



SMART GROWTH

What is Smart Growth?

Smart Growth is a city and community development plan which seeks to promote healthier people and places by limiting sprawl, improving urban space, and making neighborhoods more inviting as places of congregation. The EPA writes, "When communities choose smart growth strategies, they can create new neighborhoods and maintain existing ones that are attractive, convenient, safe, and healthy. They can foster design that encourages social, civic, and physical activity. They can protect the environment while stimulating economic growth. Most of all, we can create more choices for residents, workers, visitors, children, families, single people, and older adults—choices in where to live, how to get around, and how to interact with the people around them. When communities do this kind of planning, they preserve the best of their past while creating a bright future for generations to come."

Political Will

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

"Smart growth is the future." —**Charles Schumer**, *US Senator (D-NY)*

"If we don't decide where our growth is going to go, it is going to be haphazard and it is going to be everywhere." — **Sherrie Despino**, *Louisiana Chamber of Commerce President*

"As the planet becomes increasingly urbanized...the need for a more environmentally sustainable form of city design, a 'green city,' has never been greater."

—**Christine Todd Whitman**, *National Smart Growth Council Co-Chair*

For Our Health

Scientists at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have watched rates of obesity, and chronic diseases skyrocket in the last 20 years. Today, nearly one in four Americans is obese, or more than 30 pounds over their ideal weight. At the same time, 75% of the U.S. adult population is sedentary – meaning they don't achieve the U.S. Surgeon General's recommended 30 minutes of moderate activity most days. Just 30 years ago, nearly two-thirds of all children walked or biked to school. Today, the figure is less than 10%, according to the CDC. Public health leaders are beginning to promote Active Community Environments – places where people can easily and safely walk or bicycle for most routine trips.

Sustainable Communities Partnership

On June 16, 2009, EPA joined with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U. S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to help improve access to affordable housing, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment in communities nationwide. Through a set of guiding livability principles and a partnership agreement that will guide the agencies' efforts, this partnership will coordinate federal housing, transportation, and other infrastructure investments to protect the environment, promote equitable development, and help to address the challenges of climate change.

The HUD/DOT/EPA partnership will:

- Enhance integrated planning and investment.
- Provide a vision for sustainable growth.
- Redefine housing affordability and make it transparent.
- Redevelop underutilized sites.
- Develop livability measures and tools.
- Align HUD, DOT, and EPA programs.
- Undertake joint research, data collection, and outreach.

1 Mix Land Uses

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 provides 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.

2 Take Advantage of Compact Building Design

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.

3 Create Walkable Neighborhoods

Walkable communities are nothing new. Outside of the last half-century, communities worldwide have created neighborhoods, communities, towns and cities premised on pedestrian access. Within the last fifty years public and private actions often present created obstacles to walkable communities. 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.



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

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 seeks to create interesting, unique communities which reflect the values and cultures of the people who reside there, and foster the types of physical environments which support a more cohesive community fabric. Smart growth promotes development which uses natural and man-made boundaries and landmarks to create a sense of defined neighborhoods, towns, and regions. 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.

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

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 communities quality of life, and guiding new growth into existing communities.

Protection of open space provides many fiscal benefits, including increasing local property value (thereby increasing property tax revenue), providing tourism dollars, and decreases local tax increases (due to the savings of reducing the construction of new infrastructure). 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.

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YOUR COMMUNITY • YOUR HEALTH
YOUR ENVIRONMENT

6 Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities

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.

The ease of greenfield development remains an obstacle to encouraging more development in existing neighborhoods. Development on the fringe remains attractive to developers for its ease of access and construction, lower land costs, and potential for developers to assemble larger parcels.



7 Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices

Providing people with more choices in housing, shopping, and transportation is a key aim of smart growth. People are increasingly seeking these choices—particularly a wider range of transportation options—in an effort to improve beleaguered transportation systems.

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.

8 Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective

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. If investors, bankers, developers, builders and others do not earn a profit, few smart growth projects will be built. Fortunately, government can help make smart growth profitable to private investors and developers. Since the development industry is highly regulated, the value of property and the desirability of a place is largely affected by government investment in infrastructure and government regulation. Governments that make the right infrastructure and regulatory decisions will create fair, predictable and cost effective smart growth.

9 Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration

Citizen participation can be time-consuming, frustrating and expensive, but encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration can lead to creative, speedy resolution of development issues and greater community understanding of the importance of good planning and investment. 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. The common thread among all, however, is that the needs of every community and the programs to address them are best defined by the people who live and work there.

10 Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices

Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component of 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. More importantly, it is a key factor in determining access to transportation, commuting patterns, access to services and education, and consumption of energy and other natural resources. 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.

Resources:

Smart Growth Online: <http://www.smartgrowth.org>
EPA Smart Growth: <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth>

Upcoming EFC Events:

Smart Management for Small Communities: Practical Resources for Governance

April 20-22, 2010

Blue Mountain Lake, NY

This two-day conference in the Adirondacks will be focused on the needs of municipal leaders and will provide technical assistance, funding updates and practical skill-building sessions. Sessions will focus on topics such as Asset Management, and Meeting Facilitation. There will also be a co-funding panel including the Environmental Facilities Corporation, USDA RD, NYSERDA and others.

June 2, 2010

Bear Mountain, NY

This conference will include updates from state and federal agency representatives on funding updates and opportunities, and offer sessions including asset management, alternative strategies in drinking water management, wastewater management, and solid waste management.

Asset Management 101

June 15, 2010

Salamanca, NY

This event is designed to train municipal water and wastewater systems operators on the short-term and long-term benefits of incorporating asset management planning into their operations as a means to enabling long-term financial and operational sustainability. The program will include information, training and tools appropriate for operators and public officials.



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Recent EFC Events:

NYS Agriculture and Water Quality Forum

February 18, 2010

More than 30 people attended the Environmental Finance Center's first New York State Agricultural Forum to discuss current funding and programming opportunities for farming communities in New York State and to discuss ways we can address challenges through collaboration, information dissemination, and how the Environmental Finance Center can be a resource to technical service providers who serve New York State's agricultural community.

Technical Assistance Partnership Forum

February 25, 2010

This program included a tour of the new LEED-registered Syracuse Center of Excellence building and its green innovations. The forum also included funding and policy updates from the USDA RD, NYS DOS and NYS EFC.

NYS SRF Sustainability Initiative Discussion

March 5, 2010

Recently, New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation (NYS EFC) has announced its CWSRF Sustainability Initiative, an initiative that will revise NY's Clean Water State Revolving Fund, and the Environmental Finance Center at Syracuse University is working with the NYS EFC as they undergo this process. Together with the Environmental Facilities Corporation, we hosted a discussion about the intersection of smart growth, energy efficiency, asset management and green infrastructure and their impact on the SRF Sustainability Initiative.

Sustainable Communities Partnership Forum

March 6, 2010

In continuing with our work to build capacity, partnerships and collaboration towards a more sustainable New York, we hosted a Sustainable Communities Partnership Retreat to discuss the potential for project development in concert with the new EPA, DOT, and HUD Partnership for Sustainable Communities.

The Right to Water

March 29-30, 2010

The EFC is proud to co-sponsor The "Right to Water" conference, an interdisciplinary and international conference to explore strategic possibilities for ensuring equitable access to water worldwide. This event will explore how universal calls for the right to water articulate with local historical and geographical contexts.

The Environmental Finance Center at Syracuse University is tasked by the EPA with facilitating the development of sustainable communities. As an affiliated center with the Syracuse Center of Excellence, the EFC-SU leverages more than 200 SyracuseCoE partners to connect local government officials and private organizations with technical assistance, assessment tools, and funding offered by our large network of collaborators and resources. EFC also provides professional training and community outreach to engage, educate, and enable the public to make their own change toward improved environmental infrastructure and quality of life.

The Environmental Finance Center at Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York serves the two states and two territories of the EPA Region 2: New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.