Choosing
Our Community's Future

A Citizen's Guide to Getting the Most Out of New Development

BY DAVID GOLDBERG
Smart Growth America

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Smart Growth America is a non-profit coalition of national, state and local organizations working to help communities grow in ways that sustain quality of life, provide plentiful options in housing and transportation, preserve our built and natural heritage and promote a healthy economy. Our members work on behalf of public health, the environment, historic preservation, social equality, land conservation, neighborhood redevelopment, farmland protection, labor, town planning and more.

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

I first became interested in – OK, obsessed – with how development and growth affect our lives in the early 1990s, when my young family and I bought our first house in the then-distant suburbs of Atlanta. We were seduced by a new subdivision on the edge of a quaint Southern town set amid gently rolling farmland. But from the moment we moved in, that landscape began to change, and fast. The new neighbors were fine, but why were we converting farms and forests into throwaway shopping centers that could be anywhere, instead of building on the more compact and beautiful model of the old town center? And why did our widened roads fill up with traffic so fast? I felt helpless as a citizen, so as a journalist at *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, I threw myself into the task of learning and writing about growth and development and how they connect to transportation, the environment, the design of our communities and similar topics. Over the ensuing decade I helped to create a weekly section that explored those issues, and then joined the paper's editorial board to opine on them. In 2002 I decided to work fulltime with citizens who want to shape the future of their communities, joining Smart Growth America as communications director. As a citizen, journalist or advocate, I've observed countless development issues and watched the dynamics at play. I now firmly believe that an educated, engaged citizenry is an essential corrective to the "specialists" – whether in real estate, engineering, planning or politics – who yield so easily to the temptations of standardization and easy money. It is with that sentiment that my colleagues and I offer this modest contribution.

Preface

Communities can be shaped by choice, or they can be shaped by chance. We can keep on accepting the kind of communities we get, or we can start creating the kind of communities we want. **– Richard Moe, National Trust for Historic Preservation**

Why this guidebook?

In many areas of our lives, change is expected, even welcome. As parents, we thrill to each new phase as our kids advance through the years. Each year we eagerly embrace the change from sweltering summer to cool, colorful autumn, or from the muddy snows of late winter to spring's warm, aromatic breezes. When unexpected change comes to our neighborhoods, though, most of us find it unsettling.

First come questions about what a proposed development could mean for the character of the area, for quality of life or for property values. Then comes the anxiety of being thrust into the unfamiliar world of planning, zoning and development, with their specialized terminology, dense books of codes and confusing array of meetings and decision points. In dealing with local officials and developers—and their lawyers and consultants—who regularly inhabit this world, citizens must educate themselves quickly, not just about the approval process, but about what they can reasonably hope to get from it.

This publication is intended as a quick-start guide to help citizens get up to speed on the terms, procedures and key issues in development. This effort is motivated by one central belief: **The surest way to create neighborhoods, towns and metropolitan regions worthy of passing on to our children is to engage the full, informed participation of the people who live in them. It is our hope that, by leveling the playing field for citizens even a little bit, we can help make planning and development more collaborative and less adversarial.**

That is perhaps more important today than ever before. Over the last decade, people all across the country have grown increasingly worried about the consequences of rapid growth and poorly planned development. In search of a better way, many of those concerned citizens have been working with forward-looking professionals in planning, design, real estate and related fields to figure out how to be smarter about growth. (*See Chapter 2 for more on these efforts.*)

Who is behind this publication?

Smart Growth America, the organization primarily responsible for the content of this guidebook, is one outgrowth of that conversation. SGA is a coalition of roughly 100 national, state and local organizations working to improve the ways we plan and build our cities. The coalition includes many of the best-known national organizations advocating on behalf of historic preservation, the environment, farmland and open space preservation, neighborhood revitalization and more. Chances are, one of our state- or regional-level members is working in your own back yard to save treasured landscapes while making towns and cities more livable and lovable.

Indeed, our members work with citizens every day of the year to improve poorly conceived developments, preserve our built and natural heritage, fight for high-quality neighborhoods, expand choices in housing and transportation and promote fairness for people of all backgrounds. Through long experience, we have come to understand that merely saying "no" rarely succeeds, for reasons we will examine in the pages to come. **The trick is knowing what we're willing to say "yes" to, so that decisions about growth become a win for current and future residents and the larger metro area, as well as for land owners and developers.**

You don't have to be an expert to understand good planning and design. With a modest amount of background information, ordinary citizens can make, and have made, very smart contributions to development decisions—when they are invited into the process. In fact, planning and design are most likely to fail when people are kept in the dark and left out of the process until the end.

Using this guidebook as a starting point, you can learn how to turn inevitable change to the advantage of your community. You can become an advocate for top-quality design and the amenities that will improve life for you, your neighbors and the larger community.

We hope to make this a living document that responds to lessons about what works and what doesn't. To that end, we heartily invite your comments on the usefulness of this guidebook, along with your ideas on how to improve it.

To learn more, please visit our web site at:
http://smartgrowthmamerica.org

Introduction. Using the Guidebook

The fact that you are reading this guidebook already marks you as a special sort of citizen: the kind of person who cares enough about your neighborhood, town or metro area to go to some trouble to help make it better. Because most people either cannot or simply choose not to become engaged, your potential influence may be stronger than you realize.

Choosing Our Community's Future is designed to help you get oriented quickly and to give you some ideas about how to help shape growth and development in your area. This is necessarily a general overview. If you need to go deeper into a particular area, you'll find references to help you do so. Likewise, because this document is designed to apply throughout the country, you will want to find more localized information, as well. There are leads here to help you do that.

Many resources out there focus mostly on how to kill a project you don't like. This handbook is about assisting you and your fellow citizens in choosing something to be in favor of. It's a powerful and proven strategy for dealing with development proposals. Even better, the lessons learned here from your fellow citizens can help turn initial concern and worry into a reason to hope, and provide motivation to stay involved in making your community better.

What you'll find here

There are other guidebooks that might be more helpful in grappling with proposals for certain high-impact land uses, such as landfills, highways, prisons, garbage transfer stations or airport expansions. This book is designed more to help citizens come to terms with, and improve, more conventional planning and development processes.

Some of the issue areas include:

- **Superstores or "big box" centers.** These are retail developments that, because of their disposable nature and high local impact, warrant special consideration. We'll help you judge when, where and how to push to improve and/or transform such proposals.
- **Infill.** Development on previously vacant or under-used land in already built-up areas is, in principle,

environmentally and economically desirable, but it must be done right. This book illustrates what that can mean.

- **Mixed use.** Projects that incorporate, say, both shops and housing, or offices and retail are growing in popularity. Vigilant citizens—that's you—can help make sure they are well-integrated with existing neighborhoods.
- **Mixed housing types.** Neighborhoods that include both affordable and higher-end homes, and/or a mix of houses, townhouses, condominiums, etc. used to be the norm. They're on the comeback, but how do we make them fit well in today's world?
- **Redevelopment.** Bringing new life to dead malls, former industrial sites or blighted city blocks can be a bonus, but citizen input is vital. Use this book to help you make sure yours is heard.
- **Greenfield development.** When new development occurs on farm, forest or other open land, as most of it does, those resources are gone for good. How do you decide when such growth is appropriate, and push for change when it isn't?
- **Community planning.** Too often, "public involvement" in planning for growth and change is limited to a couple of obligatory meetings. But informed, determined citizens almost always can find a way not only to have a say in local plans, but also to make sure they are implemented.

We begin in Chapter 1 with a discussion of the evolving—and critical—role of citizens in planning for change in their communities. We also discuss some of the key principles to think about in guiding new development, a set of concepts sometimes grouped together as "smart growth". The chapter also includes a sample checklist that you can use for evaluating proposed projects.

Chapter 2 gives a (we hope) mercifully brief overview of the concepts and terminology involved with planning and zoning, as well as some insight into how developers and their projects usually work. There's a quick-start to-do list for getting the information you'll need, and an inspirational piece from some longtime neighborhood activists on "what neighborhoods should fight for."

From there we offer some tips and references in Chapter 3 that will be helpful in evaluating the potential impacts of development. Because environmental effects and associated rules can be especially complex, Chapter 4 focuses exclusively on that topic.

The "True Stories" section toward the end tells some tales from the planning and development front that we think offer some helpful lessons, both uplifting and painful.

Chapter 1. Key principles for managing change

1

To grow "smart" means **involving citizens** in choosing a future that **provides housing options** for people of all incomes and ages; **protects farmland** and open space; **revitalizes neighborhoods** and offers a variety of convenient options for getting around.

In the decades since World War II, when America's sprawling growth really took off, communities across the country have experienced increasingly destructive battles between two camps: the advocates of growth at any cost and a reactionary no-growth movement.

The any-growth-is-good-growth camp accepted development in whatever form it came. If that meant neighborhoods had to be split apart, fundamentally changed or destroyed, that was the price of progress. This view held sway in most places until the 1970s and '80s, when a backlash emerged against the disruptions from unchecked highway building, urban renewal projects that eliminated entire neighborhoods and badly planned suburban development. Over time, no-growth activists developed myriad techniques for slowing or halting unwanted projects, using environmental laws, administrative procedures, public protests and the courts.

The result of all this fighting is that today "planning" in most communities is aimed at avoiding lawsuits and other trouble, rather than laying the groundwork for a better future.

Because development ideas so rarely arise from a shared vision of what the community wants and needs, nearly every development decision results in conflict. Neighborhood residents are taken by surprise by projects they couldn't have foreseen, and rise up in anger. By the same token, responsible developers who submit proposals based on existing plans and zoning can find themselves engulfed in expensive, bitter and time-consuming battles. Local governments, for their part, are in a constant scramble to find the money to keep up with roads, sewer and water lines, police and fire protection, parks, libraries and other services AFTER development occurs, instead of before.

Growth is rarely stopped altogether, of course. It is merely made more expensive or driven out to farms and natural areas. Most people don't want to stop genuine economic growth, or penalize their children by making it impossible to build new homes for them, or force development into precious environmental or agricultural resources. By the 1990s, many people had come to realize that merely waiting in fear for new growth-related

proposals to come was not getting our communities what we wanted.

At around the same time in the mid-1990s, people advocating on behalf of the environment, historic preservation, transportation choices, housing affordability and others came to realize that simply saying "no" wouldn't work. They began to talk with like-minded planners, developers, architects, government officials and others about how to plan for economic and population growth in a way that made communities stronger as they grew. This new approach would aim to improve quality of life for people and limit the unwanted side effects of poorly managed growth, from environmental destruction to hours wasted in traffic to plain old ugliness.

Many people refer to this idea of people-oriented planning ahead as smart growth. You'll also hear people use other terms that mean the same, or nearly the same thing, such as quality growth, sustainable development, smart planning. Many people also use "new urbanism" interchangeably with smart growth (For more on new urbanism, see the box, page 7)

The legacy of poor planning

Smart growth has come to be defined by a set of 10 principles, which we'll explore in some detail in a moment. First, though, it might be helpful to remember why this new approach to planning and development is so necessary.

People often refer to the typical way development has happened in recent years as "sprawl", which literally means that cities and their suburbs have tended to spread out in haphazard fashion, at a rapid and accelerating rate. In many places this has destroyed some of our best farm and forest land and altered irreplaceable landscapes forever. Commute and driving hassles are growing because jobs are being placed in areas that are nowhere near housing that is affordable to middle-class, working people.

In a recent survey of county officials nationwide, 85 percent noted that most new housing in their county is geared to middle- and upper-income households, not working families ...

Unfortunately, in most communities today development decisions are made on an *ad hoc* basis; that is, our local officials make it up as they go along. The frustrating thing is that most cities, towns and suburbs go through the motions of making plans, but very few local governments actually follow them consistently. Instead, they react to development proposals, or to citizen hostility toward such proposals.

Chaotic development—what some refer to as sprawl—is the almost inevitable result: Roads don't connect, so other streets become clogged with extra traffic. Look-alike strip centers and their parking lots come to dominate the landscape. Sidewalks, when they exist, stop at the very arterial roads where they're needed most. And housing gets more and more expensive as developers take the path to certain approval and easy money by proposing only expensive housing. (Indeed, in a recent survey of county officials nationwide, 85 percent noted that most new housing in their county is geared to middle- and upper-income households, not working families, according to the National Association of County Officials.)

Our choices, our future

For a long time many people just accepted these outcomes as a fact of life. Increasingly, though, citizens all over the country are starting to demand something better. They don't want to stop growth. They want to have a say in how it happens. They want to know that there's a good plan that's fair to everyone, and that the plan means something. They want to be smart about growth.

The planning ideas that became known as smart growth started by asking how our communities can get less of what we don't want and more of what we do. In our work around the country, we have found that people generally agree on what they'd like to see:

1. **A seat at the table for everyone with a stake in the community.** This is basic fairness in American democracy. Development decisions should be open and transparent and not the result of backroom deals.
2. **Plentiful choices among safe, convenient and attractive neighborhoods.** Great quality of life begins with neighborhoods, though one size doesn't fit all. With today's sprawl, some neighborhoods are safe but not convenient, others are convenient but not affordable, while many affordable neighborhoods are not safe. There's no reason we can't have all the qualities we want in our neighborhoods.
3. **Ready access to jobs, daily necessities and fun, with less time in traffic.** Jobs near housing, housing near jobs. People who want to drive should be able to. But you shouldn't be a prisoner in your car because of bad planning and design. And whether or not you are able to drive or afford a car, you should still be able to get around.
4. **Thriving cities, suburbs and towns.** Keep the local economy strong. Meet the needs of existing communities before spending money to promote development in new territory. Investments in transportation, schools, libraries, parks and other public services should go first to the places people already live. New development should make the most of previous investments in those things.
5. **Preserving what's best about the places we live.** Clean air and water. Beautiful vistas and historic places. Farms and forest lands. Parks and recreational areas.
6. **Lower personal costs and efficient use of our tax money.** Households shouldn't be forced to overspend on transportation. Taxpayer money shouldn't be wasted by government failure to make efficient use of existing infrastructure, schools and public services.
7. **A shot at the American dream of opportunity for all.** Any child, no matter where he or she lives, should have access to good schools, a safe environment and opportunities for advancement.

Balancing all these values is tough and involves a series of trade-offs. Often, though, trade-offs are made without conscious thought or planning. For example, for years we built our communities and transportation networks in ways that encouraged people to drive for everything, and only later realized the impact on the quality of the air we breathe. At bottom, smart growth means weighing the trade-offs involved in development in order to make an informed choice, rather than simply letting things happen and complaining afterward. The goal is to ensure that growth improves, rather than degrades quality of life, but without limiting economic opportunity.

The goal is to **manage growth** so that it improves, rather than degrades **quality of life**, but without shutting down economic growth.

Ten Principles of Smart Growth

1. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective.
2. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
3. Provide a variety of transportation options.
4. Strengthen existing communities and direct development towards them.
5. Preserve natural beauty, parks, farmland and environmentally critical areas.
6. Create complete neighborhoods where daily needs are close at hand.
7. Create a safe, inviting environment for walking
8. Foster distinctive communities with a strong sense of place.
9. Make efficient use of public investments in infrastructure, schools and services.
10. Put jobs and good schools within reach of all who need them.

The principles of smart growth

You might hear some people say that "smart growth means different things to different people." That's true in the sense that state and local communities are free to implement their "smart" plans as they see fit. Nevertheless, the central principles discussed here are almost universally recognized as defining smart growth, and they have been embraced not only by many of the nation's key conservation, environmental, historic preservation, affordable housing, business and other organizations, but also by the national associations of planners, developers, Realtors®, local

THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE...

After citizens in **Walnut Creek, CA**, rebelled against plans to develop around their rail transit station, officials went back to the drawing board, this time with residents' input. The process, known as a charette, designed a project that brought needed affordable housing and shopping, but added only 5% more cars to the busiest road, allaying citizens' worst fear. (For more on this story, see page Chapter 5.)

government officials and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (For a partial list of endorsing organizations visit http://smartgrowth.org/sgn/partners.asp.)

The basic smart growth principles listed here were designed to help citizens in choosing a future that provides housing options for people of all incomes and ages; protects farmland and open space; revitalizes neighborhoods and offers a variety of options for getting around. Below are illustrations of each of the principles. **To learn more about the many strategies available to implement them, please see** *Getting to Smart Growth*, volumes I and II, available at http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/publications.htm

Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective

The current system of development in most places is unfair to citizens kept too much in the dark. It also can be unfair to to developers who want to do "smart-growth" projects, and it often puts public officials in the untenable position of having to compromise the future in favor of near-term election prospects. Fairness to citizens means they should be involved in creating visions for their neighborhoods, towns and metro areas and meaningful plans to implement them. They should hear about development proposals at the earliest possible moment and be given input into their design. Fairness to developers means that proposals that comply with the spirit and the letter of community plans should be able to avoid excessive red tape. It means leveling the playing field so that smart growth becomes as easy to develop as sprawl, or ideally, easier. Fairness to public officials means creating an open, trusted process that shields them from undue pressure from deep-pocketed developers and from neighbors' suspicion and hostility when they make choices to benefit the larger community.

THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE...

When **Oregon** adopted a statewide planning law in 1973, it put some land off-limits to developers, but it also made it much easier to build in designated growth areas. Citizens and developers all have a clear idea about where growth is appropriate. By law, developers building in those areas get speedier approvals. The result: A vibrant city, complete with streetcars, and working landscapes only minutes away.

Create a range of housing opportunities and choices

A central goal of smart-growth principles is to expand the range of choice in housing, in style, price and location. Homes for the people who live, work and play in our metropolitan regions should be both affordable and accessible to jobs and essential services. It follows that job centers and transit stations should have the highest concentrations of housing. Across the region, each jurisdiction should accommodate owner-occupied, rental and low-income housing in a mix that doesn't disadvantage any community. Because not everyone

"It's about thinking and **acting to create neighborhoods**—whether in the city, in existing suburbs or in newly developed areas—with **housing**, **employment**, schools, houses of worship, parks, services, shopping centers close enough that a kid can **walk** and **ride their bikes** wherever they go, without asking us for a ride every 10 minutes."

– Hugh McColl, chairman, Bank of America

The Five Tests of Smart Growth

(Adapted from the North Carolina Smart Growth Alliance)

1. **Popsicle Test:** Can can you walk home from the store before your popsicle melts? Can most daily needs be met by walking or biking?
2. **Smooch Test:** Is the place comfortable, safe, attractive, and intimate, suitable for a date-night stroll? Are people—and their ears—shielded from high-speed car traffic? Would you feel good about taking a visitor there?
3. **Kid Test:** Can children safely explore a world beyond their own backyards? Can older kids get around on their own, safely developing a sense of self-reliance and autonomy?
4. **Seniors Test:** Are elder citizens a welcome part of the mix of residents? Are they engaged and active? Can they get out and about and get their needs met when driving is no longer an option?
5. **Commons Test:** Does the development contribute to the overall community something greater than what it takes in terms of natural and community resources? Will it age gracefully and adapt to future uses, or is it designed to be disposable? What does it leave for future generations?

THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE...

Reviving some of the best features of classic neighborhoods from the early 20th century, the **Kentlands** neighborhood in **Maryland** features a mix of housing types: single-family homes of all sizes, townhomes, apartments, and even "granny flats" such as this one, located above a garage. Singles, young families, retirees and home-based entrepreneurs can all find spaces that fit their needs.

needs the same kind of housing at every stage of life, people should have options including houses, condominiums, apartment buildings of varying sizes, homes affordable to low and moderate incomes, "granny flats", and owner-occupied two- and three-family homes.

Provide a variety of transportation options

Most of us like to think of America as a land of choices. Yet in just about any community built in the last 50 years, when it comes to transportation there is only one choice: to own a car and use it for every single activity of the day. The main reason is that we have built major highways first, then let

development happen in haphazard, disconnected fashion, rather than deciding how our communities should grow and then providing transportation. To give people an alternative to spending more and more time in traffic, it will be necessary to provide better, more efficient public transportation systems and allow homes and businesses to cluster around them. We also can reduce the need to travel by locating some housing, stores and offices within walking distance of each other. We also should build networks of calm, "complete" streets that accommodate cars but also allow for people to bike and walk in safety and comfort, when they choose to.

THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE...

Street-level trains, known as light rail, have grown increasingly popular, and nowhere more than in **Denver**. In 2004 voters approved a 119-mile expansion of their system along with other transport improvements. Denverites see development oriented around a high-quality transit system as a way to accommodate 1 million new residents without ruining their prized quality of life.

The New Urbanism

Many people use the term "new urbanism" interchangeably with smart growth. The two concepts have much in common, since both aim to create walkable, well-designed neighborhoods, towns and metros. The new urbanism was begun in the late 1980s and early 1990s by architects and urban designers who wanted to blend the design ideas that created some of our classic, pre-war neighborhoods with modern needs, such as accommodating automobiles. Andres Duany, Peter Calthorpe and other early new urbanists took lessons from beloved places like Charleston to develop the technical expertise needed to create complete neighborhoods with a variety of home types, convenient shopping, parks and community space. Though their built projects have proved enormously popular, new urbanists have had to struggle to get each project approved. That's because everything from zoning to banking practices mandate a one-size-fits-all style of development, making it all but illegal to design in the style of some of our most cherished places. One goal of smart growth is to change policies and practices to make it easier to meet the clear market demand for what new-urbanist designers would like to build.

For more information, contact the Congress for the New Urbanism via their website at http://cnu.org.

For an introductory, online tour of new urbanism, please visit: http://cnu.org/about/index.cfm?formaction=tour2

"In [the traditional New England town], one can live above the store, next to the store, five minutes from the store or nowhere near the store, and it is easy to imagine the different age groups and personalities that would prefer each alternative. In this way and others, the traditional neighborhood provides for an array of lifestyles. In conventional suburbia, there is only one available lifestyle: to own a car and to need it for everything."

–Andres Duany, a founder of new urbanism, in "Suburban Nation"

THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE...

Every community has something great to build on–but sometimes it takes some imagination to see existing conditions as assets. **Providence, Rhode Island** spent a decade uncovering the three rivers beneath its streets, reconnecting the city with arched bridges and creating the central WaterPlace park. Now visitors come from all over, drawn by the waterfront walks, great restaurants, and Waterfire, when the river becomes an enormous hearth.

Strengthen existing communities and direct development towards them

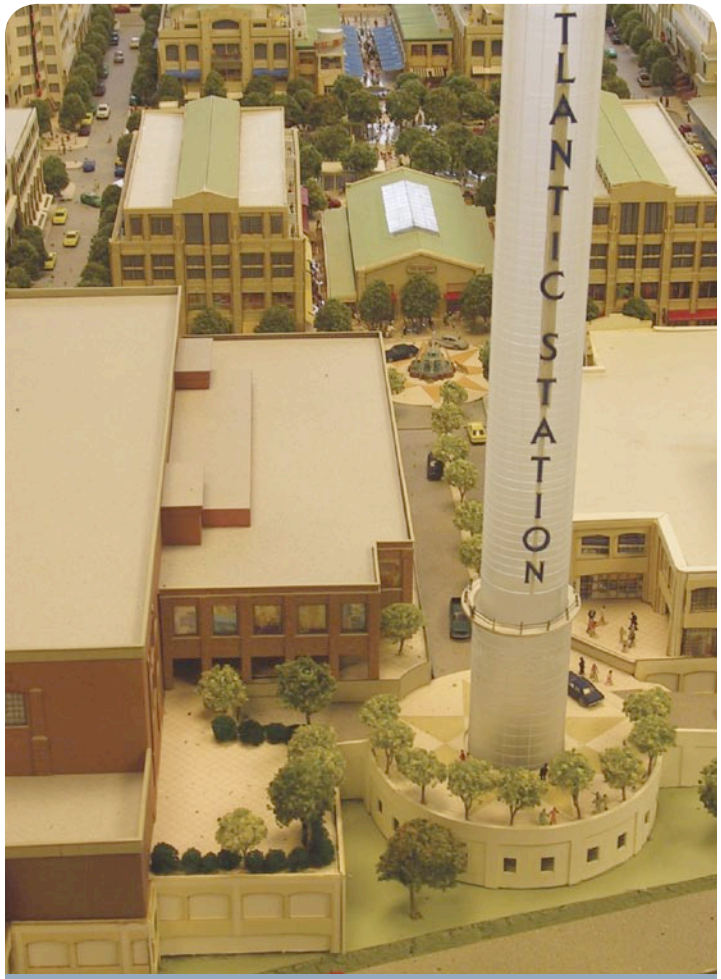
By encouraging development in existing cities, towns and suburbs, communities benefit from a stronger tax base, closer proximity of a range of jobs and services, more efficient use of already-developed land and infrastructure and reduced development pressure in edge areas, thereby preserving more open space. However, because it is so much easier to develop on "green fields" at the fringe–land is cheaper and easier to obtain and zoning usually is looser–communities must consciously work to change the incentives to encourage development where they want it and discourage it elsewhere. This typically means allowing higher densities in targeted areas and reducing or eliminating subsidies for development outside growth areas. Smart-growth practitioners have developed a number of mechanisms to do this and are developing still more. Please see Getting to Smart Growth, volumes I and II, available at http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/publications.htm

Preserve natural beauty, parks, farmland and environmentally critical areas

In many cases, this means buying land outright, especially if it is to be accessible for public use. However, because no government has the resources to buy all the land that should be protected, communities must use a number of techniques to preserve land while ensuring that owners aren't unduly burdened. These can range from partnering with private, non-profit land trusts to offering tax breaks for working farms to remain as farms, to purchasing the development rights without actually buying the land. While most cost money, all require forethought and a consensus to act.

THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE...

Barton Springs is part of the Edwards Aquifer, the source of drinking water for more than 1.5 million people in **Austin, Texas**. Barton Springs has always been one of the places that makes Austin special, but in the early 1990's, nearby construction began to pollute the water. Austinites showed their appreciation for the Springs by approving a bond for land purchases to protect the water, wildlife and beauty for future generations.



THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE...

By putting compatible uses like homes, offices, shops and schools all in one neighborhood, you can make life a lot more convenient and reduce the number of car trips we need to take every day. That's the whole idea behind Atlantic Station, a new development near **Atlanta's** Mid-town, where a central area of shops and offices is surrounded by all kinds of homes—apartments, condominiums and houses.

A growing body of research is showing that we have all but engineered walking out of our lives, with predictable health consequences. The problem is we stopped arranging our neighborhoods and designing our streets for safe, pleasant and efficient walking.

THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE...

The I'On neighborhood outside **Charleston** has many features that set it apart from other new developments. Chief among them is the street design. Sidewalks, generous planting strips with street trees, narrow lanes that discourage speeding and welcoming porches combine to create a space that works for cars, pedestrians and kids on bikes.

Create complete neighborhoods where daily needs are close at hand

The best way to make the neighborhoods where we live and work more convenient is to create a vibrant mix of offices, shops and housing. Having a strong customer base within walking distance can support a diverse mix of the restaurants, grocers, coffee shops, dry cleaners and the like that most of us visit day in and day out. This really is nothing more than the traditional Main Street design, where shops might have apartments or offices above, parking is mostly tucked out of sight and residential streets with a mix of large and small homes are within a comfortable walk. Locating this kind of development near rail stations makes them even more convenient. Putting the pieces of the neighborhood together again requires a fresh approach to zoning, which today carves out a separate district for each and every use and for every housing type and price range, linking them only by car trips.

Create a safe, inviting environment for walking

If you're 40 or older, chances are high that you walked to school. Why, then, do so few of our own children walk to school today? And it's not just the kids. A growing body of research is showing that we have all but engineered walking out of our lives, with predictable health consequences. The problem is we stopped arranging our neighborhoods and designing our streets for safe, pleasant and efficient walking.

Designing streets that work for both cars and pedestrians means creating an interconnected network of streets, alley-ways and trails that offer multiple, direct routes to destinations. It means using myriad traffic-calming techniques to prevent speeding and allow safe crossings. It requires not just sidewalks, but also path-shading street trees, pocket parks and other amenities. In commercial areas, on-

THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE...

As an aging suburb, **Smyrna, GA**, never had much of a downtown, and what it did have was lost to a road widening. Wanting a center for their town, the mayor and council launched a bold effort to concentrate government functions, library and homes around a new town square, which has attracted shopping and yet more housing to this new "Main Street". The result: a new gathering spot and source of civic pride and identity.

street parking shields pedestrians from traffic, while bringing the building up to the sidewalk saves people from having to cross hot, ugly, and potentially dangerous parking lots. And there's safety in numbers: the more people who are out and about, the more "eyes on the street" to spot any trouble.

Foster distinctive communities with a strong sense of place

Cities and towns built before World War II each have distinct layouts, architecture, housing styles and neighborhoods, depending on the region of the country, climate, traditions, history and local cultures. But today, it would be hard to tell a new development in, say, Atlanta from one in Dallas or San Diego. Why is that? The emergence of national-scale retailers, builders and developers is part of the reason, but there are other explanations, as well. Most cities and towns, too, have adopted national standards for everything from streets to schools. But local communities do have the option to make development adapt to their own needs and desires, rather than the other way around, if citizens insist on it and governments plan for it. For tools, see ... what's best resource?Constance's work?

THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE...

They don't build 'em like this anymore, and too many places tear them down. The city of **Decatur, GA**, however, has decided to keep its classic, neighborhood schools such as Oakhurst Elementary (above) rather than build new schools on sites that would be hard for kids to get to on foot or bike.

Make efficient use of public investments in infrastructure, schools and services.

Smart, well-planned development decisions save taxpayers money and allow governments to stretch their dollars farther, even as they make it possible for households to spend less on expenses such as transportation. Making the most efficient use of taxpayer investments in roads, water and sewer systems and services from police to fire fighting stretches taxpayer dollars farther. These days, many places are over-investing in subsidizing new sprawl development, even as they dramatically under-invest in maintenance, repair and upgrading of infrastructure in existing areas. The costs of sprawl and benefits of smart growth have been well documented (for more information, please see Brookings report at http://www.brookings.edu/metro/publications/200403_smartgrowth.htm). By emphasizing strategies such as the revitalization of depressed areas, the reuse of aging buildings, redevelopment of dying strip centers and development of vacant and abandoned properties, smart-growth practices build the tax base for the benefit of both city and suburb dwellers. And there is mounting evidence that metro areas with smart-growth attributes—healthy central cities and inner suburbs, excellent transportation networks, vibrant centers and neighborhoods—have stronger economies.

How do you know if it's smart growth?

Those are the big-picture ideas behind smart growth. But how do you know if projects or plans proposed for your area are "smart"? The scorecard that follows is an attempt to help you make your own assessment. Answering some of the questions might require asking some probing questions of the developer or his consultant team, pressing planning officials for answers or, if that fails, seeking your own consulting expertise. But if you've read this far, clearly you're not afraid to do a little investigating!

How do you know if it's "smart" growth?
A PARTIAL SCORECARD

The following scorecard is offered as one suggested way that a community can evaluate whether new development will be an overall benefit. It was adapted from a tool developed by the state of Maryland to judge whether plans and proposals meet standards under the state's Smart Growth program.

The criteria reflect the three goals of steering development *toward* land designated locally as appropriate for development and *away from* designated agricultural, open space, cultural and environmentally sensitive areas, and ensuring that development makes *efficient use* of land. Each criterion can be rated as "poor", "good", "very good" or "excellent".

Location

- The project location reinforces and logically extends existing and planned development.
- The project redevelops a brownfield[1] site or a site/location receiving state or local assistance to support redevelopment.

Public services and infrastructure

- The proposal uses existing or planned water and sewer lines.
- The proposal aligns with existing and planned school capacity.
- The proposal uses existing or planned road capacity, without overtaxing it.
- The proposal makes use of existing or planned public transportation service.

Compactness and efficiency

- The density is appropriate to the location (for example, a minimum of 10 units/acre for bus service, 20 or more for areas adjacent to rail stations)[2]
- Site area devoted to parking is minimized, and any surface parking is behind or beside buildings.

[1] "Brownfield" refers to former industrial or polluted land that could be reclaimed for development.
[2] T

SMART GROWTH SCORECARD (continued)

- Development is clustered to provide the same or higher density with large areas of open space.

Diversity of use

- The project provides a mix of land uses or, for single use projects, adds to the diversity of uses within 1/2 mile.
- Different uses or types are physically mixed in the project or within the adjacent (1/4 mile radius) neighborhood.

Housing diversity

- The project provides different housing types and/or increases the diversity of housing options in the immediate (1/4 mile) neighborhood.
- The project provides a variety of housing prices affordable to different income levels and/or increases the diversity of housing prices in the immediate (1/4 mile) neighborhood.
- Housing types and/or price levels are physically mixed in the project or within the immediate adjacent neighborhood.
- At least 10% of the residential units provided are affordable to those making less then median income, or are at a price level or type that meets an explicitly stated housing goal of the local government.

Transportation & accessibility

- Frequently visited uses are within a half-mile of the proposed project, and are easily accessible to pedestrians. Uses include grocery, other retail, restaurants; school or day care; park, public space or recreation/entertainment; jobs center; other services, such post office.
- The project provides two or more transportation options (e.g. walk, bike, bus, rail) in addition to the car that are readily available to the majority of people using the project.
- The project road system connects to and logically extends external street and transportation systems at multiple locations.

- The project is located on an existing interconnected street system, or provides an internal street system that is interconnected.
- The proposed or existing streetscape and parking designs are safe and pedestrian friendly.

Community character and design

- Buildings are oriented to maintain or establish a consistent edge from the street.
- Building exterior design are visually interesting, pedestrian friendly and establish or add to area design character.
- Public spaces (community centers, recreational facilities, parks, plazas, open space) are provided and accessible.
- Project maintains or rehabilitates existing structures for continuing use.

Environmental protection

- The project design and location is likely to benefit local air quality (reduces the number and/or length of vehicle trips over conventional, auto-oriented development).
- The project uses "green building" design techniques for site selection, construction and operation practices, energy and water use efficiency, and providing healthy building spaces.
- The project avoids development on wetlands, streams, shorelines and related buffer areas.
- The project avoids development on slopes steeper than 15% or on highly erodible or otherwise unstable soils, on floodplains, or on habitat for threatened or endangered species.
- The project uses design techniques such as clustering and vertical development to avoid sensitive environmental features, minimize development area and/or maximize areas of contiguous open space on site.
- The project relieves development pressure on natural resources on or off site through use of transfer of development rights, long-term protection strategies or other means.

SMART GROWTH SCORECARD (continued)

Stakeholder participation and community development

- Inclusive citizen and stakeholder participation begins early and is conducted throughout the project approval process.
- The proposed project meets identified community and area needs and plans.
- The proposed project positively impacts employment opportunities in the community.
- The project helps to create or maintain a balance of housing and jobs within a 5-mile radius.

Housing Diversity.
This projects includes condominiums and a variety of townhomes. The townhomes, which look like large single-family houses from the street, are all designed to fit in with the existing neighborhood.