patterns Differ across the U.S.," *Brookings Institution Survey Series* (July 2001).

2 U.S. Census Bureau, *American Housing Survey for the United States: 1999* (Washington, D.C., 1999) detailed tables from the 1993 AHS-N Data Chart.

3 The 1990 census estimated 2.63 people per household; eight years later, the 1998 census estimate calculated only 2.61 persons per household.

4 Kathy Schalch, "Target Versus K-Mart," National Public Radio's *Morning Edition* 29 August 2001, story on discount retail competition.

5 John Holtzclaw, *Using Residential Patterns and Transit to Decrease Auto Dependence and Costs* (San Francisco: Natural Resources Defense Council, 1994).

6 Emil Malizia, "Consumer Preferences for Residential Development Alternatives," Working paper 2000.02, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Center for Urban and Regional Studies, 2000).

7 Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Parking Management Brochure, 2001. Available online at www.tstc.org/pricing/parkman/parking.pdf.

8 Ibid.

9 Information on these and other parking tools can be found in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency online document, *Parking Alternatives: Making Way for Urban Infill and Brownfields Redevelopment* 1999, located at www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/publications.htm.

10 Oregon Department of Transportation and Department of Land and Community Development, *Oregon Transportation and Growth Management Program*, *Model Development Code and Users Guide for Small Cities* (Salem, Oreg.: State of Oregon, 1999).

Photo: Joe Schilling

*Chapter Three*

# Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices

By using smart growth approaches to create a wider range of housing choices, communities can begin to use their infrastructure resources more efficiently, better accommodate the housing needs of all residents, and help aging citizens remain in their homes. Housing is a critical part of the way communities grow, as it constitutes a significant share of new construction and development. More importantly, however, housing provides people with shelter and is a key factor in determining a household's access to transportation, commuting patterns, access to services and education, and consumption of energy and other natural resources. Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component in any smart growth strategy. In addition to improving a household's quality of life, housing can ensure

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a better jobs-housing balance and generate a strong foundation of support for neighborhood transit stops, commercial centers, and other services, thereby mitigating the environmental costs of auto-dependent development.

Changing demographics mean that the standard post–World War II approach—one that emphasized the construction of single-family detached homes—may no longer adequately meet America's changing housing needs. The share of households comprised of two parents and their children is diminishing, while the number of single adult households and households without children is growing. Furthermore by 2030—for the first time in the United States—one in five Americans will be elderly. Many older citizens will be unable or unwilling to drive or care for expansive back yards. While the single-family detached home will remain the housing product of choice for many, demand is growing for greater alternatives in housing. Housing that is constructed to accommodate the needs of some for better walkability, access to transit, proximity to publicly maintained parks and civic spaces, or smaller housing units in familiar neighborhoods, for example, helps communities achieve smart growth and creates more options from which households can choose.

The opportunities to expand the range of housing choices are myriad. Housing choices in new developments can be diversified by modifying land-use patterns for greenfield sites. Existing neighborhoods, too, can benefit from a wider range of choices by changing zoning and building codes to increase the type and quantity of units provided. This can also lead to other benefits. Integrating single- and multifamily structures in new housing developments and existing neighborhoods can help reduce the concentration of poverty. The addition of units—through attached housing, accessory units, or conversion to multi-family dwellings—to existing neighborhoods creates opportunities for communities to slowly increase density without radically changing the landscape. New housing construction can be an economic stimulus for existing commercial centers that are currently vibrant during the workday but suffer from a lack of foot traffic and consumers in evenings or weekends. Most importantly, a range of housing choices allows all households to find their niche in a smart growth community—whether it is a garden apartment, a row house, or a traditional suburban home—and accommodates growth at the same time.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) program of Montgomery County, Maryland, is perhaps the most well-known version of an inclusionary zoning program, which has created more than 10,000 affordable housing units since 1974. The program requires that 12.5 to 15 percent of all units in developments of 50 units or above be set aside for households earning moderate income—roughly 60 percent of the area's median. These units are then reserved for purchase by low-income home buyers or nonprofit groups who in turn rent the house to low-income tenants. The units that are sold are price-controlled to remain affordable for a period of ten years. In exchange for the set-aside, developers who comply with the program are given density bonuses that allow more units—22 percent in the MPDU program—to be constructed on the same amount of land. The program has been credited with increasing economic and racial diversity in Montgomery County's housing developments, as well as vastly expanding the number of affordable units available to residents at a relatively low cost for the county.

## I.

### Enact an inclusionary zoning ordinance for new housing developments.

Inclusionary zoning represents a critical means to both create affordable housing units and achieve a greater range of choice in housing location for below-median-income households. The distribution of housing that inclusionary zoning can help achieve

throughout a region ensures that more opportunities exist for households to live near jobs, services, and other resources. By requiring that some portion of every new housing development beyond a given threshold size (e.g. fifty units) is offered at a price that will be affordable to low-income residents, inclusionary zoning helps to both increase the number of affordable units and create mixed-income communities.

Beyond the Maryland program (see practice tip), other programs in California, New Jersey, Florida, and Oregon offer variations on this basic model. Some programs offer developers the opportunity to bypass this requirement if a contribution is made to a regional affordable housing trust fund; the risk inherent in this bypass, however, is that affordable housing will be constructed in pockets of low-income communities. Other programs waive regulatory requirements, such as parking spaces, or reimburse impact fees for developments that include affordable housing.[1]

## 2.

### Provide home buyer assistance through support to community land trusts.

Community land trusts (CLTs) constitute a long-term, permanent means to ensure affordability in housing and to provide an opportunity to expand the range of housing choices in smart growth communities. CLTs participate with traditional home buyers to lower the cost of purchasing a home by retaining ownership of the land upon which a home sits and making it available to residents through a long-term lease. By doing this, CLTs make it cheaper for lower-income households to buy a home. Since CLTs are nonprofit organizations and hold the land for a long period of time, they ensure that the house will remain affordable for many future home buyers.

When traditional subsidies for home ownership, such as down payment assistance or first-time home buyer subsidies, are administered through CLTs rather than given to purchasers directly, the benefits can be shared with future low-income purchasers. Subsidies become, in essence, permanently tied to the property rather than to the recipient household. For example, down payment assistance in the amount of a grant of $5,000 can be used to assist the CLT in purchasing the land portion of a targeted property. Whereas the grant would provide a one-time benefit to the targeted home buyer (thereby requiring additional, larger grants in the future to convey the same benefit to future buyers), the same grant will remain available to future residents (in the form of a lower acquisition cost) when directed through a CLT. Communities should work to educate lenders about the concept of CLTs to ensure that future CLT home buyers will be able to access conventional sources of financing. Approaches such as this are critical to ensuring that a sufficient range of housing at varying levels of income exists to allow for all types of households to find their place in a smart growth community.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The Institute for Community Economics in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is a technical resource and provider of a loan fund to support community land trusts. Learn more at www.iceclt.org.

## 3.

### Revise zoning and building codes to permit a wider variety of housing types.

In many areas, communities are hampered by regulations in creating the types of developments that advance smart growth. Setback requirements, regulations restricting the number of units within a building, and lot-size standards advance the concept of traditional suburban growth but are not well suited to helping communities reap the benefits that smart growth can yield, which include better walkability and a greater range of housing and transportation choices. Reduced or flexible parking requirements would allow developers to construct more units and therefore put

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Cary, North Carolina, which has been challenged by rapid growth and rising housing prices, currently operates under a zoning code that allows all single-family homes to include accessory units, but requires them to be attached to the main building and occupied by a relative. The town is considering removing both of those restrictions, which would expand both the types of ADUs that can be built and the number of people who can take advantage of them. One builder, who has already recognized the potential market value of ADUs, includes 300-square-foot "suites" in new town homes in Carpenter Village. More information can be found at www.townofcary.org/depts/dshome.htm.

more households in closer proximity to bus and rail, making transit-oriented development more viable. Additionally, regulations that prohibit the construction of multifamily housing impose formidable obstacles to building duplexes, row houses, and garden apartments.

Construction of entire new neighborhoods is not the only way to create new housing supply. Opportunities to expand the range of housing choices also present themselves in existing single-family neighborhoods. Spaces above garages, finished basements, and attics with separate entrances all represent potential homes for elderly people, adult singles, or small families. These "granny flats", "mother-in-law" apartments, or elder cottages—generally termed accessory dwelling units (ADUs)—provide a way for children who have grown up in a neighborhood, or seniors who have outgrown their large family homes, to remain in the area near family and friends. As rentals, these units can provide an important source of income to help households afford the purchase of their home. When combined with a reverse mortgage, ADUs permit seniors to age in place while receiving a steady stream of income. They also serve to gently increase the density of neighborhoods without new parcel development, which can in turn provide better support for expanded transit and commercial activity. To gain the benefits of ADUs, communities must address the zoning and building codes that currently prevent them and actively consider the concern of neighbors who fear that ADUs will dramatically change the look and feel of their neighborhood. If these issues are addressed adequately, housing can more easily meet the needs of a diverse and changing population, and home owners gain more choice in how they use their homes.

Photo: Smart Growth Network

**Newly constructed homes in Northwest Landing in Dupont, Washington, offer accessory units above rear-entry garages.**

## 4.

### Plan and zone for affordable and manufactured housing development in rural areas.

Housing needs remain pressing problems in many rural communities today. Finding adequate solutions to address them presents an opportunity not only to better house many residents but also to facilitate housing development in a way that encourages smart growth. When these needs are not considered, the result has been poor quality housing on unserviced land scattered throughout rural farmlands or on the outskirts of towns. Improved solutions, with better access for residents to services and infrastructure, can be achieved by planning and zoning for a broad range of housing types in rural areas.

Improved design, materials, and construction technology have helped to make mobile and modular homes a very viable approach to affordable housing in many rural—and urban—contexts. Local governments would be well served to explore these opportunities, as well as opportunities for traditional "stick-built" housing, and to plan and zone for them accordingly. By accommodating this growth, communities will be better able to respond in a coordinated way to demands for low-cost housing and to ensure that it is

Photo: Timothy Hursley, Jim Curtis and Affordable Housing Development Corporation

**Benedict Commons provides affordable housing opportunities for Aspen, Colorado, employees.**

in conformance with health and service standards. Communities can address these needs by discussing service provision and infrastructure needs with landowners prior to development, and by enforcing standards for maintenance, upkeep, and title transfer post-development.

## 5.

### Educate developers of multifamily housing units and nonprofits on the use of limited-equity (or equity-restriction) components.

Opportunities to expand housing choices present themselves not only in the construction of new housing types, but also in an inclusive approach to ownership structures as well. Beyond the traditional condominium approach to ownership in multifamily or attached housing developments, co-operatives (in which members own shares in the overall ownership structure and the right to occupy their unit) and community land trusts (in which a nonprofit trust owns the land, and the resident owner retains title to the house) represent additional, and at times more affordable, approaches to home ownership.

These various ownership structures lend themselves to further broadening the range of affordability through inclusion of limited equity components. These regulations place limits on the amount of equity or profit that can be earned by a single home owner over a period of time. In places where housing prices are rising quickly, this program helps to keep the housing affordable for future purchasers. Depending on the structure, these equity limitations provide a fixed return on investment (for example, two percent appreciation per year of ownership) or limit the sales price based on average below-median income levels for households. In either case, the ability to limit the amount of profit that home owners can earn from the sale of their units means that the unit can be purchased by an approved household (often one that must meet income criteria) for a lower cost than would normally be the case. Despite a concern that some participants may find it difficult to build enough equity to later afford a non-subsidized home, limited equity ownership still remains a viable means to build modest amounts of wealth and expand access to home ownership for many.

## 6.

### Educate realtors, lenders, and home buyers on the use of resource-efficient mortgages.

Resource-efficient mortgages allow home buyers to factor the cost savings associated with homes that are near transit or that are energy-efficient into their mortgage calculation, and can help put a wider range of housing options within reach for people. Initial pilots of the Location-Efficient Mortgage℠ (LEM) by Fannie Mae and the Center for Neighborhood Technology have helped to expand the range of housing that is affordable near transit, where the total household savings accrued by lower transportation costs are factored into the mortgage-qualifying calculations. A similar product is in development to capture household utility savings that are associated with energy-efficient housing, and to factor those savings into qualifying calculations.

These tools will not only make transit-accessible and energy-efficient housing more accessible for current home buyers. In addition, over time, the availability of these specialized financing resources—and the resultant market demand—will stimulate

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In the ski resort town of Aspen, Colorado, where the average cost of homes is more than $2.2 million, local officials worked with a developer to create affordable home ownership opportunities. Benedict Commons is a downtown housing development that serves local employees earning between $17,000 and $38,000 per year. The deed restrictions on the units require that the resale price of units does not rise faster than the rate of inflation. In this way, the community guarantees a permanent supply of affordable housing to local low-wage employees and provides home owners an opportunity to earn a profit—albeit a limited one—on their housing investment. More information is available at www.rose-network.com/projects/benedict.html.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Chicago, Illinois, was one of the first sites for the groundbreaking LEM. Initiated in 1999 with a $21 million commitment from Fannie Mae, lenders in the Chicago area have used the LEM to help households qualify for housing in transit-rich areas. The mortgage works as follows. A "location value" is attributed to units located near transit and for households that have limited use of private vehicles. That location value is then factored into the household's qualifying levels. In the case of a two-person, $60,000 per year income household in the city's Edgewater neighborhood, for example, the use of the LEM would allow the household to qualify for a $212,218 home—$53,854 greater than the amount the household would qualify for under traditional underwriting guidelines.

greater construction of housing that fit these criteria. By facilitating the construction of these types of housing, these financing tools will provide greater choice for households that choose to locate near transit or in energy-efficient homes.

## 7.

### Implement a program to identify and dispose of vacant and abandoned buildings.

Vacant buildings can act as physical indicators of neighborhood blight and disinvestment in existing neighborhoods, and as they such represent barriers to reinvestment and revitalization. While vacant buildings may present very real physical obstacles in the form of fire and safety threats to adjacent structures, they also pose a significant psychological barrier to the community's resources. Nevertheless, vacant properties represent potentially valuable untapped resources for revitalization and redevelopment as well as prime opportunities to expand the housing stock in existing neighborhoods.

Local governments or nonprofit organizations can facilitate resale and reuse of these buildings. Properties that remain vacant and deteriorating often are a result of tax arrears, liens, or other unresolved financial obligations or legal issues that present obstacles to transfers of ownership. Local governments can help address those issues by stepping up enforcement actions against owners where building code violations exist. In addition, local governments can make public information about vacant buildings more accessible to potential purchasers and redevelopers of the properties. In cases where the owner cannot be readily located, or where arrears are of a significant magnitude, public seizure and auction can be used to recoup unpaid taxes or liens, while at the same time creating investment opportunities for developers or home owners. Local governments and nonprofit organizations can help stimulate interest in opportunities to purchase these units by targeting investment and infrastructure resources in the surrounding areas and by marketing the assets of underutilized neighborhoods to prospective residents and investors. The result is one in which the buildings will no longer serve as examples of disinvestment but will act as symbols and opportunities for economic growth through their return to use as functional housing units.

## 8.

### Adopt special rehabilitation building codes to regulate the renovation of existing structures.

A sizable share of older, pre–World War II buildings characterizes many urban and inner-suburban communities. When they are well maintained, these buildings can represent a desirable housing stock because of their architectural uniqueness. When they are not, however, these buildings can quickly disintegrate into blighted or vacant structures, posing risk of fire, economic disinvestment, and increased crime for the neighborhoods surrounding them.

The same features that make the buildings unique can also make the prospect of their conversion into modern housing units cost prohibitive for potential redevelopers. Building codes most commonly used to monitor structures are, for the most part, suited to regulate new construction in houses that conform to modern standards of hallway width, window and door dimensions, and the like. Retrofitting older homes—which may contain more narrow hallways, for example—to these standards represents a costly and time-consuming challenge for many prospective investors.

Parallel codes to regulate renovation of existing structures can stimulate the upgrading of homes, expand housing opportunities,

and facilitate reinvestment in existing neighborhoods. These codes do not replace the dominant building codes nor do they require that all buildings conform to pre–World War II building standards. Rather, these codes, which were adopted in consultation with fire and safety officials, ensure that the full range of housing stock is available for safe and secure use by prospective tenants.

Photo: Dr. John Guilderbloom

Previously vacant and abandoned buildings are converted to high-quality, affordable housing in the East Russel neighborhood of Louisville, Kentucky.

## 9.

### Enlist local jurisdictions in implementing a regional fair-share housing allocation plan across metropolitan areas.

The effects of individual housing needs are manifested at a regional level. It is not uncommon to find, for example, enclaves of middle- and upper-income housing supported by retail shops and services in which the employees are unable to afford housing anywhere near their typically low-wage jobs. Often those employed in the service economy, the public sector (including teachers, police officials, and firefighters), and increasingly in white-collar professional jobs are forced to seek affordable housing in distant parts of the metropolitan region. The result has been longer commutes, more congested roadways, and a growing disparity between high-cost and low-cost housing areas. Local governments often view the need to supply more affordable housing as a fiscal burden. They perceive risk in exchanging the potential high tax revenue earned from expensive housing for the potential net cost associated with low-cost housing, where service needs exceed generated tax revenue. This perspective fails to recognize the interrelatedness of the locality's housing needs and the economic growth it desires. This view also fails to recognize the regional impacts that will result for all community members should this jobs-housing imbalance persist (see Principle 1, Policy 1 for more information).

Fair-share housing-allocation plans can ensure that adequate housing opportunities exist regionwide. When all local governments within a region comply with their "fair share" of affordable housing (as determined by population, projected job growth, or existing jobs-housing imbalance, for example), the risk of clustering low-

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In Richmond, Virginia, a community-based process was used to determine its six priority neighborhoods for revitalization, of which the disposal of vacant properties was seen as a critical piece. The "Neighborhoods in Bloom" program focused on enforcement actions against building code violations, streamlined assistance for the rehabilitation of units, and targeted use of federal block grant money for infrastructure upgrades in the priority neighborhoods. As a result, during the first two years of the program, violent crime rates dropped by nearly 40 percent, and property values increased at a rate that exceeded rates in the city as a whole.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In the state of New Jersey, state officials first secured the support of fire officials in creating their Rehabilitation Code, by citing that vacant structures posed a greater fire risk than did buildings renovated under the proposed code. After the introduction of the rehab codes, rehabilitation work in the five largest cities increased by 60 percent in the first year of the code's implementation and 83 percent in Newark alone.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Pension funds present a significant opportunity to direct financial resources to support smart growth. In California, state treasurer Phil Angelides has encouraged the state's largest pension funds—CalPERS (California Public Employees' Retirement System) and the State Teachers Retirement System, on whose boards he sits—to invest more of their money in revitalizing urban centers in California.

income households in only a few areas drops. It also ensures that the potential costs to localities of providing low-cost housing are equally distributed among the region. Furthermore, the geographic distribution of affordable housing units creates more opportunity for households to locate near jobs and services, thereby mitigating the need for long commutes and congestion. Guaranteeing compliance can be difficult from a regulatory or legislative standpoint, as few regional bodies exist that would trump local government authority. Incentives may be created, however, to reward communities that do comply.

## 10.

**Give priority to smart growth projects and programs that foster smart growth in the allocation of federal housing and community development block grant (and other) funds.**

Block grants such as HOME and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), as well as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, represent significant sources of funds for housing and community development. While the federal government provides these resources, state and local governments have a great deal of discretion in allocating them. By modifying the standards that are used to distribute these funds, communities can encourage projects to incorporate desired smart growth aspects. Rather than replacing good current housing and community development projects, local government can encourage these projects to be better by incorporating smart growth characteristics. These projects might include transit accessibility, a mix of uses, new housing construction in existing neighborhoods, or the rehabilitation of existing buildings to include accessory dwelling units or multifamily housing.

These priorities for funding allocation must be set at the local or state level and should reflect both the federal standards for their use as well as the community's own vision of how and where it wants to grow. Local decision making allows communities to support their priorities, such as the revitalization of existing neighborhoods, the preservation of open space, or development to support expanded transit, pedestrian, or bicycle uses. As a result, not only will federal funds be used to expand access to housing and community services, but these funds will be used in a way that considers a wider range of long-term needs of the community.

[1] See Marya Morris, *Incentive Zoning: Meeting Urban Design and Affordable Housing Objectives*, Planning Advisory Service Report No. 494, published in 2000 by the American Planning Association, for a more complete description of this approach.

**Other Resources:**

- Smart Growth Network and National Neighborhood Coalition's *Affordable Housing and Smart Growth: Making the Connection* (Washington, D.C.: Smart Growth Network, 2001).

*Chapter Four*

# Create Walkable Communities

Before the mid-1900s, urban communities and neighborhoods focused on the pedestrian. They were designed to move people to their destinations. However, in the past fifty years, dispersed development patterns and the separation of uses have led to an increased reliance on personal automobiles and to an elimination of many characteristics that support walkable communities. Today, traffic engineers' and developers' arguments that sidewalks will not be used leave many new streets without sidewalks or with sidewalks on only one side. The engineers and developers are right in one sense: sidewalks by themselves will not induce walking. Other pedestrian-friendly features must be present, such as an appropriate mix of densities and uses, compact street intersections, and neighborhoods that are scaled to people.

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Walkable communities are integral to achieving the goals of smart growth because they enhance mobility, reduce negative environmental consequences, strengthen economies, and support stronger communities through improved social interaction. Communities can be built so that walking to destinations is a viable alternative, thereby improving access to services for the one-third of the population that is too old, too young, or too poor to drive. Communities that enhance pedestrian access provide many benefits for the environment. For example, by reducing the need for people to drive cars to every destination, pedestrian design can improve air quality. In addition, many of the suggested pedestrian-friendly improvements—such as narrower streets, on-street parking instead of off-street parking, or pathways through parking lots—reduce or break up large swaths of impervious cover, thereby decreasing stormwater runoff. These strategies yield economic benefits, as communities with better air and water quality are less burdened with the costs of treating air and water. Other economic and social benefits associated with walkable communities include lower transportation costs, improved personal health and fitness, and expanded consumer choice. As these many benefits of pedestrian-friendly communities are realized, more communities are engaging the public and private sectors in developing walkable neighborhoods.

**Clear and distinct opportunities for street crossing help make Highland Gardens in Denver, Colorado, a pedestrian-friendly community.**

Photo: Local Government Commission

Unfortunately, a multitude of public and private practices hinder the creation of walkable communities. Conventional land-use regulation often prohibits the mixing of land uses, thus lengthening trips and making walking a less viable alternative to driving. This regulatory bias against mixed-use development is reinforced by private financing policies that view mixed-use development as riskier than single-use development. Many communities—particularly those that are dispersed and largely auto-dependent—employ design practices that further reduce pedestrian activity. Conventional street design suggests wide streets with few crosswalks, long blocks, and limited pedestrian infrastructure—such as sidewalks, median strips, or traffic-calming features. The conventional design of residential developments also acts as a disincentive to pedestrian activity. Setback requirements, large minimum-lot requirements, and indirect street routes, including cul-de-sacs, increase the distance between pedestrians and destinations. Similar pedestrian disincentives exist within conventional commercial designs. Many office buildings, retail establishments, hotels, and other commercial uses are surrounded by large parking lots, which force pedestrians to navigate through a sea of parked and moving cars.

These barriers demonstrate that land use and community design play a pivotal role in encouraging pedestrian environments. Communities can increase the number and quality of walkable communities by building multiple destinations and uses within close proximity. This type of development ensures that streets and sidewalks balance all forms of transportation and that the buildings and corridors are the proper size and scale. Below is a range of policy options to help communities achieve this critical goal.

## 1.

**Provide grants or other financial assistance to local communities to retrofit existing streets and sidewalks to promote more walkable communities.**

As with any construction activity, retrofitting streets and sidewalks and adding pedestrian-friendly amenities to existing developments costs money. In today's fiscal climate, where communities sometimes omit sidewalks, landscaping, crosswalks, and other features that support walkability, the importance of additional sources of funding for these changes cannot be understated. State governments can play a powerful role by directing financial resources and technical support to aid local efforts. Targeted use of state and federal transportation funds can assist communities in initiating or completing pilot retrofitting projects, thus demonstrating the benefits of improved walkability and generating further support for expanded local financing of pedestrian-friendly retrofits. The state of Illinois, for example, under the "Illinois Tomorrow: Balanced Growth for a Better Quality of Life" initiative, recently awarded $3.7 million in grants to assist localities in promoting coordinated land use, transportation, and infrastructure planning efforts. Several of the awarded grantees (Berkeley, Melrose Park, and Western Springs) are using state funds to improve the walkability of local streets and streetscapes through improved planning, pedestrian-friendly retrofits, and transit-oriented development.

Federal sources of funding are also available, such as the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), which supports the integration of bicycling and walking into the transportation mainstream. More importantly, it enhances the ability of communities to invest in projects that improve the safety and practicality of bicycling and walking for everyday travel. Bicycle and pedestrian projects are broadly eligible for funding from almost all the major federal transportation programs, including highway, transit, and safety. In the years before passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (TEA-21's predecessor), federal spending on bicycling and walking facilities was approximately $4 to 6 million per year. Since then, spending of federal funds by states has grown to more than $296 million in fiscal year 2000.

## 2.

**Concentrate critical services near homes, jobs, and transit.**

Developments or communities that have medium to high densities and mixed land uses bring destinations and origins closer together and provide more incentives for people to walk. Research has demonstrated the importance of densities in promoting walking and transit use. Higher densities and a mix of uses mean more residents or employees are within walking distance of transit stops and stations. It also means that streets have more activity, interest and security with having more people around. Finally, mixed-use development and higher densities lead to a greater propensity to walk or use transit and to lower auto ownership rates. However, in most communities, local zoning ordinances for new or infill development prohibit the mixing of land uses, which limit the location of public and private services within walking distance of home, work, and transit. Furthermore, many communities lack or have inadequate street standards that provide the needed connectivity between mixed-use neighborhoods, the street network, and existing transit routes.

There are several mechanisms for addressing these barriers. First, local governments can identify and develop mixed-use overlay zones to enhance the mixed-use and compact nature of new and

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Hillsborough County, Florida, received $2.6 million from TEA-21 to develop Riverwalk—a new 1.25-mile, vibrant, linear, pedestrian-oriented linkage along Tampa's waterfront that provides the public with the opportunity to use and enjoy the special character of the Hillsborough Riverfront. For more information on using TEA-21 funds for pedestrian activities, see: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/bp-broch.htm.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The city of Pasadena, California has developed a Specific Area Plan for the neighborhood of East Pasadena. The plan provides policy objectives and standards to enable the community to meet its vision of being "an economically viable and attractive environment with a full range of mobility options—auto, light rail, bus, bicycle and pedestrian." To meet the community goal of improved mobility and an enhanced pedestrian environment, the city has developed a series of land-use strategies (emphasizing transit-oriented development and infill development) to encourage an increased mix and higher density of land uses in transit corridors. The city has also encouraged a series of urban design improvements, including the addition of landscaping, crosswalks, public parks, and plazas, to add pedestrian-friendly amenities to the city's streetscape.

infill developments. In addition, community groups and local governments can ensure that streets and walkways are better connected to each other so that pedestrian activities are increased. Ensuring that street construction standards are pedestrian-friendly also enhances the walkability of any community. Transportation authorities can reroute bus routes and adjust bus schedules to maximize ridership, and they can link buses with heavy rail transit stops, thereby attracting more pedestrian activity between transit stops and destinations. Finally, transit-oriented development (TOD) represents a key opportunity to accommodate new growth that is centered around transit and to retrofit parts of existing neighborhoods to better focus pedestrian options and destinations (see Principle 9, Policy 9 for more information).

## 3.

### Require building design that makes commercial areas more walkable.

Shops, offices, public facilities, and other nonresidential uses are destinations as well as community assets. Diverse streetscapes with retail shops, restaurants, public art and other amenities encourage people to linger. A lively and inviting street is viewed as safe and attractive, whereas an empty street, void of pedestrian activity, can convey abandonment or danger. Building aspects that isolate people and discourage pedestrian activity include "faceless" buildings without windows or doors at eye level, buildings with no first-floor retail, or buildings that are set back a great distance from the street. Increasing pedestrian traffic in these areas requires that buildings incorporate designs that create a sense of place and security.

There are several tools that local governments can use to make commercial areas more walkable, including design guidelines and zoning. Zoning for new construction can ensure that ground floor space faces the street, street-level retail is included in appropriate areas, structures are built to lot lines, and building fronts are made permeable by the placement of doors and windows. In addition, zoning and street standards can be used to ensure that blocks are kept short (see Principle 8, Policy 3), sidewalk commerce is encouraged (see Principle 5, Policy 5), and parking between buildings and sidewalks is eliminated (see Principle 9, Policy 6). Finally, the Specific Area Plan can be an important tool because it allows communities to modify specific building designs and commercial areas in targeted communities.

## 4.

### Adopt design standards for streets that ensure safety and mobility for pedestrian and nonmotorized modes of transport.

Making communities walkable requires that pedestrians and bicyclists feel comfortable and secure enough to share the street with

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Responding to public concerns that existing street design standards were limiting the livability and walkability of their community, the public works department in Sacramento, California, recently underwent an aggressive citizen-based approach to revising and adopting new street standards. The department brought an advisory team of developers, residents, bicycle advocates, transportation and urban planners, regional transit officials, landscape architects, and policemen and firemen to the table to think "outside of the box" about street standards applicable to the unique needs of Sacramento residents and business. The results of this process were a series of street standards that provide flexibility in street design (rather than a one-size-fits-all solution) and that balance livability demands and the need to maintain street function.

buses and automobiles. For example, conventional street design places the automobile at the top of the hierarchy of transportation modes, thus giving priority to automobile access and efficiency above other considerations. Traditional street design offers considerable advantages over conventional street design for providing a sense of security and convenience. Short blocks, narrow widths, landscaping, on-street parking, through streets and walkways characterize traditional streets and lead to streets that balance the needs of different transport modes (see also Principle 8, Policy 3). In addition, these characteristics keep urban traffic dispersed and at low speeds—two important considerations for ensuring the safety of pedestrians.

Also, neighborhood and urban streets must be designed to facilitate pedestrian crossings. In general, pedestrians will cross streets at crossing points as long as it requires going no more than 150 feet out of their way. For this reason, well-designed towns ensure convenient crossing points each 300 feet. This spacing is especially important on main streets. When fewer organized crossing points are established, sporadic or spontaneous street crossings by frustrated pedestrians create unsafe, unpredictable movements.[1]

Retrofitting streets to contain design features that support pedestrian activity can be challenging, expensive, and frustrating. Traffic delays resulting from structural changes to the street network impose costs on users. Communities can be proactive and avoid some of these costs by developing a toolbox of approved alternative street standards that meet these criteria. The development of regulations and incentives that encourage traditional street design prior to construction can contribute to a street network and design that support pedestrian and other nonmotorized forms of travel. Through the use of subdivision regulations, communities can require that new developments contain on-street parking, landscaping, sidewalks, narrow roadways, short blocks, grid-patterned streets, and well-marked bicycle lanes. Zoning can be used to reduce setback requirements or require consistent, human-scale design of storefronts.

## 5·

### Adopt design standards for sidewalks.

Better sidewalks require better design. Sidewalks need adequate widths, buffers, continuity, connectivity, and edges to ensure that they meet the needs of pedestrians. However, too few local officials understand these needs and fail to provide direction or funding for constructing or retrofitting sidewalks. Many new developments lack sidewalks, because often no local requirement to build them exists. Through the use of design standards, regular public investment, periodic evaluation of sidewalk performance, and subdivision design, communities can provide citizens with secure, convenient, and lasting sidewalks.

Specific design standards might include requiring a minimum width for sidewalks, buffers to shield users from traffic, or edges to clearly mark pedestrian zones. For example, a general design standard for sidewalk width might set a minimum requirement of at least five feet. To encourage more comfortable walking and

Photo: Wilson Baker

**Narrow streets, sidewalks, and front porches all contribute to make the I'On community in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, walkable for residents and visitors.**

**PRACTICE TIP:**

While Martin Luther King Boulevard in Portland, Oregon, in the late 1980s was not much of a credit to its namesake, a decade later the situation had reversed. By that time, the boulevard that most community residents had previously regarded as a thoroughfare to shuttle commuters was transformed into a main street and neighborhood center. Because of the state Department of Transportation's flexibility in administering design standards, an intergovernmental team of officials was able to create a pedestrian- and transit-friendly streetscape and sidewalk. Widened sidewalks, curb extensions to shorten street crossings, curbside bus stops, and crosswalks were some of the infrastructure changes that supported increased pedestrian activity. In addition, the visual character of the sidewalk and boulevard was enhanced by the addition of ornamental lighting, decorative paving, and frequent street trees.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The experience of officials in University Place, Washington, shows how street design can induce changes in vehicular behavior and calm traffic. University Place is home to Grandview Avenue—a two-lane suburban road where traffic held constant speeds of 44 mile per hour, despite posted speed limits of 35 miles per hour. In an effort to reduce speeding, a 1.1-mile section of Grandview was redesigned. Travel lanes were narrowed to 11 feet each, five-foot bike lanes were added, a two-foot landscaped edge and a five-foot sidewalk were included, and trees were planted to buffer pedestrians from the street. Today, motorists on Grandview operate at speeds below the 35-mile per hour posted limit, and pedestrians have a more secure and pleasant environment for walking.

higher volumes of pedestrians in commercial and school districts, however, sidewalk widths should be increased to eight to twelve feet. Large successful downtowns have widths of 20 to 30 feet or even a fifty-fifty ratio of street to sidewalk width. Sidewalk design standards might also specify buffers and edges. For example, design standards might require planter strips of four to six feet in suburban areas or recommend that fencing, shrubs, and other features form edges to parking lots, open lots, or other areas that must be traversed. Other design standards that can improve the pedestrian experience include instituting traffic-calming measures and providing landscaping and street trees to buffer pedestrians from traffic, locating sidewalks close to building fronts, discouraging off-street parking, encouraging on-street parallel parking, and providing adequate lighting and ample street crossings.

## 6.

### Require traffic-calming techniques where traffic speed through residential and urban neighborhoods is excessive.

Many new or updated residential streets today are designed to maximize vehicular flow. Long blocks, wide turning radii, and broad streets create a comfort zone for drivers, which encourages speeding and discourages pedestrians. Car volume and speeds often increase because of the lack of pedestrians, which increases perceptions of unsafe walking conditions and leads to further declines in pedestrian use. Traffic-calming techniques can help balance pedestrian and vehicular use by slowing neighborhood and main street speeds, thereby encouraging walking. Traffic-calming techniques can be used both to retrofit existing streets and to design new streets.

Traffic-calming measures generally include changes in street design, such as incorporating traffic circles to replace traffic lights or stop signs, shorter turning radii, speed humps, narrower streets, or curves in roadways to create shorter visual horizons. Other measures directly address the pedestrian, such as raised crosswalks, landscaped islands between opposing lanes of traffic, and fewer road lanes (or the conversion of some lanes to other uses, such as bike lanes). These structural changes are often regarded as more effective at reducing speeds on streets than ticketing and enforcement and help return the street to all users—bikers, walkers, drivers, and buses.

## 7.

### Beautify and maintain existing and future walkways.

Making communities walkable not only means providing residents with pedestrian and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure—such as crosswalks, bike lanes, sidewalks—but also maintaining that infrastructure. Sidewalks, streets, and street drains that are not maintained act as a disincentive for potential pedestrians and may pose a threat to safety for bicyclists and people who use other nonmotorized means of transport.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In a partnership between the city transportation department, the Los Angeles Transportation Authority, the California Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Economic Development Administration, the city of Calabasas, California, was able to mitigate the effect of traffic spillover from nearby Ventura Freeway and enhance the walkability of the downtown. Through the use of extensive tree planting and preservation of existing trees; the incorporation of boardwalks, bollards, and lighting into roadway design; and the additions of bicycle lanes and bus turnout bays, the city has created a pedestrian-friendly destination. The design improvements and beautification of downtown have increased tourism and economic activity.

Attractive and well-maintained walkways encourage more people to walk to their destinations. Communities that incorporate or create landscaping (such as trees or shrubs) along right-of-ways, in town centers, along open spaces, and around other focus areas encourage walking by providing a more enticing environment. For example, Birmingham, Michigan, witnessed a 10-15 mph speed reduction on roads where street trees are present. Public art, seating, and frequently-maintained trash receptacles in heavily trafficked areas such as town centers, civic plazas and parks, and along transportation corridors, also contribute to the overall pedestrian experience.

Sidewalks require maintenance to ensure that they provide a hospitable pedestrian environment and to extend their useful life. While streets are routinely swept, patched, reconditioned, and serviced, sidewalks in the same neighborhoods are often ignored. Sidewalks require speedy snow removal and occasional resetting of slabs. Periodic, ongoing repairs and maintenance are necessary. Healthy neighborhoods have adequate measures to identify and correct maintenance problems. Bushes, trees, and other vegetation need to be regularly trimmed. By developing and enforcing sidewalk-shoveling ordinances and building codes to set standards for yard maintenance, debris clearance, and bush and tree trimming, local officials can help ensure that property owners are doing their part to augment the public investment in safe and well-maintained sidewalks.

## 8.

**Provide Americans with disabilities easy access to sidewalks, streets, parks, and other public and private services.[2]**

Complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is not only a matter of law; it is the best way to meet the needs of all people. However, engineers are often stymied by the numerous challenges posed by retrofitting current streets to meet the needs of people with disabilities, and unfortunately, there are no easy technological fixes. Because of the difficulties and cost associated with retrofits, pedestrian access and ADA requirements ideally should be addressed in all new developments, infill projects, and street and sidewalk construction. Street crossings, for example, should be developed to help people navigate to a crossing point, easily identify the entry and exit of the crossing, and avoid barriers along the way. Implementing many of the policies discussed throughout this section will dramatically increase access, for people with and without disabilities, and increase the pedestrian-friendly nature of new and existing communities. By improving access, communities can often better meet the requirements of the ADA—often without incurring any additional expense.

## 9.

**Connect walkways, parking lots, greenways, and developments.**

Communities need many links to facilitate pedestrian travel. Even when residential and commercial areas are in close proximity to one another, without adequate connections, community residents are discouraged from substituting short vehicle trips with walking. Unfortunately, conventional land use and design has often resulted in a street network with minimal or no through streets and walkways. In contrast, traditional street networks typically have shorter blocks and numerous through streets, providing pedestrians with multiple routes by which to reach their destination. Retrofitting conventional street networks so that they have the connectivity exhibited by traditional street networks is challenging but possible by using natural features—such as utility corridors, waterways and other open spaces—to link existing walkways and destinations.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The city of Richmond, Virginia, was awarded $80,000 in federal transportation funds to cover 80 percent of the costs of constructing an accessible sidewalk for wheelchair users. The sidewalk linked a home for adults with severe physical disabilities to Maymont Park in Richmond.

## 10.

### Identify economic opportunities that stimulate pedestrian activity.

Design standards, traffic-calming measures, and the other policies discussed all work to create an environment that is pedestrian friendly. In addition to these direct mechanisms of creating walkable communities, local governments can also identify economic or retail opportunities that stimulate and attract pedestrian activity. Main Street redevelopment programs, first floor retail, sidewalk service (see Principle 5, Policy 5), and pedestrian malls all capitalize on pedestrian activity for economic development purposes. Communities can enhance walkability by identifying important local assets—for example, natural features, historic districts, or unique architectural design—and by developing economic development strategies that use those assets to attract pedestrians to retail and restaurant venues. For example, many communities have Main Street programs that are designed to revitalize urban cores or downtown corridors. Some small towns in upstate New York, however, are revitalizing their historic Main Streets with the specific goal of attracting tourists from larger downstate cities, by getting them out of their cars and onto the sidewalks where they can browse the antique, craft, and other shops native to these small towns.

Other communities—including Boulder, Colorado, Burlington, Vermont, and Charlottesville, Virginia—have capitalized on their appeal to tourists by creating shopping districts catered to pedestrians. These districts—sometimes identified as pedestrian malls or commons—create a relationship between the pedestrian shopper and the storekeeper that is mutually reinforcing. With the growth in customers who are able to gain access to shops on foot, the stores flourish and are in turn able to attract more pedestrians as the retail district grows stronger. Communities can use economic revitalization as a magnet for pedestrian activity in any number of ways. The city of Ann Arbor, Michigan, for example, created a retail pedestrian atmosphere by permitting two-way traffic on its downtown Main Street. Parking is limited, however, and sidewalks are extra wide for outdoor cafes. Furthermore, the city closes the street several days each summer for art fairs and other special events. The result is a bustling atmosphere all day and evening, which demonstrates that increasing pedestrian access can do more than provide a transportation option or improve the quality of a neighborhood—it can also generate an economic boon.

**An old dairy redeveloped into a mixed use (retail and housing) structure initiated the revitalization of an vibrant, walkable corridor in Portland, Oregon.**

Photo: Smart Growth Network

[1] Dan Burden, "Building Communities with Transportation," (paper presented at the Transportation Research Board Conference, Washington, D.C., 10 January 2001).

[2] Summarized from Burden.

### Other Resources

- Walkable Communities, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping communities become more pedestrian friendly—www.walkable.org.
- America Walks—a national nonprofit coalition of local advocacy groups dedicated to promoting walkable communities—http://americawalks.org/.
- Reid Ewing, *Pedestrian- and Transit-Friendly Design: A Primer for Smart Growth* (Washington, D.C.: Smart Growth Network, 1999).

Photo: Joe Schilling

*Chapter Five*

# Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place

Conventional development patterns have helped to create a predominance of strip shopping centers and large suburban tract home developments that are, with the exception of small cosmetic variations, largely indistinguishable from one another. While such an approach may conserve costs initially and make development more profitable for some, it does little to stimulate civic pride or contribute to a strong sense of place with which community residents can identify.

Smart growth supports the idea that development should not only respond to basic commercial or housing needs, for example, but should also help create communities that are distinctive and unique. Smart growth seeks to

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**PRACTICE TIP:**

In the state of Maryland, where Governor Parris Glendening has made smart growth a key focus of his administration, existing schools now receive funding priority over new schools. Long-neglected, older public schools in existing neighborhoods now receive 80 percent of new state school construction funds, up from 38 percent a decade ago. In 2000, the school construction investment exceeded $300 million, with over 80 percent of the funding being used to renovate and modernize existing schools in established communities.[1]

foster the types of physical environments that create a sense of civic pride, and therefore support a more cohesive community fabric. As a result, economic benefits accrue as well; high-quality communities with architectural and natural elements that reflect the interests of all residents are more likely to retain their economic vitality and value over time.

A great deal can be learned from some of America's most distinctive and interesting neighborhoods, such as San Francisco's Japantown, the French Quarter in New Orleans, or New England's small towns. Communities that have a strong sense of place represent the values of their residents and reflect the unique historical, cultural, economic, and geographical context of the area. They use natural and man-made boundaries and landmarks to create a sense of defined neighborhoods, urban communities, and regions. These communities encourage the construction and preservation of buildings, which prove to be assets over time, not only because of the services provided, but also because of the unique contribution they make to the look and feel of a community. Beyond the construction of buildings, these communities reflect their unique characteristics in myriad details—such as landscaping, signs, and awnings—that help to further distinguish the area for passers-by and visitors. Guided by their own vision of how and where to grow, communities that have adopted smart growth principles can direct investment and development into areas that already reflect a strong sense of place. Moreover, these communities can encourage new fringe development to make a better effort to create distinctive, unique civic assets.

## I.

### Modify state funding processes and school siting standards to preserve neighborhood schools and build new schools to a "community level."

Neighborhood schools are those that serve the educational needs of nearby residents and that contribute to the social and physical environment of the community. Moreover, they function as community gathering places for adult education programs, evening civic events, or weekend sports competitions. They may serve as landmarks in a community or as examples of monumental architecture or historical significance within a region. Schools built at a community level are constructed to complement existing neighborhoods and provide improved walking or bicycle access to the school by students and community members. Most importantly, these schools serve as critical civic anchors in a community, often acting as the center of districts or neighborhoods with which residents can identify.

However, siting standards and funding criteria common in many states present significant obstacles to communities wishing to support neighborhood schools. Current standards typical in most states require vast tracts of land for new construction—equivalent to 14 acres for an elementary school with 400 students, or 50 acres for a high school with 2,000 students. Because of these standards, communities are often left with little choice but to build these large schools on available land on the urban fringe. These schools are then forced to accommodate the great number of vehicles which students require to get there. State standards may also require new construction if renovation costs to existing schools exceed a threshold amount (e.g., two-thirds of the cost of new construction).

Providing for schools in a manner that fosters their incorporation into the surrounding neighborhood is an important aspect of smart growth. Through modified siting and funding criteria, states can better support localities that want to maintain existing schools and ensure the responsible placement of new schools. Other strategies, such as the use of shared-risk insurance plans, can help overcome the liability obstacles that often prevent schools from more fully serving as community gathering points for other activities and events after hours.

## 2.

### Create a state tax credit to encourage adaptive reuse of historic or architecturally significant buildings.

Well-maintained historic, culturally, or architecturally significant buildings are often regarded as some of the most valued civic treasures in a community. These buildings remind residents and visitors of an area's unique history and provide a visible link to it. While historic buildings often do not retain their original use, their adaptive renovation and reuse can create unique, interesting, innovative spaces for modern services. When clustered in close geographic proximity, these buildings can create the basis for a specially designated zone or district that may attract tourism and other appropriate economic development activities. Finally, the very existence of historic or architecturally significant buildings may provide the basic building blocks for recreating the pedestrian-oriented development typical of the pre–World War II era.

The community value associated with historic properties, however, is not always fully represented in the building's market value. As a result, building owners may not find it cost-effective to maintain or renovate these buildings in a way that preserves their unique features, while allowing for modern uses. State tax credits, modeled after the federal program (see practice tip) constitute one possible action for states to support historic preservation.[2] Through state tax credits, incentives can be created for localities and developers to engage in public-private partnerships, when appropriate, to convert these buildings to new uses. Tax credits would allow owners, for example, to claim up to 20 percent of the cost of renovation on state income taxes, thereby effectively reducing the cost of renovation. With creative thinking, effective partnerships can turn historic theaters into arts centers or retail spaces, and can renovate small factories as loft apartments or business incubators. In so doing, not only are valuable and distinctive community treasures preserved, but new opportunities for development in neighborhoods already served by infrastructure are also created.

## 3.

### Plant trees throughout communities and preserve existing trees during new construction.

Trees play important environmental, aesthetic, and economic roles in creating distinctive and healthy places to live. Trees along

**PRACTICE TIP:**

A 2001 report released by the National Park Service cited a 25-year old federal program designed to preserve historic properties as "one of the most successful revitalization programs ever created." The Tax Reform Act of 1976 created the first federal tax incentives for the preservation of historic buildings, renovating 3,000 historic buildings that represented more than $4.5 billion worth of investments in the last five years alone. The Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit is a dollar for dollar reduction of federal income tax liability, which permits anyone who rehabilitates a historic building to claim a tax credit of 20 percent of the cost of the renovation. For more information see the press release on www.nthp.org.

Photo: Bowman Development Group

**New and mature trees combine to give this new development in Huntersville, North Carolina, a distinct character, and preserve opportunities for recreation and natural habitat.**

**PRACTICE TIP:**

American Forests, an organization dedicated to forestry issues, has determined that in three study areas—Atlanta, Puget Sound, and the Chesapeake Bay region—development over the last 25 years has helped to reduce the heavy tree canopy by more than one-third. In each of these areas, the tree canopy cover falls short of American Forests' recommended 40 percent average cover for the metropolitan area. For more information, go to www.americanforests.org. Scenic America, a nonprofit technical and advocacy organization, has a number of resources to aid communities in increasing their tree canopy, including a model tree ordinance. For more information, go to www.scenic.org.

medians, sidewalks, and embankments serve to filter noise and pollution from nearby vehicular traffic, as well as mitigate erosion that causes damage to and raises maintenance costs of adjacent roadways. Along commercial and residential zones, trees provide a canopy of shade and shelter from the elements, and soften and frame the streetscape for the passerby. Large trees along a retail strip make the strip more inviting, which generates more business, thereby serving as an economic stimulus for the community. By cooling homes and communities, trees reduce energy costs and create a more comfortable climate for outdoor activities. By slowing stormwater runoff and helping to protect wetlands, trees can reduce the costs associated with water treatment for local jurisdictions. They help the environment by cooling temperatures and by consuming excess carbon dioxide (primarily the result of pollution), thus reducing the amount of carbon dioxide that contributes to global warming. In short, trees add to the beauty, distinctiveness, and material value of neighborhoods by incorporating the natural environment into the built environment.

Through collaborative efforts, neighborhoods and the public and private sectors can be engaged to preserve and add to the tree stock in a community. In existing communities, tree planting programs undertaken by schools and civic associations can increase the presence of trees on residential streets and commercial thoroughfares. Other incentives, such as a community grant fund for tree planting or reduced zoning requirements, can encourage property owners to preserve existing trees or plant new ones. Localities can put into place ordinances or incentives that encourage landowners to preserve a portion of *in-situ* trees or replace trees that could not be preserved. When enacted in concert with a community's own plan for increasing the supply of trees and tree canopy cover, these actions can provide an additional way to create distinctive, healthy communities.

## 4.

### Create active and secure open spaces.

Open spaces, whether built or natural, active or passive, help create distinctive communities. Pocket parks, playgrounds, plazas, squares, social gathering places, and other publicly accessible open spaces contribute to the aesthetic quality of the surrounding area and to the feeling of "community" that fosters a strong sense of place. Open spaces may also provide environmental benefits as hosts to trees and penetrable ground surfaces that filter air and water, respectively, and mitigate stormwater runoff. These spaces must be managed and designed in a way that ensures the safety of their users so that the public spaces remain viable and desirable over time.

Many opportunities exist to foster open space in a community (see Principle 6 for a full discussion of these issues). For example, open spaces can be created through incentives to developers, through direct construction by local governments, or through other public-private partnerships. In new developments, open spaces should be incorporated into the design process and placed in a manner that ensures maximum access and use by area residents. In existing neighborhoods, street ends, abandoned lots, brownfields, or deteriorated houses may provide opportunities for small, scattered parks or community gardens. In bustling commercial centers, plazas, parks, and public squares can serve as prominent visual cues for business districts, provide amenities for employees and shoppers, and add value to nearby buildings. Finally, each of these settings can serve as a venue for engaging the public in festivals, community gardening activities, sports events, or other civic activities that help to galvanize the sense of community among members, and that create places in which people have a vested interest to preserve and protect.

## 5.

### Simplify and expedite permitting regulations to allow vendors to offer sidewalk service.

Facilitating sidewalk service (e.g., walk-up window purchases, retail displays, dining, and kiosks) is perhaps the easiest way to provide support for expanded business along pedestrian-oriented commercial thoroughfares. By allowing vendors to sell their goods and wares at walk-up windows or at kiosks placed along the sidewalk, local governments make it easier for entrepreneurs to connect with their customers, and sidewalk service creates a magnet for strolling shoppers who seek an alternative to the local enclosed mall. The increased foot traffic that results will spur more business investment and create a vital neighborhood shopping area from which the entire community can benefit.

In many cases, permits for sidewalk service are either difficult to obtain from local governments, or the permits require a complicated approval process. Local governments, in cooperation with local business leaders, can target neighborhood shopping districts, identify the type of retail activity that would complement existing businesses, and then simplify and expedite the permitting process accordingly. Communities that are seeking to expand sidewalk service should also ensure that the designated sidewalks are wide enough to accommodate a higher level of activity.

**Sidewalk dining helps make Bethesda Row in Bethesda, Maryland, a vibrant neighborhood center day and night.**

Photo: Federal Realty Investment Trust

By coordinating efforts among zoning, licensing, and public works officials, potential vendors benefit from an expedited approval process, and the jurisdiction benefits from growth in sales tax receipts and permitting fees associated with new business start-ups. Most importantly, communities benefit from a vibrant, strong, pedestrian-oriented shopping district that can provide a focal point for activity and neighborhood identity.

## 6.

### Create special improvement districts for focused investment.

The designation of special districts is a convenient means to organize and focus investment in a particular area to achieve a range of outcomes, such as historic preservation, business improvement, or economic revitalization. It provides an opportunity for local or other special purpose governments to establish clear boundaries and names for geographic areas with which residents and businesses can better identify. By strengthening the sense of community in these areas, citizens can become more involved in development decisions about their own district and the region of which it is a part.

Creating fixed boundaries around neighborhoods in which tax incentives, regulatory flexibility, or other

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Main Streets are found in nearly every American community and represent one of the most common approaches to the use of special improvement districts. With an emphasis on historic preservation and economic development, the Main Street program supports commercial district revitalization as a means to benefit all members of the surrounding community. Nationally, Main Street communities have had more than $12.8 billion of new public and private investment in their downtowns. In North Carolina alone, the state Main Street program has seen more than $540 million of new investment and has experienced a net gain of 8,400 jobs in downtown areas since the program began in 1980. The Main Street Center at the National Trust for Historic Preservation provides tools and technical assistance to communities to establish and revitalize these vital commercial district centers. Learn more at www.mainstreet.org.

financial benefits are made available can help channel targeted investment to support strong, vibrant communities. In central business districts, for example, business improvement districts coordinate shared responsibility among businesses and building owners to support entertainment, services, or other amenities that can attract customers and improve the business climate. Historic districts are used to help protect tracts of historic buildings through the provision of tax incentives or grants for restoration and preservation. Support to designated art corridors may help attract a critical mass of artists, art suppliers, and vendors, which would constitute a destination in itself for art lovers. Neighborhood centers often benefit from a clear determination of the service area around the center in order to better identify potential customers and recruit businesses and service providers accordingly. In these and other cases, creating smaller-scale zones within a larger urban or suburban context can help residents, visitors, and businesses better identify communities by their stronger sense of place.

**Unique lightposts, signs, and sidewalk treatments help identify this Brea, California, retail corridor.**

Photo: Local Government Commission

## 7.

### Define communities and neighborhoods with visual cues.

Just as the ancient city wall once indicated to people the beginning of a town, visual cues are an important means to help visitors and residents distinguish areas from one another. Often subtle, sometimes blatant, these cues act as either focal points or wayfinding aids to attract and direct pedestrian and automobile flow to commercial or entertainment activities. In so doing, cues create virtual borders around districts for special uses, give shape and definition to neighborhoods, and contribute to the unique look and feel of a given community. Communities that are well defined and easy to navigate not only attract new activity and investment, but they help create neighborhoods and amenities that are worth preserving.

Cues can be explicit, such as signs directing visitors to important locations or monumental-type architecture, which contributes to the vista at street ends or along blocks. The decorative gate in Chinatown, San Francisco, is a clear example of this sort of physical introduction to a unique and distinct community. Visual cues can be more subtle, as well, and include elements such as unique lightposts, novel street signs, variegated materials for streets or sidewalks, distinct landscaping styles, or complimentary awnings or overhangs above businesses. Open space and natural features, such as greenbelts, creeks, or other prominent natural features, can also be used to introduce or signal the transition from one zone to another.

As with other policies to achieve distinctive communities, visual cues can be incorporated into new and existing communities through the combined efforts of the public and private sectors. The preferences articulated by communities for aesthetic details are codified and enforced in building codes and design standards,

and preferences for the placement and orientation of open space and monumental buildings are represented in master plans. Innovative public-private partnerships, which call on the strengths of each sector to enhance the physical environment for all, will implement these community preferences.

## 8.

### Preserve scenic vistas through the appropriate location of telecommunication towers, and through improved control of billboards.

Extending high above rooftops and trees, telecommunication towers and billboards often dramatically affect the appearance of communities. They may clutter the view of an otherwise scenic roadway or streetscape or obscure the natural or physical features of a community altogether. Many creative alternatives exist for the placement of wireless towers, for example, such placing them on rooftops, where they can be concealed by high-reaching building details. However, communities that are pressured into creating full and fast access for telecommunications infrastructure may not fully consider these options. Communities can regulate the placement and use of towers by working with private industry to generate ideas on how to locate towers and monopoles unobtrusively. Joint public-private efforts may include agreements to keep tower height equal to the nearby tree canopy, to locate towers on downslopes rather than summits to reduce visual impact, to limit towers along ridgelines, or to incorporate them into existing features such as water tanks, electric-transmission towers, or church spires. Documenting these guidelines in ordinances that clearly spell out the community's requirements for tower location, appearance, and design can improve the process of expanding telecommunication networks for all involved.

Billboards, too, present an opportunity for improved management. Communities seeking to preserve their scenic vistas can begin by instituting a moratorium on all new billboards and then encouraging the gradual phase-out of existing billboards upon expiration of leases. Incentives may be created in the form of tax abatements or scenic easements to reward landowners who require removal of billboards from their property upon lease expiration, and who keep their property free of billboards. Communities that have been successful in limiting or eradicating billboards in favor of logo signs and tourist-oriented directional signs have created a higher quality of life for their residents and have continued to grow their economies based on their enhanced visual appeal to visitors.

## 9.

### Create opportunities for community interaction.

Communities are defined by more than the physical and natural elements that comprise them. The most well-designed street in the world will fail to evoke a sense of community if there are no opportunities for interaction or vibrant exchange among neighbors. Public places of all sorts can provide the venue for these sorts of interactions: sidewalks become hosts to outside shopping or art displays, closed-off streets become havens for block parties or markets, and parks and plazas become open-air theaters for music or performances. Offered on a regular basis, festivals that celebrate local produce, historical events, or cultural traditions can become a vibrant and ongoing reminder of the unique nature of a given community, and can create opportunities for distinctive traditions from which all residents and visitors can derive enjoyment.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The organization Scenic America has created a range of tools that communities can use to protect scenic vistas, including model ordinances that have been promoted by states and are currently being used successfully to address unsightly placement of towers and billboards. These and other resources are available through the organization's Web site, www.scenic.org.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The city of Santa Fe, New Mexico, has adopted design guidelines that ensure that new construction complements the traditional architectural style of the area, such as the use of light earth tone colors and traditional stucco finish materials. Its *Architectural Design Review Handbook* parallels the city's zoning code and building permit process and provides a checklist for builders so that they can avoid delays in the approval process.

Broad constituencies benefit from such events and can be tapped to support farmers' markets, art and music festivals, or even block parties. Business owners benefit from the increased flow of people attracted by these events. Schools may support such activities because of the learning opportunities they present to students and as a means to share with the broader community the skills and talents of their children. Local farmers, artisans, and musicians are likely to play a critical role in supporting such events, because these events provide outlets for performances and sales that would otherwise be unavailable to them. In many communities, nonprofit organizations are formed with the support of local government and civic leaders to manage and promote these events. Chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, civic associations, and other local organizations can play an important role in bringing together the diverse parties that are necessary to make these events vital parts of the community landscape.

## 10.

### Enact clear design guidelines so that streets, buildings, and public spaces work together to create a sense of place.

Beyond basic requirements for safety and accessibility, buildings are often subject to little regulation of how they look, how they are constructed, or how they relate to the street. In the absence of such requirements, few developers find it in their financial best interest to invest in architectural detail or decorative features, which would enhance the look of buildings and would contribute to a more distinctive and appealing community. The same could be said of public officials who, in the construction of civic buildings, sidewalks, streets, and public parks, are motivated primarily by the desire to deliver the necessary product at the lowest possible cost and in the shortest possible time. Yet, it is precisely the cumulative effect of these numerous individual development and design decisions that create the look and feel of our built environments.

Communities that include well-designed buildings, attractive signage, well-maintained facades, and a positive orientation of buildings to the street are often the most distinctive. Other opportunities for improved design guidelines pertain to the placement of bus shelters and benches, the design of sidewalks and bike paths, the introduction of landscaping and street trees, and the incorporation of community parks and public gathering spaces. With improved attentiveness to these aspects, communities are more valued for their uniqueness, better able to attract new businesses and residents, and therefore less likely to suffer disinvestment and neglect. This ongoing vitality of neighborhoods is both an outgrowth of and a contributor to smart growth.

As the community establishes its own definition of a desirable look, an opportunity arises to create a unique, memorable streetscape to attract future development. These preferences can

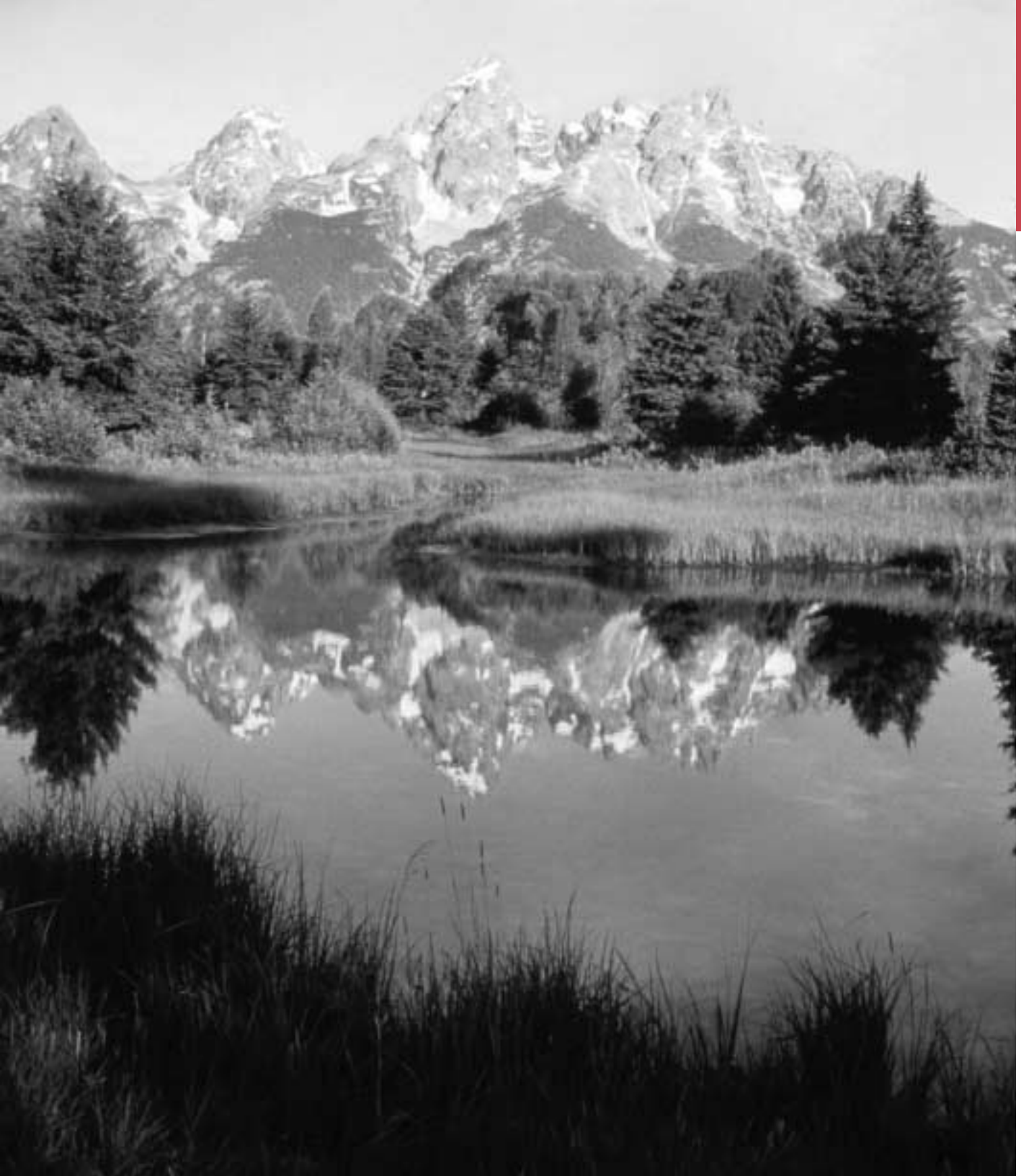
Photo: Local Government Commission

**Strict design criteria help create Civano's unique look in Phoenix, Arizona – one that evokes traditional Southwest architecture.**

form the basis for the creation of clear design guidelines that regulate building setback, street and sidewalk design, architectural styles, signage practices, and building materials. The guidelines can be prescriptive and detailed, regulating everything down to the size and color of signs, or they can set broad parameters for design to allow for maximum diversity among users. In either case, when they are applied in a clear and consistent fashion, these design considerations add value to the community and provide guidance for developers who, in turn, can create higher quality projects by being attentive to their end design from the early stages.

[1] State of Maryland, Office of Smart Growth.

[2] Other state activities to support renovation include: (1) the establishment of a state-level "Main Street" office to support local affiliates, (2) priority allocation of transportation or infrastructure funding for communities committed to preserving historic structures, (3) grants to local nonprofit organizations to carry out rehabilitation and restoration activities, and (4) efforts to inform local government officials on the economic and cultural value of preserving historic structures.



*Chapter Six*

# Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas

Communities across the United States are realizing that open space preservation is an important component to achieving better places to live. Open space supports smart growth goals by bolstering local economies, preserving critical environmental areas, providing recreational opportunities, and guiding new growth into existing communities. Preservation of open space can have a profound impact on a community's quality of life, and therefore a region's economic prosperity. An economic analysis performed for the East Bay Regional Park District in California concluded that "the provision of open space and associated recreational and educational opportunities, environmental and cultural preservation, alternative transit modes, and sprawl-limiting characteris-

$MART GROWTH
NETWORK

tics, all contribute positively to the quality of life in the East Bay region."[1] A 1997 study reported that owners of small companies ranked recreation, parks, and open space as the highest priorities in choosing a new location for their business.[2]

Networks of preserved open space and waterways can shape and direct urban form and at the same time prevent haphazard conservation (conservation that is reactive and small scale). These networks, known as "green infrastructure," help frame new growth by locating new development in the most cost-efficient places. The most cost-efficient locations for new development are where roads, sewers, water lines, and other utilities currently exist. Green infrastructure also ensures that the preserved areas are connected so as to create wildlife corridors, preserve water quality, and maintain economically viable working lands.

**Working lands and recreation resources are preserved by directing development to existing communities.**

Photo: Tim McCabe, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

There are significant fiscal, environmental quality, and health benefits associated with the protection of open space. Open space can increase local property values (thereby increasing property tax bases),[3] provide tourism dollars, and reduce the need for local tax increases by reducing the need for construction of new infrastructure.[4] In addition, management of the quality and supply of open space ensures that prime farm and ranch lands are available, prevents flood damage, and provides a natural and less expensive alternative for providing clean drinking water.[5] Preservation of open spaces helps to protect animal and plant habitats, places of natural beauty, and working lands by removing the development pressure and redirecting new growth to existing communities.

Preservation benefits the environment by combating air pollution, attenuating noise, controlling wind, providing erosion control, and moderating temperatures. Finally, open space also protects surface and ground water resources by filtering trash, debris, and chemical pollutants before they enter the community's water system.

Political will is increasing to save the places that Americans treasure. Voters in 2000 continued the trend over the past five years by overwhelmingly approving ballot measures to fund open space protection—passing 201 of 257 open space measures on the ballot, an approval rate of nearly 80 percent. In most of these referenda, voters approved tax increases, which provided more than $7.4 billion for land conservation.[6]

There is a sense of urgency to saving critical environmental areas. Once a greenfield has been developed it is hard, if not impossible, to return the land to its original state. Land preservation is also becoming more expensive as growth pressures become stronger. Therefore, communities must work with other communities in their region and political leaders to expend the resources and develop the innovative techniques to make open space preservation a reality. A range of policies and approaches that can help communities in their efforts are presented in this chapter.

## I.

### Use transfer of development rights purchase of development rights, and other market mechanisms to conserve private lands.

It may not be realistic or desirable for the public sector to buy outright all of the open space they wish to protect, so innovative ways to protect targeted areas must be considered. An increasingly popular tool for land preservation has been the use of market-

based mechanisms such as donated conservation easements, transfer of development rights (TDRs), and purchase of development rights (PDRs). These tools all can permanently protect land from development pressure by channeling financial incentives to the property owner.

A PDR—in essence, a purchased conservation easement—offers a permanent solution for communities looking to preserve open space if they are unable to purchase the land outright. Under a PDR, landowners sell the rights to develop their land to a land trust or government agency while retaining the title to the property and the rest of their bundle of rights. As a result, a legal restriction is tied to the deed for the property that prevents all future development on the targeted land. Landowners benefit by not only receiving payment for the PDR, but they are often also eligible for some combination of property tax, estate tax, or income tax benefits. PDRs have been especially successful in protecting working lands. For example, PDRs have been used to keep almost a million acres of farm and ranch land nationwide in productive private ownership.[7]

In a TDR program, a community identifies areas for protection and areas for increased density. Landowners who own property in areas designated for preservation are given development credits that can be sold. These credits can be purchased by developers to build in areas designated for increased density. TDRs are an evolving tool, but they have been successful in a handful of locations. One-third of the 90,000-acre agricultural reserve in Montgomery County, Maryland, is protected through the use of a TDR program.[8] Approximately 13,000 acres of the New Jersey Pinelands have been protected since the Pinelands Commission sanctioned the use of TDRs in 1980.[9]

The use of these innovative tools remains illegal, however, in many localities in the United States. Therefore, if these tools are to be effective, it is imperative that states provide the enabling legislation that is necessary to allow communities to preserve valuable open space.

## 2.

### Coordinate and link local, state, and federal planning on land conservation and development.

Many resources exist at the local, state, and federal levels to preserve and protect open space. Often the linkages between the various programs that would allow them to have a more significant impact are absent. States can play an active role in building stronger support for open-space conservation by collaborating with relevant partners to protect open spaces.

The state of Utah's Critical Land Conservation Committee was established as a catalyst for locally initiated conservation efforts. The committee plans to assist localities and organizations by providing technical expertise, conducting a statewide open-space inventory, developing a land-use and conservation clearinghouse, and facilitating the multi-agency and cross-jurisdictional partnerships that many open-space conservation efforts require. This effort included and educated all stakeholders: government, private industry and organizations, academia, and individuals.[10]

## 3.

### Expand use of innovative financing tools to facilitate open-space acquisition and preservation.

The challenge of paying for a resource that is unlikely to generate immediate fiscal benefits, yet necessitates expensive outlays of capital to secure, requires innovative approaches to financing.

Photo: New Jersey Department of Community Affairs

**Creating opportunities for open spaces in high-density downtown contexts -- like this one in Newark, New Jersey -- are critical.**

**PRACTICE TIP:**

For an example of enabling legislation for the New York State TDR program visit http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?cl=118&a=33.

There are many such tools that can be used to finance open-space acquisition and preservation. These tools include levying a portion of the local sales tax or real estate transfer tax, instituting impact fees, using borrowing power (e.g., bonds), providing income tax credits, charging user fees, and collecting fees from special motor vehicle taxes or license plates.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

For more information on innovative approaches to financing open space acquisition, visit the Trust for Public Land at www.tpl.org/tier3_cdl.cfm?content_item_id=1175&folder_id=708.

Maryland's "Program Open Space", for example, provides 100 percent funding for acquisition of parkland, greenways, and places of special cultural value and 75 percent of development costs for local and state parks and recreation areas funded through the state real estate transfer tax. More than 2,800 local projects have been funded so far by the program, which places one-half percent of the purchase price of a home or land into a special fund. Once the program purchases a land, the land's use cannot be altered unless a suitable alternative is provided.[11] In 1967, Boulder, Colorado, became the first city in the United States to pass a sales tax (0.4 percent) to buy, preserve, and maintain greenbelt land. In 1989, an additional 0.33 percent was added. Using this and other funding, more than $100 million has been spent on the city's Open Space Program.[12]

## 4.

### Employ regional development strategies that better protect and preserve open space in edge areas.

One of the most fundamental approaches to preserving open space is to reduce the regional development pressures on existing open areas at the fringe of communities. By providing financial or regulatory incentives to focus development in areas where adequate infrastructure for growth (water, sewer, roads, and the like) already exists, land at the urban fringe will be under less pressure for development. Regional development strategies can help coordinate the efforts of localities and identify opportunities for infill or brownfields development, thereby protecting land at the urban fringe to benefit all.

The state of Wisconsin supports regional planning to ease development pressures on fringe areas by providing state funding priority to local governments that address the needs of adjacent communities in their development plans, instead of just pursuing parochial interests.[13] In 1998, the state of Maryland issued legislation for priority funding areas that directs state funds to municipalities and other existing communities, industrial areas, and planned growth areas.[14] This legislation allows the state and local governments to target where economic development and new growth will occur.

## 5.

### Adopt a green infrastructure plan.

A formal green infrastructure plan provides a framework for future growth by prioritizing what open space should be protected and what open space should be available to development. Conventional practice now largely designates whatever open spaces are remaining for preservation after buildings and roads are developed. Conversely, a green infrastructure plan would identify and protect critical ecological sites and linkages in advance of planning and construction of infrastructure and development of land. In so doing, not only are valuable natural resources preserved, but recurring project-level decisions about conservation can be avoided by identifying targeted sites comprehensively and

early in the green infrastructure plan. According to the Green Infrastructure Working Group, a coalition of nonprofit organizations and local, state and federal governments, green infrastructure is "the nation's natural life support system—a strategically planned and managed network of wilderness, parks, greenways, conservation easements, and working lands with conservation value. This network supports native species, maintains natural ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, and contributes to the health and quality of life for America's communities and people."[15]

Identifying and planning for priority conservation areas prior to development is critical because of the high cost of restoration and the difficulty of creating man-made systems to mimic natural processes (e.g., water filtration). When development is already present, a green infrastructure plan can help communities to set priorities for restoring areas and linking them to other open spaces.

## 6.

### Create a network of trails and greenways.

To maximize the utility of green spaces, communities must ensure that trails and greenways form a continuous network of pathways for biking, running, or cross-country skiing through a region. Trails and greenways are protected corridors of open space that allow for a multifaceted approach to land conservation and park planning by serving both recreational and conservation functions. Forming an interconnected network of trails and greenways not only ensures stronger corridors for animal migration, but it can also make these valuable resources more accessible to the region's residents.

In Dane County, Wisconsin, for example, the open-space plan strives to facilitate the linking of public lands and trails of various political jurisdictions among communities and population centers to amplify the availability and recreational use of these lands. [16] Other communities have chosen to take action at the state level. In 1990, a Maryland executive order created a statewide natural infrastructure by protecting and connecting important natural corridors throughout the state. Since then, Maryland has protected over 900 miles of greenway corridors, with 200 more miles currently being built, and has identified 1,000 miles as potential greenways, many of which can be used for recreation. Most of the current land is publicly owned, but numerous easements are being placed on private properties to enhance the growing network of corridors.

## 7.

### Design and implement an information-gathering and education program.

Gathering information on the status of land use and environmental characteristics throughout a region is a critical component for determining which lands are more important to preserve and which lands can be developed with minimal impacts to the environment. Information collected should include data on issues such as land ownership, protected areas, biodiversity needs, existing infrastructure, floodplains, shorelands, wetlands, ground water recharge areas, and prime agricultural areas.

An inventory of a region's environmental characteristics and land uses can help identify critical areas for open-space preservation. For example, a comprehensive mapping project in Austin, Texas, showed that proposed housing would negatively affect the city's

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Former railroad corridors provide an ideal opportunity for many communities to build a series of trials and greenways. Since 1960, it is estimated that 11,000 miles of rail lines have been used to create trails and recreational networks. The Rails to Trails Conservancy provides technical assistance to communities interested in using their railroad networks for recreation. For more information, go to www.railstrails.org.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

For more information on green infrastructure planning, see www.greeninfrastructure.net.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The use of geographic information systems (GIS) has become a powerful tool for preserving open space. GIS is a computer-based tool for mapping and analyzing land use and environmental trends. GIS can help localities analyze different types of data by allowing communities to "overlay" maps of new housing developments, for example, with maps of the region's watersheds. As a result, the data can identify gaps in areas in need of preservation and demonstrate the relationships between ecosystems and human-induced changes to the environment.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

For more information, visit the American Farmland Trust's website at www.farmland.org.

drinking water aquifer. The city then decided to direct its public transportation and park investments in a less environmentally sensitive area in East Austin.[17]

Chicago Wilderness, an organization that is dedicated to protecting and managing the natural communities in the Chicago region, developed an atlas of important natural resources and features in the metropolitan Chicago area.[18] This atlas was instrumental in the development of its Biodiversity Recovery Plan, which provided a long-term vision for the preservation of the area's biological resources.

## 8.

### Design and implement zoning tools that preserve open space.

Communities across the United States have successfully used zoning to preserve natural resources throughout a region. One common technique is cluster development zoning. This technique allows the same overall amount of development that is already permitted but requires that the development be placed on only a portion of the parcel, thereby retaining the balance as open space.[19] Clustering can protect resources such as environmentally sensitive areas, forests, and historic sites, by allowing higher concentrations of development on a smaller portion of land, which leaves large plots of land as permanent open space.

Another technique is the use of incentive zoning. The town of Cedarburg, Wisconsin, has added language to its zoning codes that allows builders to create a greater number of lots than normally allowed in a development in exchange for dedicating additional open space. Under the ordinance, developers are permitted to increase the number of lots by up to 20 percent in exchange for clustering the development and preserving the balance as undeveloped open space.[20]

## 9.

### Provide mechanisms for preserving working lands.

The preservation of prime farm and ranch land deserves special attention for a variety of reasons. Most of the land that is under the greatest development pressure is prime farmland that surrounds metropolitan areas—termed "prime" because this farmland consists of the finest soils, requires the least amount of chemical or irrigation inputs, or is in greatest proximity to markets or transportation networks. Farmland also warrants special efforts to protect it because it demands less in public services than development, thereby serving as a net local tax contributor.

Agricultural districts can be used to support and protect the local agricultural economy from the pressure of urbanization and second-home development.[21] They do this by primarily excluding inhospitable land uses, such as suburban development, and ensuring a critical mass of farmland to support needed agricultural infrastructure (e.g., distribution channels, equipment supplies, etc.). Agricultural districts can be made more effective by adopting a hybrid approach to farmland protection that includes market mechanisms to preserve farmland.[22] Places such as Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and Marin County, California, have combined agricultural districts and the purchase of agricultural conservation easement programs (PACEs) to great success. These approaches work by using agricultural districts to protect farmland in the near term, while funding is raised through a PACE program to purchase the land easements over time.

**Otay Ranch in Chula Vista, California, uses a network of recreation trails to connect its neighborhoods.**

Photo: Otay Ranch Company

## 10.

### Partner with nongovernmental organizations to acquire and protect land.

Foundations, land trusts, and other public and nonprofit entities often have a fundamental interest in preserving space of natural, cultural, or historic value.[23] Such entities can be particularly helpful with building coalitions, assisting on land-use legislation, and making policy recommendations to communities. Local governments should support these organizations through funding and efforts to improve civic awareness about their mission.

In addition, these organizations can help with the acquisition of open space. Land trusts operate at the local and regional level to acquire and protect land of significant ecological, open space, recreational, and historical value. According to the Land Trust Alliance, there are 1,200 land trusts at work in the United States. Land trusts can save open space in ways, and at speeds, not always possible for governments. For example, organizations such as the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the Nature Conservancy can act as intermediate brokers for land acquisition, by purchasing property, conveying it to the local jurisdiction, and then waiting for local funding to come through.[24] For example, the city of Tucson, Arizona, asked TPL to buy a scenic mountain tract overlooking downtown, which was being offered for sale by a savings and loan. City officials intended to include the costs of the property in the next budget, but legally they could not commit the funds. The trust purchased the property for the city and was reimbursed during the next budget cycle.

The nonprofit status of land trusts and some other nongovernmental organizations also allows landowners to receive tax breaks when they sell their property below market value.

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2 John L. Crompton, Lisa L. Love, and Thomas A. More, "An Empirical Study of the Role of Recreation, Parks, and Open Space in Companies' (Re)Location Decisions," *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 15, no. 1 (1997): 37-58.

3 In Salem, Oregon, land adjacent to a greenbelt was found to be worth about $1,200 per acre more than land only 1,000 feet away. Elizabeth Brabec, *On the Value of Open Spaces*, Technical Information Series, vol. 1, no. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Scenic America, 1992), 5.

4 For example, one study found that New Jersey communities would save $1.3 billion in infrastructure costs over 20 years by avoiding unplanned sprawl development. For details, see Center for Urban Policy Research at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, *The Costs and Benefits of Alternative Growth Patterns: The Impact Assessment of the New Jersey State Plan* (Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, 2000).

5 For example, the cost to New York City of building a filtration plant, if

upstate watershed lands were developed and their associated waste treatment ecosystem service was lost, was estimated at $6 to $8 billion. This is significantly higher than the cost of buying and preserving the watershed lands, estimated at $1.5 billion. Steve Lerner and William Poole, *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space: How Land Conservation Helps Communities Grow Smart and Protect the Bottom Line* (Washington, D.C.: Trust for Public Land, 1999).

6 Phyllis Myers and Robert Puentes, *Growth at the Ballot Box: Electing the Shape of Communities in November 2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, 2001).

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8 Robert Marriott, Charles Loehr, and Karl Moritz, *Managing Growth with Performance Standards in Montgomery County, Maryland*, Planners Advisory Service, no. 461 (Chicago, Ill.: American Planning Association, 1996), 19-21.

9 www.state.nj.us/pinelands/density.htm.

10 www.governor.state.ut.us/planning/CriticalLands/white.htm#Introduction.

11 www.dnr.state.md.us/pos.html.

12 www.ci.boulder.co.us/openspace/.

13 Cynthia Nickerson, "Smart Growth: Implications for Agriculture in Urban Fringe Areas," *Agricultural Outlook*, April 2001 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2001), 27. Available online at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/agoutlook/april2001/AO280g.pdf.

14 www.op.state.md.us/smartgrowth/smartpfa.htm.

15 www.greeninfrastructure.net/Intro/Mission-WorkingGroup.htm.

16 www.co.dane.wi.us/parks/open%20space/body.htm#past_plans.

17 Kathy Blaha and Peter Harnik, *Opportunities for Smarter Growth: Parks, Greenspace and Land Conservation*, Translation Paper no. 3 (Miami: Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, 2000), 6.

18 www.co.dane.wi.us/parks/parkhome.htm.

19 Randall Arendt, "'Open Space Zoning': What It Is and Why It Works," *Planning Commissioners Journal*, no. 5 (1992): 4. Available at www.plannersweb.com/articles/are015.html.

20 Dan Benson, "Motivating Developers to Maintain Countryside," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 10 March 2001.

21 Tom Daniels and Deborah Bowers, *Holding our Ground Protecting America's Farms and Farmland* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997).

22 Edward Thompson, *Agricultural Sustainability and Smart Growth: Saving Urban Influenced Farmland*, Translation Paper no. 5 (Miami: Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, 2001). Available online at www.fundersnetwork.org/usr_doc/agriculture%20paper%2.pdf.

23 John B. Wright, "Land Trusts in the USA," *Land Use Policy*, vol. 9, (April 1992): 83

24 Harold Henderson, "Open Space: How to Get It and Keep It." *Planning*, vol. 4, no. 9 (November 1990): 5-6.

Photo: Joe Schilling

*Chapter Seven*

# Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities

During the post–War World II era, urban communities that experienced rapid expansion at their edges often witnessed disinvestment in the urban core and first-ring suburbs as they were abandoned for newer, low-density, dispersed developments on the urban fringe. This pattern of development had dramatic effects on the social and economic viability of many core jurisdictions. It also led to significant impacts on the natural environment by developing on formerly open lands, which reduced animal habitats, degraded water resources and water quality, and influenced transportation choices that over time degraded air quality and increased the threat of global climate change.[1] Communities are now questioning the economic and environmental rationale of abandoning neighborhoods, side-

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walks, and water and sewer services in the urban center and older suburbs, only to rebuild them further out.

Smart growth directs development towards communities already served by infrastructure, seeking to utilize the resources that existing neighborhoods offer and to maintain the value of public and private investment. By encouraging development in existing areas, communities benefit from a stronger tax base, closer proximity of jobs and services, increased efficiency of already developed land and infrastructure, reduced development pressure in fringe areas, and preservation of farmland and open space. In addition, the process of increasing development in existing communities can maximize the use of existing impervious surfaces, thereby improving local and regional water quality, and can create opportunities for more transportation options, which lower vehicle miles traveled and ultimately improve regional air quality. Often existing neighborhoods can accommodate much of the growth that communities require through infill development, brownfields redevelopment, and the rehabilitation of existing buildings. For example, a 1996 study found that brownfields in Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Cleveland could absorb one to five years of residential development, 10 to 20 years of industrial development, or 200 to 400 years of office space.[2]

However, there are a number of barriers that discourage development in existing communities, some of which include detailed zoning plans, government policies and regulations, and taxpayer subsidies that encourage development in edge and greenfield areas. In addition, greenfield development remains attractive to developers for its ease of access and construction, lower land costs, and potential for larger parcel assembly. Typical zoning requirements in edge areas are often easier to comply with, because these areas often have few existing building types that new construction must complement and a relative absence of residents who may object to the inconvenience or disruption caused by new construction. Finally, the cost of greenfield development is often subsidized by the public sector through the provision of road, sewer, and water networks and through the use of average-cost pricing, which can underestimate the true per-unit cost of expansion.

A range of options exists to begin to "level the playing field" between greenfield and infill development and to help direct new investment dollars to strengthen existing neighborhoods. Efforts to increase development in existing communities must be implemented with an eye to creating growth that improves the quality of life for existing residents as well as creates benefits for new investors. As more developers learn of the profitable experiences that their counterparts have had through infill development, the private market will increasingly identify ways to redirect resources to existing neighborhoods. The following policies are designed to address some of these issues and to provide state and local government officials with ideas and tools to strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.

## I.

### Strengthen state or local brownfields programs.

It is estimated that as many as 500,000 brownfields exist nationwide.[3] Brownfields are those sites with real or perceived environmental contamination. In existing communities, brownfields represent untapped development opportunities and often act as impediments to community revitalization. Uncertainty about the extent of environmental damage, the cost of remediation, and the risk of liability for future owners often serve as obstacles to new investment for site owners, developers, and lenders and can fur-

ther serve to drive new development to less problematic sites on the urban fringe.

Brownfields programs can help make these parcels available for redevelopment. In order to encourage brownfields redevelopment, nearly all states have developed legislation that limits and clarifies the liability of prospective purchasers, lenders, property owners, and others regarding their association with activities at a brownfields site. In addition, many communities have created state or local brownfields coordinator positions whose function is to coordinate information about sites, facilitate site assessments, market the sites to potential developers, and coordinate remediation efforts with the state environmental protection agency. In states and cities that already have established a brownfields program, these efforts can be strengthened to increase the effectiveness of existing programs, improve coordination with other players in the brownfields arena, improve remediation efforts, and better leverage support from high-level officials and executives to spur successful brownfields redevelopment.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The St. Paul Port Authority brownfields redevelopment program in Minnesota has over 50 sites needing redevelopment. Because of scarce resources, the Port Authority determines which sites to remediate based on the extent of redevelopment costs, the site configuration, and a variety of social indicators, such as the level of unemployment, housing vacancies, and percentage of rental property. The redeveloped land is given to businesses, which enter into an agreement with the Port Authority to retain businesses in and attract others to St. Paul. Agreements also include design criteria relating to energy efficiency, local hiring guarantees for St. Paul residents, and livable working wages. The program is a success: the Port Authority has three or four businesses competing for each available opening. This program has generated over $2 million a year in property taxes, created over 1,500 jobs in distressed communities, and created 900,000 square feet of building space in previously abandoned lots.

## 2.

### Adopt a "fix-it-first" policy that sets priorities for upgrading existing facilities.

Public expenditures on infrastructure, such as streets, highways, water and sewer systems, lighting, and schools and other civic buildings, constitute a significant share of public expenditures each year. Local and state governments suggest locational priorities for new development when governments allow infrastructure in existing neighborhoods to decay while investing in new infrastructure in edge communities. By not fixing this infrastructure, the local government creates for itself a larger fiscal problem for each year that the maintenance issues are not addressed. For example, a home owner spends time and money performing routine maintenance on a house in order to save money on costly repairs later and may expand or alter the house to better meet changing family needs. The maintenance and the expansion the home owner performs over time maximizes the value of the initial investment (i.e., the home) and is often less expensive than buying a new home. "Fix-it-first" policies apply the same rationale to public investments. They direct resources to support the maintenance and upgrading of existing structures and facilities. This helps to maintain the value of investments made by the private sector and to better position communities to attract private investment in new construction and rehabilitation.

**New infill townhomes on the site of a former hospital complement building styles in the surrounding U Street area of Washington, DC.**

Photos: Smart Growth Network

Current state or federal funding formulas may make this difficult to implement, however. As with school construction, projects to repair existing assets that exceed a target level (some percentage of the cost of new construction) may be rejected in favor of new construction. States have, however, found the political will to overcome these barriers. New Jersey, for example, acted on the fix-it-first principle by requiring that maintenance needs on existing roads be addressed before new roads are constructed. Then-Governor Christine Todd Whitman committed $30 billion over 12 years for extensive repairs to the state's highways and transit infrastructure, improvements in highway and pedestrian safety, and new rail initiatives to spur regional mobility. The rationale behind this initiative was the economic, social, and environmental costs of allowing current infrastructure to further degrade. As Governor Whitman said, "We've delayed fixing or replacing [our transportation infrastructure] for too long. We're fast approaching the danger point."

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Wisconsin, in considering its implementation of a regional tax-base sharing system, studied the experience of the Minnesota Twin Cities region. The model used in the Twin Cities collects 40 percent of the growth in its commercial and industrial property tax base since 1971 into a single pool. It then distributes that pool of money to each community in the region that has a lower than average commercial and industrial tax base. By participating in this plan, communities have less incentive to compete with one another for economic development opportunities. Wisconsin noted, however, that the weakness of the Twin Cities approach is that it relies on increases in the tax base since 1971, rather than on the total value of these properties, and that it fails to include residential properties, thereby creating disproportionate benefits for high-value residential areas without commercial or industrial activities. For more information on this program, please see the following website: www.lafollette.wisc.edu/reform/Issues/Tax-Base_Sharing_Model.htm.

## 3·

### Institute regional tax-base sharing to limit regional competition and to support schools and infrastructure throughout the region.

The fiscal concerns of individual jurisdictions can create an intense local competition across regions to attract more retail, entertainment, and hotel development, and less housing development. The revenues generated by the property tax on housing usually fail to cover the full costs of providing public services at all but the highest income levels. Conversely, retail and service development generates sales tax revenue that lands directly in local coffers because most state laws redirect tax proceeds to the jurisdiction where the sale takes place. The bidding wars that often ensue between jurisdictions lead them to offer a wide array of tax breaks and incentives for incoming businesses.[4] When one community underwrites a new mall with costly incentives like undeveloped land, tax discounts, or road projects, other communities in the same region are forced to offer incentives of an equal scale to their malls in order to remain competitive. This type of regional competition can spur development at the edge, because in most cases, the new mall or retail outlet will use undeveloped lands, thus requiring new roads, infrastructure, and larger parcels for construction. In addition, this competition creates fiscal inequities between the communities that succeed in attracting businesses and those that do not or cannot.

Regional tax-base sharing allows the revenues collected (most often property tax assessments or sales tax revenues) to be distributed both to the locality where they were generated and to other localities in the region based on their size, population, or other measures of disparity. Tax-base sharing recognizes that interjurisdictional competition for economic activity is, over time, a losing proposition for all the governments involved. Tax-base sharing recognizes that both the causes and the benefits of growth tend be regional. The use of this tool can, for example, ensure that all area schools are working together to provide a well-trained workforce for the next wave of economic expansion. It also distributes the benefits of regional retail, for example, among the many localities that provide customers, thereby helping to generate tax revenues.

This approach creates stronger resources across the entire region and can provide critical to strengthen existing communities that may suffer from disinvestment or stagnant economic growth. By minimizing regional competition for large commercial projects and business, such as malls and corporate headquarters, tax-base sharing can ensure that new development occurs where it makes the most sense, not for the sole purpose of raising the tax base of one jurisdiction.

States have employed different approaches to this basic concept. In Minnesota, for example, business property taxes are shared among Minneapolis–St. Paul area governments, easing the fiscal crisis in the area's declining communities. Tax-base sharing also relieves the pressure that growing communities feel to spread local debt costs through growth, and it erodes fiscal incentives that encourage low-density development.[5] Texas also offers a variation on tax sharing in which districts with high-value business property are given five options to share resources. These include directly sharing their property tax revenues with other districts, or agreeing to send surplus revenues to the state for distribution to poor school districts.[6] In Colorado, the neighboring towns of Windsor and Severance have agreed to share revenues from commercial activity along their shared Highway 392 corridor, thus saving each town from the cost and effort of attempts to draw businesses into its jurisdiction at the expense of its neighbor.[7]

## 4.

### Use the split-rate property tax to encourage development on vacant or blighted pieces of land in existing communities.

Property tax structures that assess land and improvements in the same way can act as an impediment to upgrading existing structures or adding buildings to currently vacant infill parcels. Owners may perceive the increased taxable basis on their property—and the tax liability that results—to exceed the economic value that could be derived from improving the property. As a result, vacant or underutilized land remains that way until the economics of potential improvements change, which encourages speculation. This is particularly problematic in areas suffering from disinvestment where the prospects for profitable investment by businesses are lower and where concentrations of underutilized property can exacerbate deterioration and neglect.

The split-rate property tax shifts the balance of the tax burden onto land and away from improvements, which diminishes the tax consequences associated with making improvements on the land. It also raises the tax consequences associated with leaving vacant land dormant. Under a split-rate tax, there is more incentive for building owners to put their land to maximum productive use (within the constructs of building and zoning requirements). The split-rate tax thus stimulates development on lots that had previously acted as obstacles to redevelopment in existing neighborhoods.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

A number of localities in Pennsylvania use the split-rate property tax. In the case of Pittsburgh where improvements were once taxed at one-half the rate of land, this ratio shifted to only one-sixth the rate of tax assessed on land under the split-rate tax reform. The results have been significant. An analysis published in the National Tax Journal in March 1997 revealed that, in spite of the dramatic economic effects associated with the downturn in the steel industry, the rate of development within Pittsburgh was substantially greater compared to other rust-belt cities that used a traditional property tax.

## 5.

### Locate civic buildings in existing communities rather than in greenfield areas.

Public investment in civic buildings, including historic structures, can be a critical factor in the development of a community. The placement of public and civic buildings indicates the locality's development priorities, and placement determines the residents' accessibility to the government services that these buildings house. Furthermore, a range of private services, such as legal and

advocacy services, benefit from close proximity to public buildings, such as courthouses and legislative chambers.

By locating public buildings (e.g., libraries, government buildings, and schools) in areas with existing infrastructure, state and local governments send a message to the rest of the community that these areas are worthwhile investment opportunities. Public buildings act as harbingers of revitalization in distressed communities where few employment opportunities exist or where a lack of services persists. Finally, they represent opportunities to go beyond merely maintaining the quality of public services in a community by adding services that were previously unavailable or inaccessible to local residents. The federal government recognizes the importance of the location of public-service buildings. In growing recognition of the important role that civic buildings play in the development of communities, federal legislation was introduced in the 107th Congress that placed a greater emphasis on the location of post office buildings in core downtown business districts.

## 6.

### Conduct an "infill checkup" to evaluate and prioritize infill and brownfields sites for redevelopment.

Infill locations pose a number of challenges to prospective developers that greenfield locations do not. Perceptions and realities about community opposition, environmental contamination, the difficulty of land assembly, access to the site, requirements for design conformity, and infrastructure service standards may discourage development that is needed to strengthen existing communities. Communities can attract infill investment by identifying priority sites for redevelopment—those that are likely to convey the greatest economic, environmental, or fiscal benefits—and then removing the obstacles that are preventing investment from taking place there.

Communities can be proactive in addressing these concerns by doing an "infill checkup" in which answers to the following critical questions are identified:[8] Is the community ready to accept infill, and what are likely to be residents' greatest concerns? Does the comprehensive plan (and applicable zoning code) include infill in its long-term vision, and do corollary public investments in infrastructure support it? Are efforts made to ensure that infill is constructed within the community's character? Does the community have a transit system or are plans in place, and what are the implications for parking needs associated with new development? Is the community prepared to invest financially in infill where private investment alone is not enough to cover the costs of development? Does the zoning support, encourage, allow, or prohibit mixed-use, and what is needed for it to better support current needs? Finally, are design guidelines or project prototypes in place that clarify the community's priorities for what development should look like? Answering these questions and implementing the needed changes to overcome any obstacles that appear as a result can ease the way for the redevelopment of critical infill and brownfields sites.

## 7.

### Facilitate programs to encourage home renovation and rehabilitation in existing neighborhoods.

Rehabilitation of existing homes represents a fundamental approach to strengthening existing neighborhoods. Communities, by creating tools and incentives for home owners to upgrade their own homes, can bring about visible new improvements in their

**Northwest Landing – a 3,000 acre mixed-use community -- was constructed on an abandoned brownfield industrial site near Dupont, Washington.**

Photo: Calthorpe Associates

neighborhoods. Such tools also allow residents to adapt their homes to changing needs and to remain in place as a long-term stabilizing force in the community. Furthermore, rehabilitation and renovation represent large and generally stable parts of the local economy, particularly during slower economic periods.

Communities seeking to encourage home renovation and upgrading can provide grants, low-cost loans, tax abatements, or other incentives to home owners for rehabilitating their properties. Communities may also consider evaluating current building codes to ensure that they constitute a reasonable approach to ensuring safety in all building types. New Jersey found, for example, that its building codes made renovation of older properties often infeasible and adopted a building subcode that applies specifically to rehabilitation (see Principle 3, Policy 8 for more information).

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Cuyahoga County, Ohio, has employed a widely available yet underused strategy for investing county tax proceeds to assist suburban home owners near the central city (Cleveland) to rehabilitate their homes—linked deposits. As authorized by law, the county treasurer invests up to 10 percent of total property tax intake in participating banks at below-market rates (not to exceed a 3 percent differential). In exchange, the banks must commit to pass on the savings to borrowers in the form of low-interest loans for rehabilitation and renovation. It is estimated that county treasurers in as many as two-thirds of all states have this authority, making it a potentially enormous untapped resource for revitalizing neighborhoods and improving housing quality.

Cuyahoga County's "Housing Enhancement Loan Program" is available to any home owner—regardless of income—residing in a suburb close to Cleveland in which housing values have appreciated at less than two percent annually over the last 15 years. By foregoing between $1.2 and $2 million in interest, it is estimated that the county will make available roughly $40 million to upgrade 4,000 homes over two years. As a result, residents of existing neighborhoods are able to adapt and upgrade their homes for changing needs. This program thus creates less demand for new housing construction on the urban fringe. New capital is flowing into existing neighborhoods that would otherwise appreciate slowly or not at all. The county wins, too. Property tax assessments are expected to increase by $400,000 per year as a result of the improvements.

## 8.

### Support community-based organizations involved in revitalizing neighborhoods.

The cost of redeveloping land and buildings is not only driven by the cost of materials and labor—it is also influenced by the developer's profit motive. In communities around the country, thousands of local community development corporations (CDCs) or other community-based organizations (CBOs) function as developers of residential and commercial property with no profit motive. As a result, these organizations are able to create viable, affordable projects, by using public, private, and in-kind contributions, that would otherwise remain absent from the community's building stock. These nonprofits have vast expertise in development at the neighborhood or block level. They are often capable of putting together complex financial development deals—involving as many as a dozen or more financial sources—that few profit-minded developers are willing to undertake.

Support for these community organizations in the form of financial resources, technical assistance, or time on the civic agenda of decision makers ensures that public resources are used for cost-efficient and civic-minded projects. This support improves the chances that public resources are used in projects that demonstrate a community's

**PRACTICE TIP:**

National Neighborhood Coalition, a membership organization of CDCs and CBOs working on a range of issues, has developed ten Neighborhood Principles for Smart Growth. These principles complement those of the Smart Growth Network and are tailored to speak to the needs and resources of community-based organizations. To learn more, visit www.neighborhoodcoalition.org.

own development priorities. CDCs and other CBOs are often responsive and accountable to community members in a way that few other entities are. Board members and staff of these nonprofits often live in the neighborhoods themselves, thereby ensuring that the activities that the organization seeks to complete help to achieve an improved quality of life for all residents of the neighborhood.

## 9.

### Create economic incentives for businesses and home owners to locate in areas with existing infrastructure.

Public investment is often able to leverage private investment. In some cases, public investment may provide the necessary infrastructure to attract desired development. Additional economic incentives may be necessary, however, to help the business and development community focus its attention on a given, targeted neighborhood. This has been the experience with the successful models for zone and district development, such as business improvement districts, historic districts, Main Street programs, and the federal government's Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community programs.

There are a wide range of economic incentives that can be made available to developers and property owners. For example, communities can offer favorable lending terms through dedicated bond issues; direct grants or loans through tax-increment financing or from special assessments; tax abatements, credits, or waivers; density bonuses or other zoning waivers; expedited permitting treatment; or outright grants of publicly-owned land or property. Often these economic incentives can be the missing source of gap or bridge financing that makes investment opportunities in existing neighborhoods viable. Finally, local employees can be enticed to live in existing communities near their place of work through "live near your work" initiatives (see Principle 1, Policy 1, for more information).

## 10.

### Modify average cost-pricing practices in utilities to better account for costs of expanding infrastructure in greenfield areas.

Low-density, dispersed developments generally enjoy subsidized utility costs because utility pricing is based on average—rather than actual—costs of providing services. Average cost pricing was established as a way to place rural residents on a level playing field with urban residents, but that policy is now contributing to rapid land consumption rates because the true costs of providing infrastructure to edge areas are often not passed on to either the developer or the final consumer. Cable television, electric, phone, water, gas, and wastewater services all charge for new hookups on an average-cost basis. A regional Bell telephone company, for example, estimated that, compared to the cost of serving customers in the central business district, it costs twice as much to

Photo: Smart Growth Network

**The formerly abandoned Standard Dairy in Portland, Oregon's historic Eliot neighborhood now contains 64 live-work or live-retail spaces that evoke the foursquare home design popular in the city in the early 1900's.**

serve households in the rest of the central city and ten times as much to serve households on the urban fringe.[9] Because all customers pay average costs, residents in more urban, higher density areas in effect subsidize those in edge areas. Linear utilities such as cable television, water and sewer, phone service, and even mail delivery fail to reflect the efficiencies associated with clustered development.

Communities that have recognized this problem have had difficulty in arriving at a solution that is efficient and equitable. Assessing the true marginal cost of infrastructure expansion is difficult, since some capital investments (such as schools, treatment facilities, and pumping stations) cannot be expanded on a small, incremental basis. Rather, they require one-time large influxes of capital to expand the capacity for both current and future users. The city of San Diego, however, uses a different approach. It has created service areas designed for impact-fee financing, in which impact fees are lower for areas served by existing infrastructure and higher for those without. This "step" approach to calculating impact fees encourages development to occur in existing service areas by offering lower impact fees to the builders of new units. Conversely, higher fees (that more closely approximate the true cost) discourage development in unserviced areas.

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9 U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *The Technological Reshaping of Metropolitan America*, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, OTA-ETI-643, 1995).

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The city of Sacramento has developed a policy to promote infill development by providing credits for sewer hookups so that housing that is built in the downtown or midtown area will be assessed only $900 for a sewer hookup fee (per unit) versus $3,000 in outlying areas.

## Other Resources

- *Robert A. Simons*, *Turning Brownfields into Greenbacks* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1998).
- Diane R. Suchman, *Developing Infill Housing in Inner-City Neighborhoods: Opportunities and Strategies* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1997).
- Center for Livable Communities, *Building Livable Communities: A Policy Maker's Guide to Infill Development* (Sacramento, Calif.: Local Government Commission, 1995, 2001).
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO), *Redeveloping Brownfields with Federal Transportation Funds* (Washington, D.C.: AMPO, 2001). Also available online at http://smartgrowth.org/pdf/brownfields_tea21.pdf.

*Chapter Eight*

# Provide a Variety of Transportation Options

Providing people with more choices in housing, shopping, communities, and transportation is a key aim of smart growth. Communities are increasingly seeking these choices—particularly a wider range of transportation options—in an effort to improve overwhelmed transportation systems. Traffic congestion is worsening across the country. Whereas 65 percent of travel in 1982 occurred in uncongested conditions, only 36 percent of peak travel did so by 1997. In fact, according to the Texas Transportation Institute, congestion over the last several years has worsened in nearly every major metropolitan area in the United States.

The science of traffic management and prediction has begun to catch up with what citizens

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have observed for years: new road capacity fills up almost as fast as it is constructed. Known in transportation circles as "induced demand," studies now show that as large new roads are built people increase their driving to take advantage of the new infrastructure. Some studies suggest that between 60 and 90 percent of new road capacity is consumed by new driving within five years of the opening of a major road.[1] In the short term, people may switch from using transit and carpools to traveling on the new road, and in the long term, with the increased accessibility of the surrounding land, development patterns shift to create more growth and new traffic in the area. In regions around the country, travel forecasters show that the continuation of current policies and practices is unlikely to alleviate congestion.

**Existing infrastructure can support transit, vehicle, and non-motorized means of travel.**

Photo: Ann Thorpe

In response, communities are beginning to implement new approaches to transportation planning, such as better coordinating land use and transportation; increasing the availability of high quality transit service; creating redundancy, resiliency and connectivity within their transportation networks; and ensuring connectivity between pedestrian, bike, transit, and road facilities. In short, they are coupling a multimodal approach to transportation with supportive land-use patterns that create a wider range of transportation options.

Numerous policies are available to expand transportation choices, and a number of them are featured in this section as a means to help communities identify opportunities to enhance their transportation network. Like the others presented in this document, these policies are best used in combination with parallel policy efforts to support other aspects of smart growth.

## I.

### Finance and provide incentives for multimodal transportation systems that include supportive land use and development.

States are responsible for much of the nation's transportation planning and investment. As a result, states can directly affect the mix of transportation modes available by planning and funding a balanced portfolio of pedestrian, auto, transit, and bike transportation facilities. The effectiveness of these investments however, is greatly dependent upon the existence of supportive land uses. For instance, sidewalks without nearby destinations render walking an unrealistic option; transit servicing of low-density areas is expensive, and land uses that separate residential development from jobs and shopping increase congestion.

States can improve the cost-effectiveness of their transportation investments by ensuring that transportation and development are coordinated. Project selection criteria should give priority to those projects that demonstrate supportive land uses (e.g., transit service for areas with transit-oriented development or bikeways connecting residential areas with shopping and amenities). By including a commitment for follow-up implementation funds for the transportation portions of the plan, states can use special grant programs as catalysts for integrated land-use transportation planning by local governments. Requirements or incentives for land planning can be implemented in areas where major expansions or new facilities are contemplated. States can also offer incentives and rewards to communities that ensure safe-routes to school and to communities that locate schools in walkable locations.

Communities can take advantage of the flexibility in federal transportation law to create public-private partnerships around transportation and development investments. For example, they can use transportation funds for brownfields redevelopment or take advantage of joint development policies to encourage transit-oriented development. Finally, state transportation departments can encourage their own offices and local governments to adopt policies that allow flexibility in road, pedestrian, bike, and transit facility design standards, such that upgrades and new facilities fit the character of existing communities.

## 2.

### Modify roadway level-of-service standards in areas served by transit.

Level-of-service requirements set the level of acceptable congestion at an intersection or on a segment of road. Once this level of congestion has been reached, it is common to require that development in the surrounding area halt or that the road or intersection be upgraded. This one-size-fits-all prescription may not fit all situations. Some of the most lively, economically vital districts in the country are congested. In many cases, it is a sign of their vitality, particularly in city and town centers. Similarly, uncongested, fast-moving traffic can be a signal of a downtown or neighborhood business district in decline. In addition, stringent adherence to a statewide level-of-service standard may not be appropriate in areas served by high-quality transit. In these areas, reliance upon a roadway level-of-service standard fails to reflect the accessibility offered by the transit service.

For these areas served by transit, some combined measure of service and accessibility, which includes roadway, transit, and pedestrian activity, may be needed to properly manage transportation in these areas. Likewise, where transportation improvements are deemed necessary, policies can then evaluate the impact of upgrades to road, transit, pedestrian facilities, or some combination thereof.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the metropolitan planning organization for the San Francisco Bay Area, encourages local governments to link transportation and land-use decisions through the "Housing Incentive Program (HIP)." HIP is a grant program designed to maximize public investments in transit infrastructure and to encourage transit use while also addressing the region's housing shortage. For localities that are locating housing developments within a one-third mile walk of transit, the HIP provides additional funding for transportation-related improvements such as streetscapes, transit villages, bicycle facilities, and pedestrian plazas. As densities increase, HIP provides more funding to the locality: $1,000 per bedroom in projects that contain twenty-five units per acre, $1,500 per bedroom at forty units per acre, and $2,000 per bedroom at sixty units per acre. For all affordable units, an additional $500 per bedroom is awarded. For more information, visit www.mtc.ca.gov/projects/livable_communities/lcindex.htm.

## 3.

### Plan and permit road networks of neighborhood-scaled streets (generally two or four lanes) with high levels of connectivity and short blocks.

Overreliance on hierarchical street networks composed of neighborhood, collector, arterial, and freeway roads tends to force traffic onto a small number of major roads, which provide drivers with few alternate routes in the event of congestion or accidents. Also, because major roads concentrate traffic, they generally do not provide a good environment for pedestrians or residential

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) has made it easier for local governments to implement traditional neighborhood street networks in new developments. In August 2000, NCDOT approved street design guidelines to support community interest in streets that slow and disperse vehicular traffic and provide a pedestrian-friendly environment. The guidelines specify widths, street geometry, utility placement, and provision of bicycle and pedestrian facilities that promote walkable, human-scaled communities. For more information see www.doh.dot.state.nc.us/operations/tnd.pdf. See also Institute of Transportation Engineers' *Traditional Neighborhood Development Street Design Guidelines, A Recommended Practice of the Institute of Transportation Engineers* (Washington, D.C.: ITE, 1999).

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In Maplewood, New Jersey, the Concierge Company has formed a partnership with New Jersey Transit, the Chamber of Commerce, and the municipal government to refurbish the transit station, complete with a "community concierge" program. This service provides links to fifty local businesses like grocery stores, dry cleaners and auto repair garages in a center within the train station, so that rail commuters can arrange their daily errands.

development. The result is that these corridors are generally accessible only by car.

A finely woven network of smaller streets can move large volumes of traffic, provide routing redundancy, and help drivers avoid long delays associated with the left turns at large, multilane intersections. These streets also are scaled to the neighborhood level. Narrower than major roads, such streets generally have slower speeds that are compatible with a mix of residential, commercial, and retail uses. This mix of uses and improved connectivity makes walking a realistic transportation option because destinations can be placed at closer distances, and more direct routes exist for pedestrians to reach a given destination. In addition, unlike major thoroughfares, large setbacks are not necessary to shield building occupants from the noise associated with large volumes of fast-moving traffic.

## 4.

### Connect transportation modes to one another.

Too often, transportation systems and networks are planned and operated in an uncoordinated manner—both within and between jurisdictions. Providing efficient connections between different modes is key to achieving a functioning multimodal system. For instance, nearly every transit trip starts or ends with a pedestrian trip.

Photo: Unknown

**Homes near transit systems are a critical part of minimizing congestion and preserving open space in Gresham, Oregon.**

If the pedestrian fails to connect well with the point of transit pickup (no sidewalks leading to the stop, long walks, or wide roads to be crossed), transit is much less convenient, accessible, and competitive. All transportation options become more viable when they are connected to other modes. For example, bike racks at transit stations create a wider ridership for transit by effectively extending the range passengers will travel. However, better still are transit systems that allow bikes on board because they extend the area of origin and destination. Similarly, auto trips can be more effectively linked with pedestrian transportation when destinations are close to one another and walkways are provided between locations.

## 5.

### Zone for concentrated activity centers around transit service.

To be most effective, transit service requires supportive land use. Local governments can help to ensure good accessibility to transit by clustering higher-density residential development around transit stops. Some researchers estimate that a minimum of six to eight residential units per acre are needed to support basic transit service provision. In addition, transit becomes still more effective if other services and amenities are also co-located with transit. Such services and amenities include community services such as childcare, as well as facilities for daily trips such as dry cleaning, parcel pickup and drop off, and convenience store shopping. Enabling transit riders to accomplish multiple errands as part of their commute is essential if public transit is to become a viable, convenient transportation option.

Photo: Smart Growth Network

**Parking lots (this one concealed by a wall and pedestrian pergola) can be treated with design and landscaping to create a safer, more interesting, pedestrian environment.**

## 6.

### Require sidewalks in all new developments.

With the growing dominance of the automobile, many new streets are built without sidewalks. It is true that the existence of sidewalks will not create walkers. Other elements (many already discussed) including mix of uses, short blocks and nearby destinations are necessary to make walking anything but recreational. However, sidewalks are indispensable to this mix. They are essential to creating a safe and secure pedestrian environment, and therefore a balanced mix of transportation options. Local governments can require that new developments provide sidewalks so that residents and users of these developments can walk or bike if they choose (see Principle 4 for more information on walkable communities).

## 7.

### Address parking needs and opportunities.

Parking—its provision, pricing, and distribution—plays an important role in creating a balanced transportation system. The availability of parking at local destinations influences an individual's choice to drive, walk, bike, or take transit. Parking requirements affect the financial viability and form of specific development proposals and, in turn, affect the ability of those developments to play a supporting role in a multimodal transportation system. For instance, requiring large amounts of parking for a transit-oriented infill development drives up the cost of the development and may undermine the ability of the development to support transit.

Communities can affect change in the way parking influences transportation choices through a range of potential efforts (see Principle 9, Policy 6 for more information). They may choose to allow on-street parking to meet parking requirements, or they may reduce the amount of parking required for infill sites in mixed-use or transit-oriented areas. They may work with employers to create priority parking areas and to reduce parking fees for carpools, allow employees to "cash out" their parking benefits, or tax as income parking benefits that workers receive. Communities may encourage developers either to locate parking behind buildings (in garages, especially) or in courtyards rather than in surface parking lots in front of buildings, or to design surface parking more like a park, courtyard, or plaza that doubles as public space in off-peak hours. Jurisdictions may design public parking garages as mixed-use buildings with storefronts that match neighborhood commercial buildings. They may allow local businesses to fulfill their parking requirements by purchasing credits for garage spaces or by sharing parking if peak hours are different (e.g., office buildings and entertainment venues have peak parking needs at different times). Communities can work to ensure that parking is located in areas that serve residents and businesses throughout a district. Finally, parking can be located to allow drivers to access pedestrian networks once they have parked, so that they can access a day's worth of activities on foot. These options are just a few of the many ways that communities can improve their treatment of parking.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) have established a voluntary, national standard of excellence for employer-provided commuter benefits. The program encourages U.S. employers to help employees get to and from work in ways that: cut air pollution, reduce traffic congestion, increase employee job satisfaction, improve employee recruiting and retention, reduce parking facility expenses, reduce employee commuting expenses, and cut taxes for both employers and employees. Detailed information about commuter choice and the national standard of excellence can be found on EPA's website at www.epa.gov/otaq/transp/comchoic/ccweb.htm.

## 8.

**Collaborate with employers and provide information and incentives for programs to minimize or decrease rush-hour congestion impacts.**

Daily travel patterns are the result of thousands of individual travel decisions on the part of community residents. Employers are one way to reach those individuals and influence these decisions. Regardless of local and state government efforts to manage traffic more effectively, employers are increasingly finding strong business reasons to work with their employees on transportation issues. Employee retention and lost productivity are just two of the reasons for employers' interest. In Atlanta, Bell South's concern over its employees' rising commuting difficulties led them to consolidate more than seventy offices into three locations—each immediately adjacent to a subway stop.

Local government can play an important role in increasing employer efforts by providing information and incentives for employer-sponsored commute options. Subsidies for use of public transit and employer-assisted housing programs for employees who live near their jobs can help minimize rush hour congestion by vehicles. Additionally, included in the range of transportation choices is the option to remain in place. Private employers who provide opportunities for employees to work at home through telecommuting, or condense work hours via flex time can facilitate this choice.

## 9.

**Adjust existing transit services to take full advantage of transit-supportive neighborhoods and developments.**

Coordinating land use with transit is often considered in the context of future developments and new transit service. However, powerful opportunities may exist within the context of the current transit system. Local governments can evaluate existing systems and relocate routes or stops to ensure that areas with high densities, good mixes of use, and high-quality pedestrian access are well served by transit. In addition to locating transit in areas with supportive land uses, local governments can also target transit based on economic and demographic factors. For instance, neighborhoods with higher percentages of young people, students, and elderly citizens may yield higher riderships, and strategic routing decisions can help to ameliorate the effects of regional and subregional jobs-housing imbalances. To be most successful, the nature of commutes and other trips—reverse commutes, weekend service employee job travel, and entertainment trips—should be considered to determine timing and fare schedules.

## 10.

**Cluster freight facilities near ports, airports, and rail terminals.** Efficient management of goods movement within a region can help reduce congestion and create healthier, more livable communities. Frequently, freight facilities are dispersed throughout a region and offer poor connections between rail, port, and truck modes of freight movement.

Local governments can encourage clustering and connectivity between modes by (1) designating areas for freight facility development, (2) making public infrastructure investments to support modal connections and improved facility accessibility, and (3) taking steps to ensure that centrally located facilities and their operations are compatible with the broader community function and character. These steps can cut short-haul truck trips and improve regional air quality, build up the economic competitiveness of local freight enterprises, and enhance community quality of life by reducing the number of at-grade crossings and the number of local truck trips with their attendant noise and pollution.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, Inc. (NJTPA) and the New Jersey Institute of Technology are crafting policy that encourages the reclamation of brownfields by freight businesses. The goal of the project is to make efficient use of northern New Jersey's land and transportation resources and to help reverse the loss of jobs and economic activity in blighted urban areas. In the region, freight-related businesses are a good fit for brownfields redevelopment because these businesses require good transportation access. A large number of brownfields lie within several miles of the Newark/Elizabeth transportation hub that includes the marine port, airport, and major rail terminals. According to NJTPA, "[a]ttracting freight businesses to brownfields sites would help reduce the need for long distance trucking of goods, increase rail usage and create new unskilled and semiskilled jobs in proximity to urban populations with significant unemployment." For more information see www.njtpa.org/planning/brownfields/index.htm. See also The Foundation for Intermodal Research and Education's products about the metropolitan implications of "e-freight" at http://intermodal.org/FIRE/e-freight.html.

[1] This study looked at the growth in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) as a result of expanding highway capacity on the California state highway system. Mark Hansen and Yuanlin Huang, "Road Supply and Traffic in California Urban Areas," *Transportation Research*, 31, no. 3 (1997), 205–218.

*Chapter Nine*

# Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective

For a community to be successful in implementing smart growth, its vision, objectives, and actions must be embraced by the private sector. The private sector is crucial to supplying the large amounts of money and construction expertise needed to meet the growing demand for smart growth developments. If investors, bankers, developers, builders, and others do not earn a profit, few smart growth projects will be built. Fortunately, government can help reduce barriers to profitable smart growth development practices. Since the development industry is highly regulated, the value of property and the desirability of a place are determined in large part by government investment in infrastructure and by government regulation.

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**PRACTICE TIP:**

The city of Austin, Texas, offers a variety of financial incentives to developers through their Smart Zone and Smart Matrix Incentive programs. Developers who build in desired growth areas and who include smart growth features in their projects can receive waivers of development fees and city subsidies for the development of infrastructure such as installation of water and sewer lines, roads, sidewalks, and other related improvements. For more information on Austin's program see www.ci.austin.tx.us/smartgrowth/incentives.htm.

Government investment and regulation shape the types of development that are being created today. For example conventional zoning originally used by cities to separate homes from noxious factories has also served to separate homes, stores, schools, and offices from one another. As a result, many households are dependent on automobiles to conduct day-to-day activities. This pattern of separate uses is mirrored in the private sector, where developers, investors and bankers are specialized in—and increasingly compartmentalized into—a given type of conventional development (e.g., retail or residential) and develop or finance only projects of that one type.[1] Even building codes that mandate setbacks, parking requirements, and height or density restrictions often make illegal the very type of development that would achieve smart growth.

Despite the many barriers, developers have been successful in creating places that exemplify the principles of smart growth. The process of creating such places, however, frequently requires them to get variances to zoning codes—a process that is often uncertain, time-consuming, and therefore costly. Creating more certainty and expediting the approval process for smart growth projects is of particular importance for developers, for whom the common mantra "time is money" very aptly applies. The longer it takes to get approval for building, the longer the developer's capital remains tied up in the land and not earning income. In addition, developers pay high interest rates on construction loans, further increasing development costs if construction approval is delayed. The additional effort required to create smart growth in many areas helps to explain why developers continue to build conventional suburban developments, even though studies show that neighborhoods that reflect smart growth principles sell for a premium price.[2] Improved public-private cooperation to support smart growth projects can help level the playing field with conventional suburban projects.

For smart growth to flourish, state and local governments must make an effort to make development decisions that support innovation in a more timely, cost-effective, and predictable way for developers. By creating a supportive regulatory environment for compact, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use projects, government can create a more attractive investment climate for smart growth in which the private sector is more likely to participate.

## I.

### Provide financial incentives to aid the development of smart growth projects.

While many aspects of smart growth offer the opportunity to conserve resources and land costs, some development projects do require additional investment on the part of developers in site infrastructure. Alleys to allow parking in the rear, structured or underground parking lots, sidewalks and bicycle lanes, and parks and other useful open space often add to the cost of a smart growth projects. While these costs are often reflected in the final price of the projects or may be offset by the lower land costs due to more compact sites, in some cases these additional costs deter developers from initiating smart growth.

Communities and states can use a variety of tools to help developers reduce the cost of smart growth developments. Local governments can use business improvement districts or tax increment financing, for example, to provide funds for smart growth infrastructure such as parking, sidewalks, and plazas for commercial areas. Federal transportation dollars can be directed by states or MPOs to make these types of community improvements, to offer more transportation choices near projects, or to clean up

brownfields, and to make infill sites "shovel-ready." The cost to developers of protecting watersheds and wetlands associated with smart growth projects can be reduced, for example, by purchasing easements through state clean water and drinking water revolving loan funds. These funds can also be used in brownfields cleanup.[3] Whatever the funding source, governments' investments in projects to support smart growth should be considered investments in the future viability and livability of their communities.

## 2.

### Conduct smart growth audits.

Along with a strong political commitment to smart growth, one of the most important tools to achieve smart growth implementation is a clear evaluation of what is permissible in a given community's regulatory context. Smart growth audits can help point out standards or practices embedded in a jurisdiction's current operations that limit or prohibit smart growth projects from being implemented. By identifying these regulations or practices, local leaders can better prioritize those that need to be modified, and developers can be better informed of the obstacles they are likely to encounter should they attempt to create a smart growth project. A regulatory audit in Illinois, for example, funded by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, found that the median requirements of the state's jurisdictions' zoning laws were "significantly more land consumptive" than standards set by the American Planning Association. Pavement widths for local residential streets are nearly double what smart growth policy would recommend; minimum lot-size requirements are three to four times above the ideal; and commercial setbacks are well above the optimal setback of zero, to cite a few findings. The study was set up as a model smart growth regulatory audit that could be copied in other states at a minimal cost.[4]

## 3.

### Implement a process to expedite plan and permit approval for smart growth projects.

Prompt, thorough review of proposed smart growth projects and the timely issuance of permits can reduce the holding cost of land for developers and make smart growth developments more attractive. One-stop shops, developer liaisons, priority review, and review deadlines are just a few ways communities can focus their review resources on projects they want to encourage. For example, Montgomery County, Maryland, created a "Green Tape" review team that helps builders and developers obtain necessary permits more quickly, and that acts as an ombudsman for developers seeking project approvals.

Care must be taken to ensure that there is no real or perceived favoritism when conducting these reviews. These resources can be allocated many ways, including limiting them to specific geographic areas (such as special development zones) or by creating a simple version of a self-scored checklist to quickly rank review priority. By meeting their goals for expedited plan and review and improving cooperation with builders and developers in the process, communities can send the message to the private sector that they are open for smart growth business.

## 4.

### Engage political support for improved coordination on approval of smart growth projects.

Large mixed-use, infill projects are very complex and usually require numerous approvals from a variety of regulatory agencies. These projects are often the "showcase" smart growth projects in any area, and they may be seen as the test model for smart growth in the region. If a major project succeeds, it can accelerate smart

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The city of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County in North Carolina used outside consultants to review their planning, zoning, infrastructure, and development programs against fourteen smart growth principles. The results identified policy and programmatic changes that could improve the region's ability to promote smart growth. The results of this study are available online at www.charmeck.nc.us/ciplanning/complan/smartgrowth/SmartGrowthAudit.pdf.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

New Castle County, Delaware, posts an annual timetable for zoning and rezoning applications. Developers know by what date they need to submit their preliminary plans in order for the plans to be reviewed by the next council meeting. The schedule clearly outlines the process and steps that need to be taken and the timeline for the review. For more information, see www.co.newcastle.de.us/LandUse/rezdates.htm

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Georgia Governor Roy Barnes formed a "Green Light Team" of state, local, and federal agencies as well as private sector interests to expedite the approval and infrastructure development for the redevelopment of an old steel mill. The Atlantic Station project in Atlanta is a 183-acre mixed-use infill project in the center of Atlanta. Its success—particularly important due to the city's legacy as a "poster child for sprawl"—depends on coordinated input from local, state, and federal officials. The Green Light Team meets monthly and has been successful in coordinating approval requirements, funding, and timing of the various agencies.

growth in the entire region. The success of these projects may hinge on the speed of the review process. Political leaders can use their official position to encourage regulatory agencies to work more closely together and to make such projects a high priority. This coordination can identify and resolve problems quickly and keep a project moving forward. In addition, smaller projects that follow the larger ones often benefit from the relationships that were created between regulators during this process.

This political support can be done through behind-the-scenes networking or through a visible, institutionalized action. The state of Maryland, for example, became the first state to create a cabinet-level position for a smart growth coordinator. The office under the secretary for smart growth coordinates the activities of other agencies, provides education and information on smart growth to the public, and facilitates the development of both redevelopment projects in existing communities and smart neighborhoods in growing communities.

## 5.

### Use a point-based evaluation system to encourage smart growth projects.

Most conventional zoning codes offer relatively broad guidelines that define the size and use of buildings. A point-based performance evaluation system for development projects provides a way for communities to evaluate projects in terms of the smart growth benefits they provide, as well. Since they are clear and open to the public, the point systems give developers flexibility to determine how they will meet the community's smart growth goals rather than mandating exactly what amenities are expected.

Communities can develop a point system by first identifying a series of design or service criteria that they want new developments to meet. The next step is to assign points to each criterion to measure how well the proposed project meets community goals. Proposed projects are reviewed against the criteria, and incentives are offered for projects that achieve a predetermined score. Austin (see Practice Tip under Principle 9, Policy 1), for example, relies on very specific criteria concerning design and performance as measured by its Smart Growth Matrix. Projects that fail to meet the desired level can be redesigned during negotiation with planning staff so they can achieve a higher score. Communities can offer a wide range of incentives, such as reduction of development fees, support for infrastructure financing, or density bonuses to encourage the features they desire. The value of the incentives may increase as the project scores increase, with a low level of concessions being given for minimally acceptable scores and more valuable incentives given to higher-scoring projects.

## 6.

### Remove parking from the development equation through public-private partnerships to build community parking facilities.

Parking has a significant impact on the type of development that takes place and the look and feel of a community that results. Prominent voices in development adhere to the belief that parking drives development, as more space is often needed to park cars than to house people.[5] This is particularly true for retail development. The city of Olympia, Washington, estimates that parking accounts for 54 percent of the site coverage for conventional retail development—more than double the footprint of the building that itself accounts for only 26 percent.[6] The prospects for creat-

ing smart growth on infill sites are often diminished by the requisite amount of parking that is specified in local codes.

While local governments can ease the parking burden for developers by reducing excess requirements, governments can also help improve the integration of parking into a community by working with area landowners and developers to finance and build community-owned parking facilities that serve all the surrounding buildings. In so doing, local government removes a sizable portion of site planning and development from the development equation, which makes the project easier to implement. Using local government authority and fees collected from nearby landowners who benefit from the parking service, the community can acquire land and build structured parking facilities and remove the zoning requirements for parking in the surrounding plots. Creating community parking structures can be particularly useful when localities seek to develop high-density infill and transit-oriented development projects. In creating these lots, however, the community needs to be very careful about the amount of parking it supplies; too much parking will reduce transit use in the area, and too little parking can make the area undesirable to certain tenants. At the same time, potential lenders for new developments in the area must be educated on the use of community parking facilities, because their own lending requirements may stipulate that on-site parking be provided.

## 7.

### Encourage demand for smart growth though consumer incentives.

Strong consumer demand is perhaps the most direct means to create an incentive for private development of smart growth projects. The economics of home and auto ownership, supported by post–WW II era government policies that favor buying houses on the edge of urban areas, still persist, despite a growing demand for smart growth. Local and state governments can offer incentives to prospective home buyers that would help offset the myriad existing tax, infrastructure, and utility subsidies that currently favor conventional suburban development.[7] New incentives would help level the playing field between conventional and smart growth developments, which would give consumers a wider range of choice in the type of communities they live in, and which would create more demand for development projects that exemplify smart growth principles.

Helping people to live close to work is one such opportunity.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In the late 1970s, the city of Fort Collins, Colorado, adopted its Land Development Guidance System (LDGS)—a point-based program to replace its conventional planned unit development ordinance. The system gave developers density bonuses for projects that received high scores. The program was controversial and was refined over time to ensure that the right types of projects received assistance. It helped to create a very vibrant smart growth community, despite the burden of outdated underlying zoning codes. In 1997, the community revised its comprehensive plan and zoning codes to better promote smart growth design and amenities. As a result, it was determined that the LDGS was no longer needed, and it was eventually dropped. Some developers resist the mandates of the new system and want the option to retain the LDGS because it allows them the flexibility to achieve results using a variety of designs rather than having requirements mandated. One problem cited with the LDGS was that the criteria were so broad that the system would still award high scores to projects that did not achieve quality smart growth.

Photo: Federal Realty Investment Trust

**Structured parking – owned and operated by Montgomery County, Maryland – helps relieve parking pressure on the streets surrounding Bethesda's retail areas.**

Photo: Smart Growth Network

**A mix of buildings and a public square developed by private developers on transit agency property enhances the vitality of downtown Bethesda, Maryland.**

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Montgomery County, Maryland, has a number of county-owned parking lots to service downtown Bethesda. These lots are placed and constructed to allow the most desirable land—street frontages on busy avenues and boulevards—to remain available for pedestrian-oriented, commercial development. In an effort to encourage transit-oriented development in the area, developers are allowed to forgo building on-site parking if they contribute to the county's parking fund, which pays for the lots. The result has been that developers are exempted from the cost and effort of constructing parking, and the community benefits from a dynamic, walkable neighborhood with a generous mix of office, retail, restaurants, and housing.

Living in proximity to workplaces provides residents with opportunities for improved household choice in transportation and reduced time spent commuting (and the air pollution associated with it). Localities can encourage employers to provide employees with direct financial support, such as low-interest loans or down-payment assistance, to purchase a house near work through employer-assisted housing programs. Maryland's "Live Near Your Work" program goes one step further by providing direct financial assistance for employees to buy a home near their work (see Principle 1, Policy 1 for more information). The Location Efficient Mortgage℠ is another useful tool to increase demand for transit-oriented development by making it easier to qualify for home purchases near transit (see Principle 3, Policy 6 for more information).

## 8.

### Display zoning regulations and design goals in pictorial fashion to better illustrate development goals.

Depicting outcomes that are visual in nature through the written word can be a challenge. Conventional zoning regulations are often dense statistical documents, difficult to understand, and sometimes vague. This can lead to confusion and misunderstanding during the permit process, the need for multiple public hearings to resolve disputes, and finally the resubmission of plans and proposals—all of which constitute significant delays and additional costs for developers. Faced with this uncertainty, many developers will simply resort to building what they know they can build right away. The result is often more development that is familiar and conventional and less likely innovative projects that help create smart growth.

The concept that a picture is worth a thousand words has helped to inform some communities' approaches to regulation. They are finding that pictures can help convey to developers, architects, and builders the precise types of developments that the community wants. The city of Providence, Rhode Island, for example, found that changing from "zoning by statistics" to "zoning by showing" (what is desired) has created a simple, flexible process for their Downcity redevelopment program (see Practice Tip under Principle 10 for more information). The city of Boulder, Colorado, has encouraged new mixed-use and infill development by designing prototype projects to educate local developers about the preferences that the community had expressed. The planning office had architects create project prototype designs so developers could see exactly what the community was looking to have built. Local developers used these designs as guidelines to build many early mixed-use projects.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Many new urbanist and traditional neighborhood developments, such as Harbor Town in Memphis, Tennessee, use posters to define what design criteria apply to new homes in the community. These criteria clearly depict what will and will not be accepted by design review boards and thus help to preserve community character and create a sense of place.

## 9.

### Maximize the value of transit agency property through joint development of transit-oriented development.

Many transit agencies have underutilized property or air space over property near rail stations or bus routes. These resources constitute valuable investment opportunities for the private sector, which can be engaged through the joint development process to put land to its highest and best use. Recent changes in federal guidelines have helped to overcome obstacles that previously limited the sale or leasing of these properties and have simplified the process. Transit agencies can modify the criteria that they use to evaluate development proposals—which currently focus on economic profitability, thereby favoring high-value, single-use buildings for office space, for example—to place more emphasis on the potential role of the development in creating smart growth. In short, transit agencies are well-poised to act as key implementers of smart growth. As they work with the private sector to develop these parcels, transit agencies can ensure that space is used to create the mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development that the parcels are naturally suited for.

Photos: Sam Shamoon Providence City Planning Office

Besides the potential for smart growth benefits, the joint development effort can create benefits for both developers, who get access to valuable property that is near transit and in desirable areas, and transit agencies, who are able to make more profitable use of their real estate assets. Sale or lease of the property generates revenues for the transit system. Increased development near transit centers enables more people to use transit for travel between jobs, shops, and home. Finally, the public-private partnership that creates these transit-oriented development opportunities can serve to demonstrate the viability and potential profitability of smart growth projects for developers.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) has one of the nation's most aggressive joint development programs. Over thirty projects have been developed or planned in the last few years. WMATA has projected an income of $15 million dollars by 2003 from joint development projects alone—a figure that is impressive, although it could still be improved. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation has issued a report on how WMATA could enhance its joint development program entitled, "Building Healthier Neighborhoods with Metrorail: Improving Joint Development Opportunities." The report identifies barriers that WMATA faces—and which other transit agencies may face as well—and how better partnerships with local government and new policies could improve opportunities for joint development.

Photos: Sam Shamoon Providence City Planning Office

**Public investment and planning and zoning changes attracted private developers back to "Downcity" Providence, Rhode Island.**

## 10.

**Incorporate by-right smart growth redevelopment into existing communities' masterplans.**

Infill redevelopment projects usually face greater regulatory barriers than do greenfield sites. This tendency is often a result of more detailed regulatory systems put in place to protect existing residents against any potential adverse effects of redevelopment. While the underlying motives are good, these regulatory frameworks often have the undesirable effect of preventing—or making it difficult to build—smart growth. In many communities, for example, the zoning code has evolved to a level that, if the current buildings on a wonderful old commercial street were to burn down, it would be illegal to rebuild them. These regulatory barriers often make it nearly impossible to recreate the walkable, mixed-use environments that once existed in many communities across the country.

Local government can promote the revitalization of important neighborhoods into smart growth communities by changing the planning and zoning regulations in these areas so that compact, walkable, mixed-use, transit-oriented projects can be built by right. Such changes allow a developer to purchase the land knowing that zoning variances will not be required to build a smart growth project because the community has approved this type of development in advance. A number of tools, including area plans and overlay zones, can be used to achieve this goal. By eliminating uncertainty from the development equation and permitting this development by right, the community is making a clear statement that developers are welcome to help create smart growth.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In Providence, Rhode Island, the city has used a master planning process to revitalize its old downtown retail district known as Downcity. The planning process emphasized the educational and arts assets that exist in the area by creating an arts and entertainment district that included housing and workspace for artists, students and retirees. An overlay zone was created that designated streets as either "A" or "B" streets. On A streets regulations exist to preserve their historical, architectural, and walkable qualities. The rules for B streets are more flexible, but require developers to get approval for the height, shape, and location of the building on the lot. These regulations, along with complementary investments in public infrastructure like sidewalks and streets, have resulted in a development renaissance downtown.[9]

1 See Chris Leinberger, *Financing Progressive Development* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2001) for a thorough discussion on the eighteen types of development that can be financed in today's system and the obstacles for smart growth.

2 Mark Eppli and Charles Tu, *Valuing the New Urbanism* (Washington, DC.: Urban Land Institute, 1999).

3 For more information on federal funding for smart growth see EPA's smart growth Web page funding sources guide at www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/funding.htm, as well as the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organization's *Redeveloping Brownfields with Federal Transportation Funds* at http://smartgrowth.org/pdf/brownfields_tea21.pdf.

4 "Local Codes an Obstacle to Smart Growth," *New Urban News*, January–February 2001, 1.

5 Robert Dunphy, "Parking Strategies," *Urban Land*, 59, no. 10 (October 2000):78.

6 Ibid.

7 Michael Lewyn, "Why Sprawl is a Conservative Issue," *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*, 20, no. 4 (August 2000): 295–315.

8 The Chesapeake Bay Foundation's full report is available at www.savethebay.cbf.org/resources/pubs/metrorail.pdf.

9 For more information on Downcity planning and Implementations see city of Providence Department of Planning and Development, *Downcity Providence: Master Plan and Implementation Plan* (Providence: 1994).

Photo: Joe Schilling

*Chapter Ten*

# Encourage Community and Stake Holder Collaboration in Development Decisions

Growth can create great places to live, work, and play—if it responds to a community's own sense of how and where the community wants to grow. Articulating this vision, however, can be a challenge because the vision must reflect the needs of a wide range of stakeholders and community members. The development process allows for some of this input, through periodic public hearings on planning or zoning decisions, for example. While useful, these opportunities are only a few of the many ways in which the values and concerns of all stakeholders in development can help shape a community's plan for growth.

A key component of smart growth is to ensure early and frequent involvement of all stake-

$MART GROWTH
NETWORK

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In 1999, Governor Ventura laid out Minnesota's framework for smart growth in "Growing Smart in Minnesota." In response, Minnesota's state legislature issued a number of mandates, which together form the basis of the state's smart growth initiatives. Realizing the important role the state can play in helping local governments carry out these initiatives, Minnesota's Department of Planning and its local and state partners created a guide for local governments. The guide incorporates the state's goals and principles of smart growth. In addition, the Minnesota Department of Planning has a Local Government Assistance Center with staff who provide information and advice to local governments on a number of issues, including how to fully engage the public in the planning process. To receive a copy of the planning guide or for more information about the Assistance Center see www.mnplan.state.mn.us/commplan/index.html.

holders to identify and address specific needs and concerns. The range of these stakeholders is broad and includes developers, urban planners, transportation engineers, conservation and environmental groups, community development advocates, historic preservationists, commuters, students, environmental justice advocates, senior citizen organizations, children's advocacy groups, churches, parent-teacher associations, civic associations, and many others. Each is capable of contributing a unique and valuable perspective to both broad community plans and specific project designs. These perspectives are particularly critical for the construction of the mixed-use, compact, walkable, and transit-rich communities that smart growth supports because these varied perspectives may represent a departure from what is conventional and familiar. The means of engaging the community and stakeholders are myriad and range from early stakeholder input in community plans to ongoing feedback and evaluation of the plan's implementation as projects are constructed. Ensuring a high level of public awareness is one of the most fundamental strategies to guarantee that community needs and possible solutions are fully considered. This strategy can help local leaders better identify and support development that meets those needs.

This process can be time-consuming, frustrating, and expensive. In many cases, involving the public is a contentious and even messy process because of the diverse ideas and priorities among stakeholders. However, it can also be a rewarding one as creative solutions are found in the most troublesome problems. Moreover, in the long run, community and stakeholder collaboration creates a sound basis for creative, speedy resolution of development conflicts, which can help make development decisions more timely, cost-effective, and predictable. Engaging stakeholders early and often and sharing with them vital information about development options will give them a greater understanding of the importance of and challenges associated with good planning and investment. Projects and plans developed without strong citizen involvement will lack the community buy-in necessary for success and make it more difficult to build support when tough decisions need to be made. The following policies are designed to address some of the barriers and constraints of community involvement.

## I.

### Seek technical assistance to develop a public participation process.

Good information is critical to the smooth functioning of local government, especially the planning process. While many local governments may recognize the need for and value of engaging the public in the decision-making process, governments may lack the tools, information, or financial resources that will allow them to do so. Numerous tools and information sources exist, however—often based on the experience of other communities and public participation specialists—that can be used to help local governments develop the capacity and confidence to undertake an effective citizen participation process. Technical assistance may be available from states, interest groups, nonprofit organizations, and private sector consultants to help counties, cities, and towns craft a strategy for stakeholder involvement. Local governments that

lack the necessary financial resources may take advantage of the capacity of local community groups or universities by engaging them to assist with developing and implementing a public involvement campaign for a specific project. For example, the city of Eugene, Oregon, engaged faculty and students from the nearby University of Oregon planning department to help them carry out their widely successful "Eugene Decisions" process. As a result, not only have the skills of local government staff improved, but a wider range of stakeholders have been actively involved in planning and development decisions about their community's future.

## 2.

### Use unconventional methods and forums to educate nontraditional, as well as traditional, stakeholders about the development and decision-making processes.

In order for a community to fully support a new initiative, all segments of the population need to be informed and educated on its components. Similarly, citizens need information about possible alternatives before they voice their choices or concerns. Often, however, only a small portion of the community is engaged in the decision-making process because of socioeconomic, language, or education barriers. Involving a wide range of public voices at each stage requires that local officials actively solicit and recruit diverse components of the public. Doing so means identifying and addressing barriers to full public participation.

Local governments should be creative in identifying and using new methods for sharing information. Common methods for reaching a broad audience might include placing meeting notices in local papers, directing mail to individuals and groups who express an interest in a project, leaving copies of documents in public offices and libraries, handing out leaflets, or inserting information into other community forums. To reach other audiences, a local government might hold evening or weekend meetings on specific issues, present updates at neighborhood meetings, host design charrettes, distribute radio public service announcements, or work with local clergy and community-assistance groups. Often, lower-income communities feel less politically empowered to participate. To reach these audiences, localities can issue neighborhood notices or post notices in local newsletters and local gathering spots such as post offices, popular shops, or local farmers markets. Finally, to ensure full access, key information on proposed development decisions should be translated into the languages of area residents. Every community should develop its own range of methods to reach as many individuals and segments of the community as possible. The community must reflect its unique demographic makeup in the values it uses to frame the planning process, and this can only be ensured if the cross section of residents and their development priorities are well known.

## 3.

### Conduct community visioning exercises to determine how and where the neighborhood will grow.

Effective decision making about how regions will grow requires considerable information gathering on the part of both professionals and citizen-stakeholders. For this reason, it is important to use a number of visualization tools that allow for a greater understanding of the way planning decisions affect citizens. For example, a computer simulation can depict radical changes in a streetscape—such as the construction of new buildings or the incorporation of transit infrastructure into existing roadways—in just seconds. It can help create an image of what a proposed multifamily development would look like, thus enabling community

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In 1989, the city of Portland, Oregon, began the work that led to the adoption in December 1994 of a regional growth plan—the Region 2040 Growth Concept. Metro developed base conditions and community values that were then used to propose 3 potential alternative urban form strategies for the region, from which a preferred alternative could be constructed. To engage citizens in developing this alternative, a video outlining the options and their impacts on the region was developed and available to the public for no charge through Blockbuster Video outlets, a chain of video rental stores. As a result, the process solicited more than 17,000 citizen comments and suggestions, which eventually led to the selection of an alternative that reflected public comment as well as aspects of each of the alternative scenarios provided.

members to determine its appropriateness based on specifics rather than broad planning concepts such as "higher-density construction." Alternative future scenarios can be used to model the growth of a region over a specified time frame and can be generated in real time to respond to different variables suggested by a live audience. This rapid response to concerns and ideas provides facilitators with the tools to more quickly and efficiently reach consensus for innovative plans. Other exercises might include providing local residents an opportunity to vote, to comment on several designs of a proposed project, or to speak directly with designers and architects

Increasingly, planning offices and development consulting firms use computer imaging to engage citizens in planning workshops. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, after the East Gate Mall failed, the community came together with strong ideas about future uses of the old shopping center. Members of the community were tired of large, single-use developments and wanted to see a village center that was consistent with the scale of surrounding neighborhoods. Since it was not feasible to redevelop the entire site at once, they were shown a computer simulation of several distinct phases that would be implemented over a span of years, according to market conditions. This simulation enabled citizens to visualize how new buildings would initially be sited in outlying parking areas, eventually replacing the mall itself. The community's vision formed the basis for a plan that will guide development and that will radically change the look and feel of that community over the years to come.

**Developers engaged community residents and neighborhood vendors to address density and retail design issues in Hisman Hin-Nu terrace in Oakland, California.**

Photos: Pyatok Associates

## 4.

### Require communities to create public access to tax and lien information on all properties to facilitate the rehabilitation of distressed properties.

Community groups are better able to offer innovative solutions about difficult development challenges when they have access to information. However, neighborhood groups often have difficulties obtaining the information they need to fight deterioration in their own area. Efforts to find information about tax arrears and outstanding liens on properties in disrepair or blight, or about owners of abandoned or vacant properties, can be time-consuming and difficult. Residents may be frustrated by efforts to access this information that is kept in various computer banks or scattered among different government agencies.

State and local governments can support the public information process by providing better access to tax and lien arrears. Citizens can then use this information to encourage owners to make need-

ed repairs or sell their properties or to engage local authorities to seize abandoned properties for revitalization. Local governments can help the public be an active participant in strengthening its own community by providing easy access to data by collecting and assembling into one area data that would otherwise be scattered. This can include making data available on computer systems that could be accessed online or through a computer located in a central public building, such as city hall. Governments can provide training for local groups on how to access and use the data available. In addition to being more informed about the development challenges communities and government face, this approach also allows residents to more effectively act to prevent commercial and residential abandonment and decline, which can lead to additional financial disinvestment. In this way, residents work with their governments to create more livable, vibrant communities.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In Chicago, the Center for Neighborhood Technology has developed the Neighborhood Early Warning System (NEWS) that makes it easy to obtain housing information that can be critical to the success of any sustainable community development project. NEWS is an online inventory of property in Chicago, which provides information that can help community groups and city and county agencies identify sites of potential disinvestment and abandonment. For severely tax-delinquent buildings, NEWS makes data available for Chicago's Scavenger Sale and the County Treasurer's Annual Sale. With NEWS, residents can respond proactively to troubled buildings and neighborhoods. Because it is a Web-based system, NEWS can be easily replicated in other areas, which allows localities to increase community access to information. For more information, see www.newschicago.org.

## 5·

### Incorporate opinions and interests often and routinely into the planning process.

There are numerous phases within the development process that require public involvement, including the process of deciding what to build, where to build, how to build, the constantly changing site plans, and the multiple phases of implementation. Many of the policies in this section discuss mechanisms of public involvement in the initial phases of development. However, the involvement of the public after the decision has been made of what to build is equally important to ensure that the project conforms to the original decision and design parameters during its implementation. This citizen involvement is most effectively done when there is a clear and consistent means of incorporating public opinion on an ongoing basis into the development process. The process may include an easy and convenient mechanism to reach public decision makers or regularly scheduled (weekly or monthly) public meetings with the developer. A number of other communities use Web sites to increase the availability of information about changes to a specific site design, for example. In this way, the public can remain informed and engaged as the development moves from design to construction and use.

Local jurisdictions can also formalize citizen input by institutionalizing a citizen role in the process of reviewing development decisions. Citizen involvement can be achieved through citizen advisory and neighborhood councils. In general, advisory committees tend to attract individuals who are knowledgeable around a specific type of project and who, over the course of that project,

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The Community Development Department in the city of Spokane, Washington recognizes thirteen neighborhood groups in areas primarily composed of low- and moderate-income residents. These neighborhoods receive a portion of the city's Community Development Block Grants to make recommendations on projects to be funded in their respective neighborhoods. The neighborhood groups support existing projects, research and propose new ones, and present their recommendations for approval. Because they have been involved in the decision-making process and are familiar with their own needs, the neighborhoods groups are better prepared to participate during the implementation stage as well. They meet with the divisions of city government that are implementing projects, monitor progress and timelines, and make suggestions when new issues arise.

provide a neighborhood perspective and experience in their recommendations. Conversely, neighborhood councils are usually institutionalized mechanisms for direct public involvement in comprehensive planning and civic issues. Neighborhood council can make recommendations on proposed development activities and serve as the vehicle for citizen input for changes to the land use plan, park plan, or other planning activities. Whether formalized or not, providing a means for ongoing citizen participation in decision making and project implementation creates a feeling of ownership among community members and ensures higher-quality outputs as a result.

## 6.

### Work with the media to disseminate planning and development information on a consistent basis.

Traffic congestion, loss of open space, and economic growth and jobs are concerns that consistently rank at the top of the list of citizen concerns for their communities. Although planning, smart growth, and growth management issues are complex and multifaceted issues that are sometimes difficult to comprehend, they have a profound effect on these common problems. Often, the public does not understand how its everyday activities influence these conditions or how planning or smart growth could relieve some of the problems and improve quality of life.

All media outlets regularly feature stories on pertinent local and regional topics. Localities can encourage newspapers, radio, or local television to cover development and planning issues. The greatest impact will be made when these issues are covered as a regular column or through a series of recurring feature stories that take the time to unravel the complex web of individual public and private decisions and the cumulative changes in quality-of-life that result. Not only do these information venues provide a means for news outlets to cover issues that resonate with their audiences, such venues also provide a means for local leaders to better inform citizens on the impacts of pending development and infrastructure decisions.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

David Goldberg of the Atlanta Journal Constitution identified the interest of local citizens in stories on congestion and quality of life, but he noted a lack of ability among many readers to connect these impacts to local planning and development decisions. By securing the commitment of editorial staff, Goldberg was able to feature a regular weekly section on these issues, which provided a context to explain how these effects were linked to the development decisions that created them. This coverage provided an important forum for Atlanta's residents to consider critical decisions on regional transit, downtown revitalization, and a proposed outer beltway, among others, in the years that followed. Tips on how to portray issues in the media related to development and growth are available in Goldberg's publication, *Covering Urban Sprawl: Rethinking the American Dream*, available through www.rtnda.org/resources/sprawl/sprawl.html.

## 7.

### Engage children through education and outreach.

As it is often said, today's children are tomorrow's leaders. Engaging children often and early is critical for them to develop a comprehensive understanding on how the built environment impacts the natural one, and moreover, their quality of life. In addition, many children "teach" their parents about new issues and innovative solutions. To some degree, the success of recycling can be attributed to children who learned about it in school, brought it home, and created a demand by parents for curbside recycling. Many schools now have some type of environmental education program in their curriculum. Local governments and school boards can work with teachers to expand these programs to provide children the vocabulary and tools to understand how development impacts the natural world and what they can do to influence the development process. Once a better understanding

has been developed of the links between development decisions and quality of life, students will have a better sense of how to build a community that meets the needs of its residents and will be more inclined to engage in the process to implement that vision.

One of the most innovative programs that teach children about the concepts of community planning is known as "Box City."[1] This program provides a hands-on approach to community planning by allowing students to use milk cartons to make their own buildings and to create their own communities. Program components mirror the way real communities get built, through a mix of collaboration, regulation, and entrepreneurship. When the community is built, the kids evaluate it and compare the good and bad features with the community in which they live. The program aids students to better comprehend the built environment, why it is important to them, and how they can help shape it.

Photos: Dave Wann

Children in Kansas City envision changes to their community using Box City.

## 8.

### Cultivate relationships with schools, universities, and colleges.

Universities and colleges can be a great resource for localities for intellectual capital and research assistance. At the same time, the real-world process of local government decision making about development provides an excellent opportunity for applied student learning. Recognizing these shared benefits, many universities are able to assist local governments to address growth issues through research and community-based projects. Such opportunities provide planning and real estate students the chance to assist on projects as interns, and provide local government a way to expand its temporary work force to complete short-term projects. Furthermore, the insight that professors and instructors can provide as academic experts can enrich many local government planning processes with original ideas and perspectives.

For example, the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture in South Bend, Indiana, has established a center that employs the expertise of faculty and students to assist developers and public officials on projects in that city.[2] Another such center, the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education at the University of Maryland in College Park,[3] analyzes the impacts of alternative development patterns and monitors and evaluates specific smart growth alternatives in communities across Maryland and elsewhere. In addition, the center conducts outreach sessions with developers,

**PRACTICE TIP:**

In Liberty, Missouri, a Kansas City suburb, a program demonstrated how youth can contribute to problem solving for community transportation issues. Students in the seventh grade surveyed sixth grade students to determine current modes and preferences for getting to school. The results showed that 77 percent of the students would like to bike to school, yet only 10 percent did so. The students shared the results with the local planning commission and pointed out that a lack of sidewalks was one of the main reasons that students were not able to safely bike or walk to school. They provided input on how to improve city trails and walkways. The planning commission was so impressed with the information provided by the students that a student is now a member of the long-range planning committee.

Photo: Evanston Urban Renewal Agency

**Community members were engaged to help create a plan for the reuse of a historic train station in Evanston, Wyoming, as a community center.**

local government officials, lenders, public health experts, and citizen leaders to identify barriers to smart growth and solutions to overcome them.

## 9.

### Bring developers and the development community into the visioning process.

The vision of how and where a community wants to grow should help resolve a number of key social, economic, transportation, and growth considerations. The vision should represent the values of its residents of what the community should look like in the future. In order to be successful, the vision should also represent the input of an important stakeholder group: developers. As one of the most critical groups for implementation, developers should be engaged in the visioning process, not only in the plans to carry out a specific project. Early engagement by developers can help ensure that community plans are economically feasible and attractive enough to ensure active private-sector participation.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) in Washington, D.C., has an advisory service that offers expert advice to help communities find creative, practical solutions for the full range of land-use and development issues. Washington, D.C.'s Department of Planning enlisted ULI to help redevelop Waterside Mall, an underutilized two-block stretch in the southwest part of the city. A team of experts spent several days on site touring the study area, meeting and interviewing key people within the community, and preparing findings and recommendations. This process, which incorporated community participation, helped build consensus for the recommendations that served as a blueprint for the plan adopted. Over time, the area will be redeveloped into a town center with new restaurants, cafés and services that serve nearby residents. In addition, the project will reconnect downtown with the waterfront and will provide additional opportunities for commercial development or recreation. For more information on ULI's Advisory Services see http://experts.uli.org/DK/AdServ/ex_AdServ_About_fst.html.

Engaging members of the development community who have skills in conceptualizing, financing, and constructing projects can ensure that community-based plans are feasible and cost-effective. In addition, experience has shown that developers who have intimate knowledge of local conditions and community values are able to create better communities than those developers who do not. Blending the expertise of the development community with the visioning process carried out by community members creates a better end product for all.

## 10.

### Hold a design charrette to resolve problematic development decisions.

Engaging the community to envision its growth priorities can be a time-consuming process that may take months or years. Charrettes, on the other hand, are brief, intense four- to seven-day design sessions that address specific urban problems or broader community visions. All citizens who are interested in the issues or projects to be considered are invited to participate and are placed in a room with maps of the study area. Over the course of a few days, with the help of a team of professionals (facilitators, engineers, planners, designers, and architects), these citizens are able to draw a clear picture of the future of their community. This shared achievement gives a project a better chance of successfully navigating the numerous political, economic, and envi-

ronmental obstacles that the project may face because true buy-in has been achieved.

Charrettes can be used to address a variety of needs, from reaching consensus on long-term visions for town development to finding workable agreements on single projects. They can identify short-term and long-term problems and issues that are important to residents and business leaders, as well as identify opportunities and needs. Charrettes build both immediate and long-term solutions, by outlining short-term steps as part of the work product. They may offer implementation strategies and offer policies and principles for future decision making and town development. Brainstorming and negotiation during a charrette can change minds and facilitate unexpected concepts or solutions to problems. As a result, the number and variety of solutions and ideas generated and considered are far greater than those under conventional planning methods, which would normally take months to achieve.

**PRACTICE TIP:**

Jackson Hole, Wyoming, struggles with an affordable housing problem. To address the area's need for more housing, Teton County (in which Jackson Hole is situated) acquired a 329-acre parcel of land on which it plans to build a new neighborhood that will include affordable housing. To ensure that this new development meets the needs of the Jackson Hole community, the design process is being guided by public input. In November 2001, a design charrette was held to solicit public input that the county would use to create specific ideas about the development for the public's approval. The public was able to return to the charrette time and again during the course of a week to see the project transformed and to see how its new ideas were translated into the specific plans for development.

[1] For more information on Box City, see www.cubekc.org/.

[2] For more information see www.nd.edu/~arch/.

[3] For further information see www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/Colleges/ARCH/URSP/Research/CSG/.

# *Conclusion*

The range and breadth of policies that communities can use to achieve vibrant, healthy, and diverse living environments go well beyond the 100 identified here. Nevertheless, the framework provided in this primer—using the ten smart growth principles as broad community objectives and specifying detailed programs and policies to achieve them—may provide a first step for communities to move toward implementation. It is not uncommon for the slightest change—even adoption of even a single policy—to be met with resistance by some. It is incumbent upon communities, therefore, to ensure that any new approach to development is one that actively and equitably considers the needs of all those who affect and are affected by development. The rationale for this new smart growth approach must be well articulated and supported by clear short- and long-term community goals that measurably improve the community's quality of life.

As with all efforts, implementation of a broad smart growth strategy as well as detailed policy changes should be evaluated periodically for effectiveness. Creating benchmarks for improved fiscal efficiency in infrastructure and school spending, for example, can be valuable management tools for local officials seeking to ensure that smart growth efforts result in an improved bottom line. Partnerships and diverse coalitions—such as that represented by the Smart Growth Network itself—can also be effective tools for identifying priorities and reaching consensus among members of a community.

The route to achieving smart growth will be different in every community, as will the outcomes. In every case, however, it is the demand for the the economic, environmental and community benefits that smart growth can provide, paired with a clear and comprehensive approach towards achieving them, that will result in successful smart growth implementation.

# 100 Policies for Implementation

| | State | Local | Mix land uses | Take advantage of compact building design | Create a range of housing opportunities and choices | Create walkable communities | Foster distinctive attractive communities with a strong sense of place | Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas | Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities | Provide a variety of transportation choices | Make development decisions predictable, and cost effective | Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **I. Mix land uses** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Provide incentives through state funds to encourage residents to live near where they work. | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 2. Adopt smart growth codes to parallel existing conventional development codes. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 3. Use innovative zoning tools to encourage mixed-use communities and buildings. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| 4. Facilitate financing of mixed-use properties. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| 5. Zone areas by building type, not by use. | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| 6. Use flex zoning to allow developers to easily supply space in response to market demands. | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 7. Convert declining shopping malls and strip commercial streets into mixed-use developments. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 8. Provide examples of mixed-use development at scales that are appropriate to your community. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 9. Create opportunities to retrofit single use commercial and retail developments into walkable, mixed-use communities. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 10. Reward communities that create a balance between jobs and housing. | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **II. Take advantage of compact building design** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Use public meetings about development options to educate community members on density and compact building options. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2. Ensure ready access to open space in compactly-developed places. | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 3. Encourage developers to reduce off-street surface parking. | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 4. Match building scale to street type in zoning and permit approval processes. | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| 5. Establish model state-level design standards and codes to encourage compact building design that can be adopted by local communities. | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 6. Use density bonuses to encourage developers to increase floor-to-area ratio (FAR). | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 7. Ensure a sense of privacy through the design of homes and yards. | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. Employ a design review board to ensure that compact buildings reflect desirable design standards. | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 9. Offer incentives that encourage local communities to increase density. | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 10. Support regional planning efforts to encourage compact communities. | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| **III. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Enact an inclusionary zoning ordinance for new housing developments. | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 2. Provide homebuyer assistance through support to community land trusts. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 3. Revise zoning and building codes to permit a wider variety of housing types. | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | |
| 4. Plan and zone for affordable and manufactured housing development in rural areas. | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 5. Educate developers of multi-family housing units and nonprofits on the use of limited equity (or equity restriction) components. | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 6. Educate realtors, lenders, and home buyers on the use of resource-efficient mortgages. | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 7. Implement a program to identify and dispose of vacant and abandoned buildings. | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 8. Adopt special rehabilitation building codes to regulate the renovation of existing structures. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 9. Enlist local jurisdictions in implementing a regional fair-share housing allocation plan across metropolitan areas. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 10. Give priority to smart growth projects and programs that foster smart growth in the allocation of federal housing and community development block grant (and other) funds. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| **VI. Create walkable communities** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Provide grants or other financial assistance to local communities to retrofit existing streets and sidewalks to promote more walkable communities. | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 2. Concentrate critical services near homes, jobs, and transit. | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| 3. Require building design that makes commercial areas more walkable. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 4. Adopt design standards for streets that ensure safety and mobility for pedestrian and non-motorized modes of transport. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 5. Adopt design standards for sidewalks. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. Require traffic-calming techniques where traffic speed through residential and urban neighborhoods is excessive. | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | |
| 7. Beautify and maintain existing and future walkways. | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 8. Provide Americans with disabilities easy access to sidewalks, streets, parks, and other public and private services. | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 9. Connect walkways, parking lots, greenways, and developments. | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 10. Identify economic opportunities that stimulate pedestrian activity. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| **V. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Modify state funding processes and school siting standards to preserve neighborhood schools and build new schools to a "community level." | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 2. Create a state tax credit to encourage adaptive reuse of historic or architecturally significant buildings. | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 3. Plant trees throughout communities, and preserve existing trees during new construction. | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 4. Create active and secure open spaces. | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 5. Simplify and expedite permitting regulations to allow vendors to offer sidewalk service. | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 6. Create special improvement districts for focused investment. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 7. Define communities and neighborhoods with visual cues. | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 8. Preserve scenic vistas through the appropriate location of telecommunication towers, and improved control of billboards. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 9. Create opportunities for community interaction. | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| 10. Enact clear design guidelines so that streets, buildings, and public spaces work together to create a sense of place. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| **VI. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Use TDRs, PDRs and other market mechanisms to conserve private lands. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 2. Coordinate and link local, state, and federal planning on land conservation and development. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 3. Expand use of innovative financing tools to facilitate open space acquisition and preservation. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 4. Employ regional development strategies that better protect and preserve open space in edge areas. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. Adopt a green infrastructure plan. | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6. Create a network of trails and greenways. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 7. Design and implement an information-gathering and education program. | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 8. Design and implement zoning tools that preserve open space. | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 9. Provide mechanisms for preserving working lands. | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 10. Partner with nongovernmental organizations to acquire and protect land. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| **VII. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Strengthen the state or local brownfields program. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2. Adopt a "fix-it-first" policy that sets priorities for upgrading existing facilities. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 3. Institute regional tax base sharing to limit regional competition and to support schools and infrastructure throughout the region. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 4. Use the split-rate property tax to encourage development on vacant or blighted pieces of land in existing communities. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 5. Locate civic buildings in existing communities rather than in greenfield areas. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 6. Conduct an "infill checkup" to evaluate and prioritize infill and brownfield sites for redevelopment. | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 7. Facilitate programs to encourage home renovation and rehabilitation in existing neighborhoods. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 8. Support community-based organizations involved in revitalizing neighborhoods. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 9. Create economic incentives for businesses and home owners to locate in areas with existing infrastructure. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 10. Modify average cost-pricing practices in utilities to better account for costs of expanding infrastructure in greenfield areas. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| **VIII. Provide a variety of transportation choices** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Finance and provide incentives for multimodal transportation systems that include supportive land use and development. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 2. Modify roadway level-of-service standards in areas served by transit. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 3. Plan and permit road networks of neighborhood scaled streets (generally two or four lanes) with high levels of connectivity and short blocks. | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. Connect transportation modes to one another. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | |
| 5. Zone for concentrated activity centers around transit service. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 6. Require sidewalks in all new developments. | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| 7. Address parking needs and opportunities. | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 8. Collaborate with employers and provide information and incentives for programs to minimize or decrease rush-hour congestion impacts. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| 9. Adjust existing transit services to take full advantage of transit supportive neighborhoods and developments. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 10. Cluster freight facilities near ports, airports, and rail terminals. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| **IX. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Provide financial incentives to aid the development of smart growth projects. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 2. Conduct smart growth audits. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 3. Implement a process to expedite plan and permit approval for smart growth projects. | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 4. Engage political support for improved coordination on approval of smart growth projects. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5. Use a point-based evaluation system to encourage smart growth projects. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6. Remove parking from the development equation through public-private partnerships to build community parking facilities. | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | |
| 7. Encourage demand for smart growth though consumer incentives. | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 8. Display zoning regulations and design goals in pictorial fashion to better illustrate development goals. | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 9. Maximize the value of transit agency property through joint development of transit-oriented development. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 10. Incorporate by-right smart growth redevelopment into existing communities' masterplans. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| **X. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Seek technical assistance to develop a public participation process. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 2. Use unconventional methods and forums to educate non-traditional, as well as traditional, stakeholders about the development and decision-making processes. | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. Conduct community visioning exercises to determine how and where the neighborhood will grow. | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 4. Require communities to create public access to tax and lien information on all properties to facilitate the rehabilitation of distressed properties. | | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 5. Incorporate opinions and interests often and rountinely into the planning process. | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 6. Work with the media to disseminate planning and development information on a consistent basis. | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 7. Engage children through education and outreach. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 8. Cultivate relationships with schools, universities, and colleges. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 9. Bring developers and the development community into the visioning process. | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 10. Hold a design charrette to resolve problematic development decisions. | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |

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# List of Acronyms

**ADA** - Americans with Disabilities Act

**ADU** - Accessory dwelling unit

**AHS**- American Housing Survey (part of the U.S. census)

**APA** - American Planning Association

**CalPERS** - California Public Employees' Retirement System

**CBO** - Community-based organization

**CDBG** - Community Development Block Grant (a HUD program)

**CDC** - Community Development Corporation

**CLT** - Community Land Trust

**DOT** - Department of Transportation (also referred to as U.S. DOT)

**EPA** - Environmental Protection Agency (also referred to as U.S. EPA)

**FAR** - Floor-to-area ratio

**FHWA** - Federal Highway Administration (part of DOT)

**GIS** - Geographic information system

**HIP** - Housing Incentive Program

**HUD** - Department of Housing and Urban Development

**ICMA** - International City/County Management Association

**ITE** - Institute of Transportation Engineers

**LDGS** - Land development guidance system

**LEM** - Location Efficient Mortgage℠

**MPDU** - Moderately priced dwelling unit

**MPO** - Metropolitan planning organization

**NCDOT** – North Carolina Department of Transportation

**NEWS** - Neighborhood early warning system

**NJTPA** - North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, Inc.

**PACE** - Purchase of agricultural conservation easements

**PDR** - Purchase of development rights

**PUD** - Planned unit development

**TDR** - Transfer of development rights

**TEA-21** - Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century

**TOD** - Transit-oriented development

**TPL** - Trust for Public Land

**ULI** - Urban Land Institute

**USDA** - Department of Agriculture

**VMT** - Vehicle miles traveled

**WMATA** - Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

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International City/County
ICMA
Management Association
icma.org

http://smartgrowth.org

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