

SMART GROWTH

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Spurring the smart growth movement are demographic shifts, a strong environmental ethic, increased fiscal concerns, and more *nuanced (appreciation of subtle growth) views of growth. The result is both a new demand and a new opportunity for smart growth.

The features that distinguish smart growth in a community vary from place to place. In general, smart growth invests time, attention, and resources in restoring community and vitality to center cities and older suburbs. New smart growth is more town-centered, is transit and pedestrian oriented, and has a greater mix of housing, commercial and retail uses. It also preserves open space and many other environmental amenities.

*(nu·ance ☒ (n̄ōō' äns', nyōō'-, n̄ōō-äns', nyōō-.)

1. A subtle or slight degree of difference, as in meaning, feeling, or tone; a gradation.
2. Expression or appreciation of subtle shades of meaning, feeling, or tone: *a rich artistic performance, full of nuance.*

The Smart Growth Principles and Issues below describe in greater details the various aspects of planning and development that make up smart growth.

Smart Growth Principles

1. Create Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices

"For too long, federal policy has actually encouraged sprawl and congestion and pollution, rather than quality public transportation and smart, sustainable development."

President Barack Obama

Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component in any smart growth strategy. Housing is a critical part of the way communities grow, as it constitutes a significant share of new construction and development.

By using smart growth approaches to create a wider range of housing choices, communities can mitigate the environmental costs of *auto-dependent development*, *use their infrastructure resources more efficiently*, *ensure a better jobs-housing balance*, *and generate a strong foundation of support for neighborhood transit stops, commercial centers, and other services.*

Integrating multi-family structures in new housing developments can support a more diverse population and allow more equitable distribution of households of all income levels across the region. 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

Most importantly, providing 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 accommodate growth at the same time.

2. Create Walkable Neighborhoods

"People want to go to the corner on foot and get a quart of milk. They want to have social life in walking distance of where they live."

-- Congress for New Urbanism President John Norquist

"With higher gas prices, now's the time to think about alternative modes of transportation."

-- Connecticut State Senator Bob Duff

"Giving people a choice of housing, a walkable environment, and a good network of streets is a formula for a higher quality of life."

-- Livable Communities Coalition Executive Director Jim Durrett

Walkable communities are *desirable places* to live, work, learn, worship and play, and therefore a key component of smart growth. Their desirability comes from two factors.

First, walkable communities locate within an easy and safe walk goods (such as housing, offices, and retail) and services (such as transportation, schools, libraries) that a community resident or employee needs on a regular basis.

Second, by definition, walkable communities make pedestrian activity possible, thus expanding transportation options, and creating a streetscape that better serves a range of users -- pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and automobiles. To foster walkability, communities must mix land uses and build compactly, and ensure safe and inviting pedestrian corridors.

Many communities -- particularly those that are dispersed and largely auto-dependent -- employ street and development design practices that reduce pedestrian activity. By building places with multiple destinations within close proximity, where the streets and sidewalks balance all forms of transportation, communities have the basic framework for encouraging walkability.

3. Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration

"Quality of life is not an automatic byproduct of the free market. You don't just get it. You have to plan for it. You have to care for it."

-- Smart Growth Leadership Institute executive director Harriet Tregoning

"If communities fail to plan effectively for new growth and development, they will be unprepared to take advantage of the new economic development opportunities as they become available."

-- Wisconsin Realtors Association President William Malkasian

Communities have different needs and will emphasize some smart growth principles over others: those with robust economic growth may need to improve housing choices; others that have suffered from *disinvestment* may emphasize infill development; newer communities with separated uses may be looking for the "sense of place" provided by mixed-use town centers.

Smart Growth plans and policies developed without strong citizen involvement will at best not have staying power; at worst, they will be used to create unhealthy, undesirable communities.

When people feel left out of important decisions, they will be less likely to become engaged when tough decisions need to be made. Involving the community early and often in the planning process vastly improves public support for smart growth and often leads to innovative strategies that fit the unique needs of each community.

4. Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place

"If you design streets for traffic, you'll get lots of traffic. If you design streets for people, you'll get people."

-- Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District analyst Chris Morfas

"The key is to have walkable communities, to have a place where people can walk, shop and don't need vehicles. It becomes a social and cultural experience."

-- Huntington, New York Town Supervisor Frank Petrone

"If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places."

-- Project for Public Spaces President Fred Kent

Smart growth encourages communities to craft a vision and set standards for development and construction which respond to community values of architectural beauty and distinctiveness, as well as expanded choices in housing and transportation. It encourages the construction and preservation of buildings which prove to be assets to a community over time, not only because of the services provided within, but because of the unique contribution they make on the outside to the look and feel of a city.

In so doing, the infrastructure and natural resources used to create these areas will provide residents with a distinctive and beautiful place that they can call "home" for generations to come.

5. Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective

"There are a number of trends that are reshaping the American Dream, and the value home buyers now place on living close to more daily destinations is one of the most important."

-- CEOs for Cities President and CEO Carol Colletta

"Many of the assumptions on which we built our communities in the last 30, 40 years are untrue."

-- CEOs for Cities CEO Carol Coletta

"We must think about making communities that can sustain themselves when unlimited driving is no longer an option."

-- Smart Growth Leadership Institute President and former Maryland Democratic Governor Parris N. Glendening

For a community to be successful in implementing smart growth, it must be embraced by the private sector. Only private capital markets can supply the large amounts of money needed to meet the growing demand for smart growth developments.

Only private capital markets can supply the large amounts of money 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. City Governments that make the right infrastructure and regulatory decisions will create fair, predictable and cost effective smart growth.

For smart growth to flourish, state and local governments must make an effort to make development decisions about smart growth more timely, cost-effective, and predictable for developers. By creating a fertile environment for innovative, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use projects, government can provide leadership for smart growth that the private sector is sure to support.

6. Mix Land Uses

"We need to rethink our energy use. We can't just buy energy- efficient cars -- we need to plan communities so that the everyday services we need are closer to us."

-- Lancaster, New York Councilwoman Donna G. Stempniak

"Accommodating a growing population in the era of high gas prices will mean increasing density and mixing land uses to enhance walkability and public transit"

-- Cornell Law School property and land-use expert Eduardo M. Penalver

"Mixed use is the wave of the future. It will mitigate traffic on the roads. People will be able to take a stroll to get a loaf of bread -- you don't have to get in the car every time you want to deal with the most basic parts of life."

-- Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy

Smart growth supports the integration of mixed land uses into communities as a critical component of achieving better places to live. By putting uses in close proximity to one another, alternatives to driving, such as walking or biking, once again become viable.

Mixed land uses also provide a more *diverse* and sizable population and commercial base for supporting viable public transit. It can enhance the vitality and perceived security of an area by increasing the number and attitude of people on the street. It helps *streets; public spaces and pedestrian-oriented retail again become places where people meet, attracting pedestrians back onto the street and helping to revitalize community life.*

Mixed land uses can *convey substantial fiscal and economic benefits. Commercial uses in close proximity to residential areas are often reflected in higher property values, and therefore help raise local tax receipts.* Businesses recognize the benefits associated with areas able to attract more people, as there is increased economic activity when there are more people in an area to shop.

In today's service economy, communities find that by mixing land uses, they make their neighborhoods attractive to workers who increasingly balance quality of life criteria with salary to determine where they will settle. Smart growth provides a means for communities to alter the planning context which currently renders mixed land uses illegal in most of the country.

7. Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas

"It's time to put teeth in the law and impose statewide standards that limit sprawl and encourage urban redevelopment."

-- Baltimore Sun

"By adopting smart growth approaches, these communities are helping improve residents' quality of life and the quality of the environment."

-- EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson

Smart growth uses the term "open space" broadly to mean natural areas both in and surrounding localities that provide important community space, habitat for plants and animals, recreational opportunities, farm and ranch land (working lands), places of natural beauty and critical environmental areas (e.g. wetlands).

Open space preservation supports smart growth goals by bolstering local economies, preserving critical environmental areas, improving our community's quality of life, and guiding new growth into existing communities.

Management of the quality and supply of open space also ensures that prime farm and ranch lands are available, prevents flood damage, and provides a less expensive and natural alternative for providing clean drinking water.

8. Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices

"Our transportation policy must solve our nation's energy and climate threats, not exacerbate them."

-- Natural Resources Defense Council Federal Transportation Policy Director Deron Lovaas

"We must connect transportation with smart development, smart growth and public policy."

-- Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program Director Bruce Katz

"As we get older, many of us will be driving-challenged. Yet we're building for the automobile-dependent."

-- Westmoreland County Smart Growth Partnership Executive Director Alex Graziani

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 beleaguered transportation systems. Traffic congestion is worsening across the country. Where in 1982 65 percent of travel occurred in uncongested conditions, by 1997 only 36 percent of peak travel occurred did so. 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.

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 road networks; *and ensuring connectivity between pedestrian, bike, transit, and road facilities.* **In short, they are coupling a multi-modal approach to transportation with supportive development patterns, to create a variety of transportation options.**

9. Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities

"If you develop close to town centers, you're going to have an economic ripple effect."

-- Environmental League of Massachusetts (ELM) President George A. Bachrach

"Demolishing dilapidated structures, greening vacant lots, and redeveloping targeted properties unlocks the value of surrounding properties and improves neighborhoods."

-- Genesee County Land Bank Authority (GCLBA) Chairman and County Treasurer Dan Kildee

"Smart growth is about creatively reusing the built infrastructure."

-- Connecticut State House Speaker James Amann

Smart growth directs development towards existing communities already served by infrastructure, seeking to utilize the resources that existing neighborhoods offer, and conserve open space and irreplaceable natural resources on the urban fringe. *Development in existing neighborhoods* also represents an approach to growth that can be more cost-effective, and improves the quality of life for its residents. By encouraging development in existing communities, *communities benefit from a stronger tax base, closer proximity of a range of jobs and services, increased efficiency of already developed land and infrastructure, reduced development pressure in edge areas thereby preserving more open space, and, in some cases, strengthening rural communities.*

A 2001 report by Urban Land Institute on urban infill housing states that, in 1999, the increase in housing permit activity in cities relative to average annual figures from the preceding decade exceeded that of the suburbs, indicating that infill development is possible and profitable.

10. Take Advantage of Compact Building Design

"Transit and the high-density development that accompanies it both have tremendous value in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and putting us on the path to a low-carbon economy."

-- U.S. House Democratic Speaker Nancy Pelosi

"When you have low densities, you're inducing a lot of traffic and the pollution and congestion that goes along with it."

-- Former Winnebago County long-range planner Reggie Arkel

"Smart growth brings back compact development, mixed uses and transportation choices."

-- Michael Pawlukiewicz, Urban Land Institute

Smart growth provides a means for communities to incorporate more compact building design as an alternative to conventional, land consumptive development. Compact building design suggests that communities be designed in a way which permits more open space to be preserved, and that buildings can be constructed which make more efficient use of land and resources.

By encouraging buildings to *grow vertically* rather than horizontally, and by incorporating structured rather than surface parking, for example, communities can reduce the footprint of new construction, and preserve more greenspace.

Not only is this approach more efficient by requiring less land for construction. It also provides and *protects more open, undeveloped land that would exist otherwise to absorb and filter rain water, reduce flooding and stormwater drainage needs, and lower the amount of pollution washing into our streams, rivers and lakes.*

Compact building design is necessary to support wider transportation choices, and provides cost savings for localities. Communities seeking to encourage transit use to reduce air pollution and congestion recognize that minimum levels of density are required to make public transit networks viable. Local governments find that on a per-unit basis, it is cheaper to provide and maintain services like water, sewer, electricity, phone service and other utilities in more compact neighborhoods than in dispersed communities.

Articles were found at:
smartgrowth.org