

Smart Growth America



Americans Want Smarter Growth.

Here's how to get there.



Smart Growth America is a nationwide coalition promoting a better way to grow: one that protects farmland and open space, revitalizes neighborhoods, keeps housing affordable, and provides more transportation choices. People want smart growth, and they're saying so—in polls, in the market, and at the ballot box. Working together, we can all make smart growth happen.



CHAPTER ONE

Americans' Attitudes about Growth are Changing

During the past decade, many of America's towns and cities have expanded at a breakneck pace, leading to runaway sprawl. Americans are seeing their communities change in more ways than they ever bargained for. New sprawl tends to sit atop what was once forests, farmland, floodplains and scenic landscapes. Growing demand for roads, sewers and schools is leading to higher taxes. New jobs at the fringes of metro areas are disconnected from places where people live, generating more traffic.

As people strive to improve the livability of their neighborhoods and towns, they are getting fed up with traffic, rising taxes, the loss of open space, and the lack of affordable housing. More and more, they're looking for alternatives that will deliver a better quality of life. They are demanding smarter growth.

Far from just a suburban or rural concern, poorly planned sprawl is also threatening the quality of life in urban communities. As subsidies for sprawl fuel a migration away from cities, many urban neighborhoods and their residents have been left behind. Even as the economy has boomed, opportunities in low-income neighborhoods remain scarce.

Americans are seeing sprawl hurt their quality of life. They want something better.

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Smart Growth America is seeking to make smart growth a reality. We define smart growth as growth that protects farmland and open space, revitalizes neighborhoods, makes housing more affordable and provides more transportation choices. And we are not alone. From urban reinvestment efforts in Oakland, California to farmland preservation programs in the Bluegrass region of Kentucky, proponents of smart growth are waging a battle against unreasonable haphazard sprawl. And people are expressing their dissatisfaction with sprawl in numerous ways. For example:

- ▶ **AMERICANS SUPPORT ALTERNATIVES TO SPRAWL** A *Smart Growth America* poll conducted in September 2000 shows that Americans strongly support both the idea of smart growth and the strategies necessary to implement it.
- ▶ **USE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IS SKYROCKETING** Since 1997, use of public transportation has grown faster than driving, and this trend has shown no signs of letting up.
- ▶ **VOTERS ARE SUPPORTING SMARTER GROWTH** In the 2000 elections, voters considered 209 ballot initiatives nationwide to protect open space, manage development and otherwise

implement smart growth policies, and 83 percent of these measures were approved.

▶ **MORE PROSPECTIVE HOMEBUYERS WANT COMPACT, WALKABLE COMMUNITIES**

According to leading real estate analysts, homebuyers increasingly prefer to live in convenient neighborhoods that have a strong sense of community.

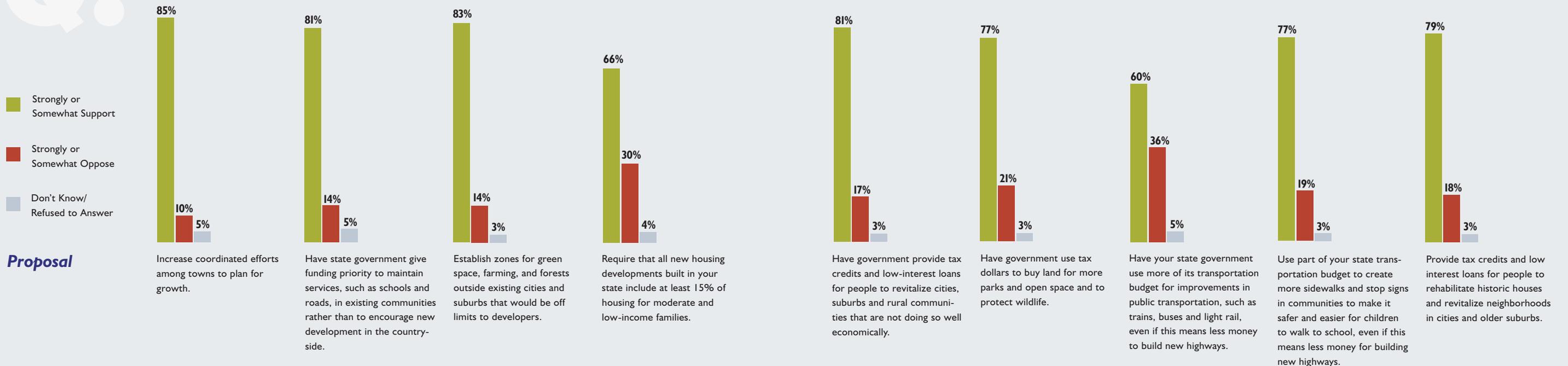
All of these trends point to one thing: people are changing their minds about growth and they want something done about it. It is time for our community, business and political leaders to start making smart growth happen.

THE SMART GROWTH AMERICA POLL

In September 2000, *Smart Growth America* commissioned the opinion research firm Belden, Russonello & Stewart to conduct a poll of Americans' attitudes toward growth issues. Interviews were conducted with 1,007 adults age 18 or older between September 7 and September 10, 2000. The results of these phone interviews were weighted by gender, age, region and race to achieve a representative sample.

Altogether, 78 percent of those surveyed said they favored smart growth. This was in response to the following question: "The term Smart Growth refers to giving priority to improving

“Here are some proposals on development and land use policy in your state. For each one, please tell me if you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the proposal.”



Support for Smart Growth Policies

services, such as schools, roads, affordable housing and public transportation in existing communities rather than encouraging new housing and commercial development and new highways in the countryside. With this in mind, would you favor or oppose smart growth policies in your state?" Only 16 percent of respondents were opposed.

To test the robustness of this response, we asked essentially the same question a different way. When asked "Now, thinking about your state, is there a need to do more or to do less to manage and plan for new growth and development in your state?" On this question, 76 percent of those surveyed felt that more should be done. Only 13 percent felt that less should be done.

More important than these general attitudes, however, were responses to some of the specific policies used in communities around the country to implement smarter growth. Respondents were asked if they supported or opposed specific development policies. The results are in the chart on pages 2 and 3.

These results show that there are high levels of support for the policies needed to make smart growth happen. Overwhelming majorities of people responded that they support coordinated planning, open space conservation, more affordable housing, alternatives to driving, tax credits and priority funding for established and low-income neighborhoods, and historic preservation. Even where questions were phrased to present clear trade-offs, such as more funding for transit instead of new roads, supporters outnumbered opponents by large margins.

The poll also asked a series of questions on transportation. It asked people, "Thinking about

the area where you live, has traffic over the last three years gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?" Fifty-four percent of people replied that traffic had gotten worse, 37 percent reported that it stayed about the same, and 4 percent said that it had gotten better.

To get more insight into how people think about transportation solutions, respondents were asked about specific strategies: "Which of the following proposals is the best long-term solution to reducing traffic in your state? Build new roads; Improve public transportation, such as trains, buses and light rail; or Develop communities where people do not have to drive long distances to work or shop."

Of these choices, the largest proportion of Americans—47 percent—believe that public transportation is the best long-term solution for managing congestion. Next was developing communities where less driving was needed, with 28

percent of respondents believing this would be most effective. Last came road building, with only 21 percent support. Most people do not think road building is an effective way to fight congestion; 75 percent see other strategies as more effective.

In June 2001, researchers at the University of Toledo used Smart Growth America's survey questions to conduct their own poll of 406 registered voters in Northwestern Ohio and Southeastern Michigan and got virtually the same responses. In fact, supportive responses to smart growth policy proposals for affordable housing, community reinvestment, public transit, sidewalks, open space and better planning coordination were slightly stronger than the national poll. The metro Toledo survey also found that support for smart growth was strong throughout the entire region, from central city neighborhoods to rural areas. To read their report, go to www.uac.utoledo.edu.

STRAIGHT TALK FROM AMERICANS—2000

Other opinion polls confirm Americans' new concerns about growth and sprawl. The Pew Center for Civic Journalism, a non-partisan research and education organization, has commissioned a series of opinion polls for its Straight Talk 2000 project. The results shown on page 6 come from interviews taken during the period October 6 through October 31, 1999 with a representative sample of 1,004 adults over the age of 18. In the words of the Pew Center:

"The complex of issues known as sprawl, growth, traffic, roads and infrastructure are a top concern, with 18 percent mentioning the issue. This cluster of issues is quite diverse, but all focus on the impact of growth and development on the daily lives of individuals. Whether it is traffic congestion, poorly-maintained roads, inadequate sewer and water or crowded schools, all the complaints focus on the quality of life that is endangered as the local infrastructure fails to keep pace with growth and development."

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Most Important Local Issue

“Now, what do you think

is the most important problem facing the community where you live?”

- 18% Development/Sprawl/Traffic/Roads
- 18% Crime/Violence
- 13% Economic Issues/The Economy
- 10% Education
- 6% Child and Teen Issues
- 3% Problems with Politics/Politicians
- 3% Moral Decline/Decline of Family Values
- 2% Racism/Discrimination/Intolerance
- 2% Problems with Immigrants
- 2% The Environment
- 2% Law Enforcement/Justice/Court System
- 1% Health/Medicine
- 1% Poverty/Hunger/Homelessness
- 1% Natural Disasters/Hurricanes/Floods
- 1% Senior Citizen Issues/Care of the Elderly
- 4% Other
- 16% Things are Good Here/Don't Know



The Pew poll found that sprawl is more of a problem for those in the suburbs than anywhere else. Twenty-six percent of those who live in the suburbs ranked sprawl-related issues as the most important local matter, well above the nationwide average of 18 percent.

The significance of this cannot be overstated. In the past some critics have labeled advocates for smarter growth as urban elitists who lack sympathy for the tastes and preferences of people who choose to live in the suburbs. This unfair characterization can now be put to rest; suburbanites who have daily, first-hand experience with the problems caused by sprawl are actually more concerned about its impacts on quality of life than other segments of society.

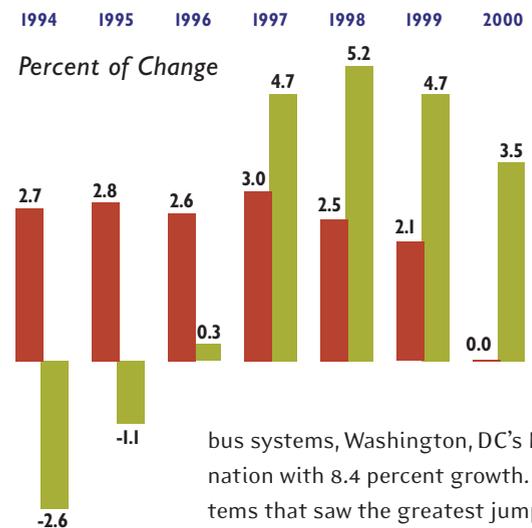
INCREASING USE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Public transit is one of the keys to smart growth. Over the past five years, ridership on trains, buses and light rail has been increasing rapidly. Total transit use grew 21 percent over this period, from 7.9 billion boardings in 1996 to almost 9.4 billion in 2000. Since 1997, transit use has grown at almost double the rate of driving; total vehicle miles of travel grew by just 11 percent. As the figure on page 7 shows, transit boardings have grown by around four percent per year since 1997, while growth in miles driven slowed each year. In 1999, transit ridership reached the highest level recorded by the transit industry since 1960.

Ridership is increasing on all forms of transit, including buses, subway systems, commuter trains and trolleys. And growth in 2000 was strong throughout the U.S. Bus systems with the strongest growth included Bowling Green, Kentucky (up 42.9 percent), State College, Pennsylvania (up 37.2 percent), Lafayette, Indiana (up 34.4 percent), and Bloomington, Indiana (up 34.1 percent). Among large

Public Transit is Booming Annual Growth in Driving and Transit Use

■ Driving (miles of travel) ■ Transit Use (boardings)



bus systems, Washington, DC's Metrobus led the nation with 8.4 percent growth. Heavy rail systems that saw the greatest jump in ridership included Los Angeles County (up 60.1 percent, thanks to the addition of new lines), BART in San Francisco (up 12.8 percent), the Port Authority Trans-Hudson Corporation, which serves New York and New Jersey (up 9.6 percent), and the Washington, DC region's Metrorail (up 7.7 percent). Light rail services that have been gaining

riders included Denver's Regional Transportation District (up 40.6 percent), New Jersey Transit (up 38 percent), and San Jose, California (up 33.8 percent). The biggest gainers among commuter rail services included the Altamont Commuter Express in San Jose, California (up 66.1 percent), the Trinity Railway Express in the Dallas-Fort Worth area (up 39.3 percent), and the



Virginia Railway Express in the Washington, DC suburbs (up 19.6 percent).

This strong reversal of past trends reflects Americans' changing attitudes. People are voting with their feet, and increasingly they are voting for transit.

VOTERS ARE SUPPORTING SMARTER GROWTH

In 2000, voters considered 209 ballot measures to preserve open space and farmland and approved 83 percent of them, generating \$7.5 billion for land protection. This electoral result reflects recent trends. In the 1999 off-year election, voters nationwide approved 77 percent of the 135 smart growth measures that were on the ballots. And in 1998, people in 31 states voted on 240 to preserve land, improve water quality, protect wildlife, and otherwise implement smart growth, and approved 72 percent of them.

HOMEBUYERS ARE FAVORING COMPACT, WALKABLE COMMUNITIES

In January 2002, a study funded by Bank of America and published by the Fannie Mae Foundation reported that retiring Baby Boomers will largely fuel the active homebuying market between 2000 and 2010. These consumers, many of whom are empty nesters, exhibit a greater preference for compact, walkable neighborhoods that have a strong sense of community. The study uses data from the National Association of Home Builders and other sources to estimate that between 26 and 61 percent of all "mover owners" will want this type of housing, which is variously referred to as the New Urbanism, neotraditional, transit-oriented, pedestrian-oriented, traditional neighborhood design, and New Community Design. For a copy of this report, see www.fanniemae.org/programs/hpd/v12i4-index.shtml.



CHAPTER TWO

Smart Growth Gives People More of What They Want

It is clear that Americans' attitudes towards growth are changing. People increasingly consider sprawl to be a problem. But can smart growth really give people what they want? Does smart growth provide better choices for our communities?

To answer that question, we need to understand exactly what smart growth is and what makes it the sensible choice.

What is Smart Growth?

We define smart growth according to its outcomes—outcomes that mirror the basic values of most Americans. Smart growth is growth that helps to achieve these six goals:

1. NEIGHBORHOOD LIVABILITY The central goal of any smart growth plan is the quality of the neighborhoods where we live. They should be safe, convenient, attractive, and affordable. Sprawl development too often forces trade-offs

between these goals. Some neighborhoods are safe but not convenient. Others are convenient but not affordable. Too many affordable neighborhoods are not safe. Careful planning can help bring all these elements together.

2. BETTER ACCESS, LESS TRAFFIC One of the major downfalls of sprawl is traffic. By putting jobs, homes and other destinations far apart and requiring a car for every trip, sprawl makes everyday tasks a chore. Smart growth's emphasis on mixing land uses, clustering development, and providing multiple transportation choices helps us manage congestion, pollute less and save energy. Those who want to drive can, but people who would rather not drive everywhere or don't own a car have other choices.

3. THRIVING CITIES, SUBURBS AND TOWNS Smart growth puts the needs of existing communities first. By guiding development to already

built-up areas, money for investments in transportation, schools, libraries and other public services can go to the communities where people live today. This is especially important for neighborhoods that have inadequate public services and low levels of private investment. It is also critical for preserving what makes so many places special—attractive buildings, historic districts, downtown and cultural landmarks.

4. SHARED BENEFITS, SOCIAL EQUITY Sprawl leaves too many people behind. Divisions by income and race have allowed some areas to prosper while others languish. As basic needs such as jobs, education and health care become less plentiful in some communities, residents have diminishing opportunities to participate in their regional economy. Smart growth provides more opportunities to people by prioritizing the improvement of existing communities over the subsidization of new ones.

5. LOWER COSTS, LOWER TAXES Sprawl costs money. Opening up green space to new development means that the cost of new schools, roads, sewer lines, and water supplies will be borne by residents throughout metro areas. Sprawl also means families have to own more cars and drive them further. This has made transportation the highest category of household spending, consuming an even greater share of costs than shelter. Smart growth helps on both fronts. Taking advantage of existing infrastructure keeps taxes down. And where convenient transportation choices enable families to rely less on driving, there's more money left over for other things, like buying a home, paying for education or saving for retirement.

6. KEEPING OPEN SPACE OPEN By focusing development in already built-up areas, smart growth preserves rapidly vanishing natural treasures. From forests and farms to wetlands and wildlife, smart growth lets us pass on to our children the land-

scapes we love. Communities are demanding more parks that are conveniently located and bring recreation within reach of more people. Also, protecting natural resources will provide healthier air and cleaner drinking water.

How is Smart Growth Achieved?

Setting goals is easy. Attaining them is always the challenge. But after years of experience with an assortment of projects, we are beginning to see what approaches work best.

Though techniques will vary across regions and community types, the ten tools listed here can form the basis for a sensible and effective smart growth plan. This list has been endorsed by a variety of political and business leaders, including the National Governors Association, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Association of Realtors.

To achieve smart growth, communities should:

1. Mix Land Uses. New, clustered development works best if it includes a mix of stores, jobs and homes. Single-use districts make life less convenient and require more driving.

2. Take Advantage of Existing Community Assets. From local parks to neighborhood schools to transit systems, public investments should focus on getting the most out of what we've already built.

3. Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices. Not everyone wants the same thing. Communities should offer a range of options: houses, condominiums, affordable homes for low-income families, and "granny flats" for empty nesters.

4. Foster "Walkable," Close-Knit Neighborhoods. These places offer not just the opportunity to walk—sidewalks are a necessity—but something to walk to, whether it's the corner store, the transit stop or a school. A compact, walkable

neighborhood contributes to peoples' sense of community because neighbors get to know each other, not just each other's cars.

5. Promote Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place, Including the Rehabilitation and Use of Historic Buildings. In every community, there are things that make each place special, from train stations to local businesses. These should be protected and celebrated.

6. Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty, and Critical Environmental Areas. People want to stay connected to nature and are willing to take action to protect farms, waterways, ecosystems and wildlife.

7. Strengthen and Encourage Growth in Existing Communities. Before we plow up more forests and farms, we should look for opportunities to grow in already built-up areas, such as downtown business districts, Main Streets, and places with good public transit access.

8. Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices. People can't get out of their cars unless we provide them with another way to get where they're going. More communities need safe and reliable public transportation, sidewalks and bike paths.

9. Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair, and Cost-Effective. Builders wishing to implement smart growth should face no more obstacles than those contributing to sprawl. In fact, communities may choose to provide incentives for smarter development.

10. Encourage Citizen and Stakeholder Participation in Development Decisions. Plans developed without strong citizen involvement don't have staying power. When people feel left out of important decisions, they won't be there to help out when tough choices have to be made.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES: PORTLAND, OREGON

AND ATLANTA, GEORGIA A recent study by Professor Arthur C. Nelson of the Georgia Institute of Technology presents hard evidence for the quality of life benefits of smart growth by comparing Portland, Oregon with Atlanta, Georgia. Portland has invested in public transportation and has controlled sprawl by maintaining a band of open space around the metro area. During the same period, the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, Atlanta built highways and developed land faster than any other area in the country.

As shown in the chart to the right, both metro areas experienced rapid population and job growth, but commute times in Portland actually *declined* 9 percent, while in Atlanta commutes lengthened by 1 percent despite an aggressive and costly freeway widening program. Air quality problems, measured by number of "ozone alert" days, declined 86 percent in Portland while they rose by 5 percent in Atlanta. Perhaps most importantly, Portland residents surveyed noted that the quality of their neighborhoods improved by 19 percent while Atlantans responded that the quality of their communities declined by 11 percent.

These results are consistent with public perceptions of livability in each area. Portland is widely regarded as the American city that best exemplifies smart growth. Real estate industry analysts recognized this in a recent report, noting that "Portland has growth controls, which investors increasingly covet, and excellent quality-of-life perceptions."

Atlanta, on the other hand, has now been dubbed "Sprawl City," beset by problems ranging from geographically severe racial segregation, air pollution, and the longest average commute in

Light Rail in Portland



A Tale of Two Cities

(mid-1980s to mid-1990s)

Measure	Portland	Atlanta
Population Growth	+26%	+32%
Job Growth	+43%	+37%
Income	+72%	+60%
Government Revenue	+34%	+56%
Property Tax	-29%	+22%
Vehicle Miles Traveled	+2%	+17%
Single Occupant Vehicle	-13%	+15%
Commute Time	-9%	+1%
Air Quality in Ozone Days	-86%	+5%
Energy Consumption per Capita	-8%	+11%
Neighborhood Quality	+19%	-11%

Source: Arthur C. Nelson, "Effects of Urban Containment on Housing Prices and Landowner Behavior," Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, *Land Lines*, May 2000.

America. In fact, large corporations such as Hewlett Packard have passed over the region as a potential site for new facilities. Hopefully, these perceptions will someday be a thing of the past for Atlanta. Faced with severe federal penalties for unhealthy air quality in Atlanta, Georgia Governor Roy Barnes in 1999 formed a regional transportation authority to expand public transit and ensure that transportation and development plans comply with the Clean Air Act. Regional leaders then created a Livable Centers Initiative that steers planning and implementation funds to existing cities and town centers that support additional compact development without significantly increasing demand for new roadways.

WHY SMART GROWTH MAKES SENSE FOR TOWNS AND SUBURBS

In rural and suburban areas where sprawl is happening, communities face tough choices when it comes to growth. Many landowners feel they have no choice but to sell their properties to developers, and too many communities watch helplessly as nearby farmland,

forests, fragile ecosystems, and scenic landscapes succumb to sprawl. But poll after poll demonstrates that people greatly value open space and are willing to pay to preserve it.

A growing body of research shows that protecting open space makes fiscal sense. There is a common myth that development is good for the local bottom line. But in fact, new residential development demands more in services than it contributes in taxes, and existing residents typically foot the bill. Over 70 "cost of community services" studies conducted nationwide show that residential development costs a municipality more in maintenance costs than farmland and open space.

For example, in a study of costs in Skagit County, Washington, developed land required \$1.25 in county services for each \$1 of revenue it produced; agricultural land only required 51 cents in services for each \$1 of property tax revenue. Farmland and open space conservation also have indirect positive tax benefits such as increasing nearby property values, increasing revenues from tourism and reducing costs for flood control and water supply. Bond rating institutions, which rate the overall financial health of municipalities, are now rewarding communities with better bond ratings when they have farmland protection programs.

Smart growth also delivers savings in infrastructure costs. A recent analysis by Robert W. Burchell and David Listokin of Rutgers University determined that modest increases in development density could reduce total capital costs by 25 to 60 percent for roads and 15 to 40 percent for water and sewer infrastructure. Another study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency showed that compact infill development projects would demand roughly 90 percent less infrastructure costs than comparable greenfield sites. Such

development would also generate 48 to 61 percent less traffic and roughly 50 percent fewer nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and carbon dioxide emissions.

Smarter growth also improves community safety. A 1998 study by the American Farmland Trust found that residents in sprawling developments wait longer for emergency services. For example, police response took on average 25.3 minutes in a new scattered development versus 4.1 minutes in established towns. Regarding emergency medical services, the study showed that all of the scattered sites reviewed exceeded the recommended maximum response time by four to six minutes.

NEW BEGINNINGS: COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT AT WORK Smarter growth is achieving dreams that have gone unfulfilled for decades. Chief among them is the goal of urban reinvestment. Reinvestment comes in many forms: historic preservation, the improvement of community services, the renovation of affordable housing and the resurrection of brownfield sites.

In 1997, for example, the State of New Jersey adopted an innovative urban code to encourage the renovation of decaying buildings. Within a year, rehabilitation investment statewide rose by 8 percent. In the cities of Newark, Jersey City and Trenton, spending increased by 60 percent, 83 percent and 40 percent, respectively. Gains in Newark totaled \$41 million. The reinvestment boom has been so successful that other states are following suit; Maryland enacted a similar law in April 2000.

For residents, revitalized neighborhoods mean better places to live and more choices about where to live, shop and work. At the federal level, two laws have played a key role in spurring these new opportunities: the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) and the Home Mortgage Disclosure

Before and After



Jackson Avenue
South Bronx, New York



The American Can Company,
Baltimore, Maryland



Highlandtown Cooperative
Apartments,
Baltimore, Maryland



Act (HMDA). CRA encourages lending institutions to invest in the communities that they serve, ensuring that some savings from the residents of minority and low-income neighborhoods are being reinvested in their own community. Since 1977, CRA has secured roughly a trillion dollars of investment in mortgage lending, affordable housing development, small business lending and other community development projects. HMDA requires financial institutions to tell the public how they are investing their funds, thereby providing communities with a valuable tool for assessing investment under CRA. An array of parties, from developers to non-profit organizations, have been able to use CRA and HMDA to reinvest in neglected communities and bring them back to life. In the photos to the left are a sample of “before and after” pictures of affordable housing and redevelopment projects.

SMART GROWTH IS GOOD FOR WORKING FAMILIES Increasingly, labor leaders and other advocates for working families are joining the smart growth debate. From food and commercial workers who care about the quality of employee benefits at big box retail stores to transit unions that wish to see more station-area development, union leaders in many industries are beginning to see that viable alternatives to sprawl are essential for a healthy economy.

Led by a few central labor councils in Chicago, Contra Costa County, and Cleveland, the national AFL-CIO convention in December 2001 passed a resolution criticizing urban sprawl for its harmful impacts on teachers and city workers, factory workers, hotel and restaurant employees, grocery workers, public transportation employees, health care workers, janitors and building engineers. In a subsequent issue of *Working USA*, Chicago

Federation of Labor President Don Turner argued that “This is *the* urban issue for the next 20 years. Either labor gets involved in how smart growth unfolds or it happens to us, and we all know what that means. Our leadership understands now that smart growth could be a very good thing for labor.” For more ideas on reaching out to labor leaders, see “Talking to Union Leaders About Smart Growth” at www.goodjobsfirst.org/pdf/talking.pdf.

SMART GROWTH DELIVERS VALUE TO HOMEBUYERS More and more, the desire for smarter growth is being reflected in real estate trends, as Americans are rediscovering the appeal of traditional neighborhoods—ones in which you might find a attractive mix of houses, shops, townhomes, parks and civic buildings. These are neighborhoods where people don’t have to drive everywhere because destinations are close by and a range of transportation choices—reliable public transit, bicycle lanes, sidewalks—are safe, convenient and plentiful. They are culturally diverse communities with a rich array of amenities.

Sales of new homes that emulate many of these qualities—known as “New Urbanism”—are booming. Today, over 200 New Urbanist developments have been built and occupied all across America. Because of their excellent design, such properties tend to sell out quickly and command a \$5,000 to \$30,000 price premium above nearby units of comparable size, according to a recent Urban Land Institute study.

Developers who have seized on these new opportunities are gaining handsome profits. The real estate investment trust (REIT) most heavily invested in New Urbanism, Atlanta-based Post Properties, is perhaps the best example. In the *Sacramento Business Journal*, a senior analyst with Goldman Sachs argued that, “Post probably has one of the best balance sheets in the REIT industry, and that’s no B.S.” The nation’s largest homebuilder, Pulte Homes, has reported that more than 65 percent of active home-shoppers in South Florida prefer communities designed around New Urbanist principles rather than conventional sprawl.

As demographics change, this trend will only get stronger. Sprawl development is geared to nuclear families with children. But today, 31 percent of American households are childless single people. The number of empty nesters and older people is rising, and they exhibit the strongest preference for New Urban and established walkable neighborhoods.

Is Sprawl a Good Investment?

Each year, two financial research firms, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and Lend Lease Real Estate Investments Inc., assess the commercial real estate market. Increasingly, they are warning investors away from suburban office parks and malls, and towards 24-hour districts with a more urban character. Their most recent report, *Emerging Trends in Real Estate 2002*, was issued after the economic concerns following September 11, 2001. It sends an unmistakable message:

“Today, uncertainty reigns.”

“Properties in better-planned, growth-constrained markets hold value better in downmarkets and appreciate more in upcycles. Areas with sensible zoning (integrating commercial, retail, and residential), parks, and street grids with sidewalks will age better than places oriented to disconnected cul-de-sac subdivisions and shopping strips, navigable only by car.”

“Another mantra: eschew fringe suburban [office] product and older, obsolescent space.”

“Americans’ growing desire to work near where they live is no accident. Across the country in major cities and suburban agglomerations alike, traffic congestion takes an increasing toll on hurried lifestyles—the average citizen spends 36 hours a year stuck in traffic, triple the time wasted in 1982.”

“Markets served with mass-transportation alternatives and attractive close-in neighborhoods should be positioned to sustain better long-term prospects as people strive to make their lives more convenient. Building roads and spaghetti junctions won’t handle future growth alone and will only raise already unacceptable air pollution levels.”

“If cities haven’t figured it out yet, the availability of attractive housing of all stripes—luxury condos, rehabbed lofts and warehouse space, affordable units for both low- and middle-income people—will determine the future health of downtown markets. Without healthy residential neighborhoods, downtowns wither...”

“New housing must be integrated into neighborhoods with service retail—supermarkets, drug stores, cleaners—plus parks and recreational space.”

CHAPTER THREE

Smart Growth is Working All Over America

In many places, the principles of smart growth are already making a difference. Innovative approaches to age-old problems are making communities more livable.

NEW GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPMENT Most people think developers will build whatever they want, so long as it turns a profit. But under current laws, even developers trying to contribute to smarter growth are required to build conventional sprawl. For example, most towns won't allow apartments to be built above storefronts. Zoning codes often require separated building types, excessively vast parking lots, and building setbacks away from the street that result in automobile-oriented strip malls and isolated housing developments.

Growing ranks of architects, planners and developers contend that these codes prevent the creation of neighborhoods and town centers that have an attractive variety of housing types, shops and workplaces—places that look like old-fashioned communities. Fortunately, a growing number of places have started to modernize their planning and zoning codes. These ordinances are allowing developers to build communities that offer homebuyers an alternative to isolated housing subdivisions.

The Traditional Neighborhood Development Ordinance is one such new ordinance. Versions of this new set of rules have been adopted in a wide range of places, such as Huntersville, North Carolina; Austin, Texas; Fort Collins, Colorado and

Dade County, Florida. Other similar rules have been adopted by communities across the country, including Sacramento County's Transit-Oriented Development Ordinance; Pasadena, California's City of Gardens Code; and Loudoun County, Virginia's Rural Village Ordinance.

At the broader regional level, many states and metro areas are trying to develop visions for better growth. These exercises typically feature regional plans that look twenty, sometimes fifty years into the future and encompass fiscal and economic projections, demographic estimates, and traffic analyses. With public input, many have succeeded in creating plans that reflect local priorities, such as open space preservation, traffic management, the creation of world-class civic facilities, and thriving neighborhoods.

An example of such long-range planning is Envision Utah, an initiative to develop a vision for the Greater Wasatch Area's future. After employing state-of-the-art demographic projection and land use mapping techniques, Envision Utah was able to demonstrate that a business-as-usual approach to development would result in a doubling of the Greater Wasatch Area's urbanized land area. Envision Utah estimated that a smarter growth scenario featuring major investments in public transit would save 171 square miles of open space, reduce the amount of driving by 2.4 million miles per day, decrease commute times by 5.2 percent, increase average speeds by 12.5 percent and save the region \$4.6 billion in infrastructure costs.

In 1999, project managers advertised the results of their analysis in local newspapers together with a mail-in questionnaire and got 18,000 responses. The state is now implementing its plans which include light rail transit,



Envision Utah estimated that smart growth would save 171 square miles of open space.

undeveloped buffers around communities, and compact development that integrates multiple uses.

REWARDING THE RIGHT KIND OF GROWTH In a growing number of areas, public leaders have recognized that major subsidies support the development of sprawl and many have sought to level the playing field. The State of Maryland's Smart Growth and Neighborhood Conservation Act, for example, requires that existing, older communities be given priority for public infrastructure, services, schools and other neighborhood improvements. A variety of other states have now enacted laws that embody this approach to growth. New Jersey's latest transportation law, for example, recommends that roadway and transit system maintenance reach acceptable standards before new highways are built.

This redirection of subsidies is also being practiced at the city level. For example, Austin, Texas recently launched a multi-pronged effort to counteract runaway sprawl and traffic. Given the city's relatively weak planning and zoning powers, public



Austin's Triangle project



officials decided to redirect existing subsidies to channel the region's rapid growth into places that are more fiscally and environmentally beneficial. This program, dubbed the "Smart Growth Matrix," created a score card that offers developers incentives for supporting sound growth.

Under the score card, projects are awarded points for a variety of positive attributes. These include transit access, brownfield redevelopment, whether or not water and sewer lines exist on site, and good urban design. Projects that accumulate enough points receive different benefits, including a waiver of development fees and expedited permitting. Those reaching the highest level can have the city pay for new infrastructure.

After three years of working with the Matrix, Austin's development community appears to be pleased with it. One new project which features shops, offices and condos received a \$130,000 subsidy from the city after builders altered original plans to make the ground-level retail spaces more pedestrian-friendly and accessible to the street. A recent 22-acre project located in Austin's urban core received a whopping \$7.6 million incentive because of its excellent design. This

project, known as "the Triangle," features 57,000 square feet of office space, 155,000 square feet of retail space, and 794 condos above the commercial uses. It also includes 6.5 acres of attractively landscaped public open space, all integrated in a series of 3 to 5-story buildings. And unlike most developments of comparable size, the Triangle is designed for pedestrian access, and parking has been located behind most of the buildings.

PROVIDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In many places, citizens are rethinking their approach to providing affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families. One of the best examples of this is an ambitious project in Louisville, Kentucky known as Park DuValle. For decades, Park DuValle represented the worst kind of subsidized housing: barracks-style buildings concentrated in a neglected and isolated part of the city. With funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOPE VI Program, the city set out to redevelop the area to be an attractive mix of low-income and market-rate housing, reflecting current policies to improve the quality and livability of affordable housing.

Rather than build conventional ranch-style homes on isolated cul-de-sacs, the architects designed the site to look like old Louisville. They ensured that architectural styles, landscaping, streets, and sidewalks would be compatible with Louisville's rich vernacular of Victorian architecture and stately parks. For the first year, project backers projected 39 sales, a figure regarded as highly optimistic by the housing authority and local realtors given the development's high proportion of subsidized housing. Park DuValle reached this target within four months.

The City of Rochester, New York recently launched the \$4.5 million Rochester Community Development Collaborative which provides funding and guidelines to organizations that wish to create affordable housing, commercial development and other revitalization programs in inner city areas. The city has teamed up with the Enterprise Foundation, a national non-profit provider of affordable housing to convert 350 abandoned homes into new single-family homes. One-hundred and fifty houses will be sold at market rate and 200 will be set aside for purchase by low-income families.

Such programs are especially important to keep housing affordable, because national trends indicate that property values nationwide are rising faster than wages. In Denver, the housing crunch is especially bad. From 1992 to 1998, regional home prices rose 61 percent and rents increased by 50 percent. Meanwhile, incomes rose by a mere 28 percent during the same period. For families whose incomes have not risen, this has led to a housing crisis, as landlords convert affordable housing rental units to market-rate homes for sale. In fact, home prices in Denver's fifteen poorest neighborhoods increased by 153 percent during that six-year period.

IMPROVING TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

Many communities are beginning to recognize the value in providing residents with greater transportation choices. Efforts to make neighborhoods more walkable are especially popular. For example, California's Safe Routes to School law provides \$20 million to communities to improve crosswalks, install bike trails, slow traffic and educate the public to enable children to walk to school.

The State of Maryland recently launched its Live Near Your Work Program, in which employers and state and local governments each provide \$1,000 to people who purchase homes near their workplace. After three years, 50 employers have signed up to participate in the program and over 300 workers have received their \$3,000 grants.

Similar programs are gaining favor in the private sector. A team of non-profit organizations recently teamed up with Fannie Mae to offer a new mortgage product called the Location-Efficient Mortgage™. Recognizing that people buying homes in convenient, transit-rich neighborhoods tend to own fewer automobiles and drive less, program sponsors estimate that prospective homebuyers can apply those savings to finance mortgages that are \$15,000 to \$50,000 larger than what they would normally qualify for, making homeownership possible for more poor families. Already, lenders in Seattle, Chicago and California are offering this program, and Fannie Mae has committed to purchasing \$100 million in such mortgages over the next few years.



Park DuValle
Louisville, Kentucky



Many communities are also fighting sprawl by building trails and greenways to both enhance quality of life and improve accessibility for bicyclists and pedestrians. Many trail networks have been built along abandoned railroad corridors, reusing what have become eyesores in many communities. From meager beginnings (less than 1,000 miles of open rail-trails in 1985), there are now 11,000 miles of rail-trails in use throughout America, with another 19,000 miles of potential trails under active development. One of the most successful efforts is Detroit's Southeast Michigan Greenways Initiative which extends beyond the city's borders, covering seven counties.

RETROFITTING THE SUBURBS

In the suburbs, smart growth innovations are becoming more common. In California's Silicon Valley, the city of Mountain View recently faced the problem of what to do with a dead mall. Standard practice would have been to entice a new developer to come in and renovate the shopping complex. Instead, the city decided to raze the mall and replace it with a neighborhood called "The Crossings."

The developer and architect designed an aesthetically appealing community containing a mix of stores, homes, and parks. To make the compact layout more appealing, the architects designed the entire project to enhance privacy, natural light, and a feeling of spaciousness. One tool used was rigid steel framing to allow for the use of large window panels without sacrificing seismic performance. It was further enhanced by

a commuter rail station. Despite their inability to secure conventional financing from banks, the high-quality design helped developers sell out all the units at a blistering pace, more than two years ahead of schedule.

PROTECTING FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE

In rural areas, planning for growth means not only ensuring sensible development, but also preserving valuable open space and scenic vistas. Some efforts have preserved agricultural lands either through direct acquisition or conservation easements. Easements are legal contracts that reward landowners for permanently waiving the right to develop their land. Farmers and other property owners are then free to continue working their lands, making agriculture more economically viable.

In New Jersey, Governor Christine Todd Whitman authorized the investment of \$14

million for farmland preservation, part of her Administration's ultimate goal to preserve a million acres of open space. To date, these efforts have set aside more land in the past two years—81,000 acres—than have been preserved in the previous two decades. Maryland's preservation programs—Rural Legacy Program, Program Open Space, and Agricultural Preservation Program—have set aside nearly 200,000 acres of open space in the past three years. Over the past two years, Maryland conserved more open space than the amount of land converted to development—something that has never happened in the state's history.

REBUILDING INNER CITY SERVICES WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

In 1994, Anacostia Economic Development Corporation (EDC) in Washington, D.C. learned that the supermarket chain Safeway was planning to build a major shopping center on a vacant inner city site. Safeway, however, was not interested in long-term ownership. Working together with Safeway, the community secured an agreement that would allow the company to buy and develop the site and later sell it to EDC. They put together a financing package to purchase the development, including funds from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, the local Office of Community Services, Community Development Block Grant funds, and a loan from the Local Initiatives Support Corporation. The benefits of

this unique business/community partnership include new retail services, local jobs and a revitalized neighborhood. For EDC, the project has been an invaluable experience—one that has boosted their capacity to take advantage of future opportunities.

RECLAIMING OLD INDUSTRIAL SITES

Old industrial areas in cities and suburbs are often considered blight. But with modern clean up techniques, these eyesores start looking like opportunities. For example, 138 acres of central Atlanta once housed the Atlantic Steel works. Today, the site is destined to become a transit-oriented community with shops, homes and an array of services. It joins a long list of New Urbanist neighborhoods being built in the Southeast.

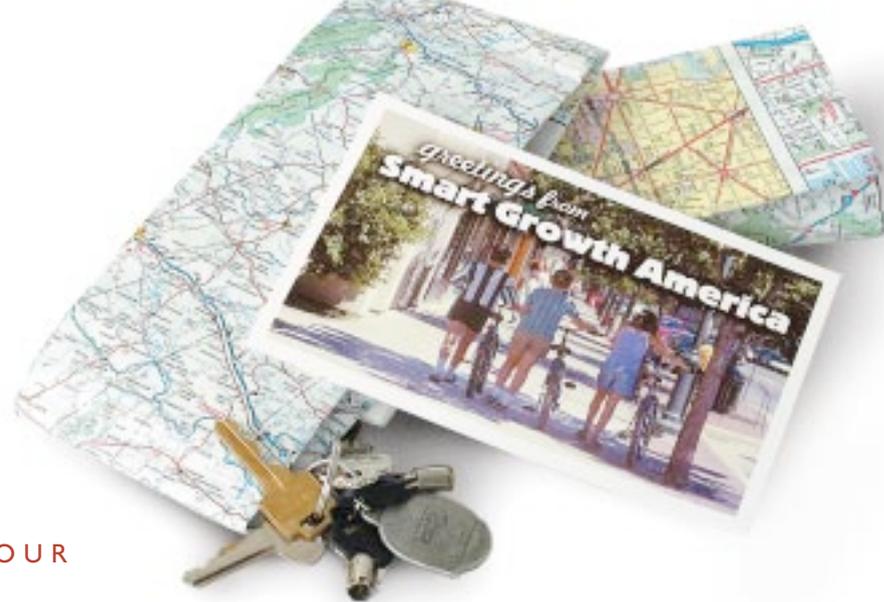
After conducting a state-of-the-art travel modeling study, analysts convinced the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that the project would reduce annual automobile travel by 50 million miles because it would capture a significant amount of growth that would otherwise have gone to outlying suburbs. These environmental benefits were instrumental in winning EPA approval for local street improvements needed to make the project viable. Once the project is complete, Atlantans will be able to choose new homes in the heart of the city that are well-served by public transportation and stores.

Abandoned regional malls are ripe candidates for multi-use projects that integrate office, residential, recreational, and even educational functions.

—Emerging Trends in Real Estate 2000

The Crossings
Mountain View, California





CHAPTER FOUR

Where We Go From Here: How to Achieve Smarter Growth

People from all walks of life—business leaders, citizens and public officials—are starting to make smart growth a reality in communities across the country. These people have recognized the potential benefits and they're making things happen.

However, achieving smarter growth is not easy. Neither the problems of sprawl nor the solutions to these problems are simple. No single policy or program can guarantee the quality of life benefits that are the ultimate goal of smart growth. And no single person, business, agency or level of government can do the job by itself. Everyone has a role to play, and success requires a team effort.

For example, tax and spending policies that drive sprawl exist at all levels of government. Correcting these at the local level will have a limited effect if state action is not forthcoming. Innovations in federal transportation policy could help shape growth for the better, but they

won't work if state agencies stay wedded to road building and leery of alternatives. Model building codes drafted at the state level will have little effect without enforcement by local governments. Ensuring that neighborhood improvements actually benefit residents instead of pricing them out won't happen without tangible steps to prevent housing displacement.

Opportunities to spur smart growth abound; almost everyone can do something.

A SMART GROWTH AGENDA

The basic pieces of the smart growth puzzle are described in the following pages. Although these policies and actions are important, they are not the only way. Dozens of other options exist, and are being tried around the country. Each of the policies discussed here has been tried somewhere with success.



Local Governments

REWRITE LOCAL GROWTH PLANS Local comprehensive plans govern most aspects of growth—where building can occur, what densities and uses are allowed, where open space will be. To guide growth, some communities have set aside zones for green space. Others charge development fees to pay for local services, with builders paying little or nothing if they pursue smart growth projects, such as developments that will accommodate a range of uses and income levels. Without sensible local plans, smart growth will never achieve its full potential.

PURSUE TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

Although state and federal funding dominates transportation, local governments have a key role. Federal and state transportation funds flow only after years of work by local people to plan, design and build community support for a project. Many of the small but important investments that make walking and biking practical alternatives—sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike parking—are prime targets for local action. So are transit programs to link workers to job opportunities.

AVOID SCHOOL SPRAWL In too many communities, school districts contribute to sprawl by replacing neighborhood schools with larger new schools far away from the communities they serve. Site specifications used by school boards



often require huge contiguous parcels of land for athletic fields and parking for any new school, and infill sites in older communities are often

out of the running before site selection begins. School districts should re-examine these requirements and seek to build schools in the neighborhoods that they serve. Also, more funding should be made available to rehabilitate older schools which are valuable community assets.

PROVIDE MORE HIGH QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Housing affordability is becoming a major problem across the country, particularly for families with lower incomes. Local governments can adopt ordinances that require some portion of new developments to consist of affordable units. The *Smart Growth America* poll shows 66 percent public support for requiring that 15 percent of all new units be affordable. Local governments can also support the preservation of the existing supply of affordable homes.

ADOPT "SMART" BUILDING CODES Modern building codes can be a barrier to rebuilding older communities. They often require an entire building to be brought up to modern standards before any part of it can be used, forming a barrier to the small businesses and others that are often the leaders in revitalizing older neighborhoods.

AFTER

Martin Luther King Historic District
Atlanta

BEFORE



State Government

FOCUS STATE SPENDING ON EXISTING COMMUNITIES State funding policy can be a powerful tool for encouraging development in the right places and discouraging it in the wrong places. Whether state funds are for highways, schools, wastewater treatment or state office buildings, a fiscally responsible and equitable smart growth screen on spending is a logical first step for state action.

ENACT A STATE GROWTH MANAGEMENT PLAN Although local planning for growth is key, sometimes state action is necessary to keep competition among local governments from undermining smart growth. State policies can establish regional zones that are off limits to development or other policies to protect open space and guide development to areas that already have good public transportation and other services.

FUND ALTERNATIVES TO DRIVING States take the lead in funding most transportation projects. Almost all states have funding sources dedicated to roads, but few offer similar funding for alternatives to roads. In addition, state enthusiasm for road building can frustrate local smart growth efforts. State support is often the key to

maintaining public transit systems and offering more high-quality services where they are needed, particularly in lower income communities. States can lift restrictions which prohibit the use of state gas tax revenues to support public transit and walking and cycling facilities. They can also establish programs that coordinate transportation and land use plans and help get low-income workers to job locations.

PRESERVE OPEN SPACE In many regions of the country, state government has been an important partner in efforts to preserve open space. This can come through land purchase programs that protect green areas or tax policies that help farmers, ranchers and others keep their land in production. Programs to preserve working lands can be key to assuring the continued viability of rural economies. Also, preserving neighborhood parks and gardens is critical for enhancing the quality of life in urban communities

PROTECT HISTORIC DISTRICTS. State tax credits and other policies can assist businesses and homeowners in making the investments necessary to revitalize historic neighborhoods. Efforts to protect the integrity of historic communities across the country have provided the spark needed to revitalize many older urban neighborhoods.

The Federal Government

SPUR BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT One key to promoting infill development and urban revitalization is to modernize the way we reuse potentially contaminated industrial sites. Investors seeking to redevelop such sites need guidelines and assurances to make projects straightforward and predictable. Similarly, residents of nearby communities need assurances that environmental standards are being met and that they are involved in the decision making. Without such measures, even the slightest hint of problems can prevent these properties from being returned to the tax rolls.

PROTECT OPEN SPACE AND SCENIC LANDSCAPES Federal interest in land protection has a long history, but funding has not kept up with demand. From National Parks to wildlife habitat, federal efforts to protect key pieces of land should match the efforts being made at the state and local level. Public officials should also fight to preserve the cherished scenic vistas that make our communities special and drive our growing tourism industry. In particular, the federal government should ease restrictions limiting communities' ability to fight billboard blight.

REFOCUS TRANSPORTATION POLICY For the last 50 years, federal transportation policy has focused on highways. A new commitment of federal funding to provide people with alternatives to roads, from reliable bus services to bike lanes, can give communities the boost they need to make

these projects happen. More funding should be devoted to improving public transit access between homes and jobs. Also, our federal commitment to the country's unfinished rail systems and greenways should match the commitments made in the past to highways and airports.

SUPPORT HOUSING PROGRAMS The federal government is an important partner in ensuring access to housing for low-income families. The buying power of key federal programs has eroded over time, and our ability to assure adequate housing is falling further behind market needs. The federal government can support housing programs by providing a larger low-income housing tax credit, helping states establish affordable housing trust funds, providing more assistance for subsidized housing, and linking housing to job opportunities through public transportation programs.

ADOPT SMART GROWTH TAX INCENTIVES The federal government could provide a variety of tax credits and other incentives to support smart growth. Tax credits for transit-oriented development, preservation of historic buildings and investments in distressed neighborhoods could help communities around the country achieve their smart growth goals.



State enthusiasm for road building can frustrate local smart growth efforts.



Private Sector

DEVELOPERS: BUILD PLACES WITH VARIETY

New flexibility in zoning is allowing developers to plan and build projects that include mixed-income housing, retail, services and offices together. Such a blending of uses can create built-in markets for retail businesses, offer residents the convenience of nearby stores, and make transit feasible. Transit station areas offer prime opportunities for this kind of new development.

BANKS: SUPPORT INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

Even as local governments and builders have begun to see the value of smart growth, some financial institutions have been reluctant to provide capital for these projects. Recent growth in projects that blend an array of building uses should give banks the confidence they need to back them.

BUSINESSES: LOCATE IN COMMUNITIES WITH TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Businesses that opt for smart growth communities over isolated office parks can reap benefits for their workers and their bottom lines. Giving employees the option of commuting by transit or living close to work can increase satisfaction and reduce turnover. Locating businesses closer to the local work force reduces the risks associated with labor shortages.

Citizens

SUPPORT SMART GROWTH BALLOT

INITIATIVES In many cases, state and local governments are either unable or unwilling to adopt key policies. This means that smart growth issues are often decided directly by voters. Strong citizen support for proposals for everything from zones for open space to transit can put these policies into place and send a signal to political leaders about what people really want.

CONSIDER NEIGHBORHOODS WITH

TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS Families can save money and avoid traffic delays by living in communities that offer access by multiple means of transportation. These areas combine a mix of destinations—stores, housing and jobs—that are accessible by car, transit, foot or bike. Higher housing prices in some communities of this kind can be offset by the substantially lower cost for transportation achieved by owning fewer cars.

SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESSES

Living in communities that have shops within walking distance gives residents the option of supporting stores located nearby rather than distant superstores. This keeps resources close to home, keeps neighborhood stores in business, and helps preserve the qualities that make close-knit neighborhoods great places to live.

Endnotes

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Acknowledgements

Greetings from Smart Growth America was written by Don Chen with help from Roy Kienitz. Others who made major contributions include Elizabeth Humphrey, Greg LeRoy, Kaid Benfield, Steven Bodzin, Shelley Poticha, Hank Dittmar, Judith Bell, Heather McCulloch, Meg Maguire, Deborah Myerson, Constance Beaumont, Gordon Kerr, Kitty Higgins, Richard Moe, Joe DiStefano, John Russonello, Kate Stewart, Karen Nozik, Joanne Veto, Betsy Garside, Barbara McCann, and Geoff Anderson. Thanks also go to Michelle Ernst, Nancy Jakowitsch, Robert Bullard, Jacky Grimshaw, Scott Bernstein, Phyllis Myers, Cindy Coffin, Debby Goldberg, Rich Stolz, Allison Smiley, John Bailey, Betty Weiss, Lee Epstein, Betsy Otto, Kris Siglin, Ned Farquhar, Ernest Cook, Jutka Terris, Ralph Grossi, Ed Thompson, Reid Ewing, and Deron Lovaas. Special thanks go to Smart Growth America's supporters: the Surdna Foundation, the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Turner Foundation, the George Gund Foundation, the Clayton Fund and the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities.

Design: Bob Kiernan, Actual Size Design

Smart Growth America Poll: Belden, Russonello & Stewart



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Better Choices for Our Communities

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Smart Growth America is a nationwide coalition promoting a better way to grow: one that protects farmland and open space, revitalizes neighborhoods, keeps housing affordable, and provides more transportation choices.

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Kaid Benfield *Natural Resources Defense Council*

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To Learn More

This report gives a general overview of the approach to growth, development and community quality of life called Smart Growth. But there is more to the story than we can put in one short piece. New ways of reaching the goals of smart growth are being tried every day in communities across the country.

If you are interested in learning more about smart growth or want to help the members of Smart Growth America work for progress in your community, your first stop should be our web site, www.smartgrowthamerica.org where you can learn more about how to make smart growth happen and follow links to our partner organizations. You can also reach us by phone at 202.715.2035.

Another useful resource is the Smart Growth Network, a group of government, business and community leaders working together to refine the smart growth concept and share ideas, strategies and information with the public. They can be found at www.smartgrowth.org. For more information about Network membership, call the International City/County Management Association at 202.962.3607.

Also, the Sprawl Watch Clearinghouse provides a variety of news and information about smart growth, from recent developments around the country to articles addressing various growth and development issues. The Clearinghouse can be found at www.sprawlwatch.org.