



Fact Sheet 3.3

Smart Growth Principles



There are many tools available to help communities develop in ways that foster economic growth, improve quality of life, and utilize natural resources wisely while protecting community heritage and character. These strategies may be used to make urban areas more appealing, thus reducing development pressures on wildlands. One such approach is called Smart Growth. When development does occur in the wildland-urban interface, Smart Growth may help make it more sustainable.



Photo courtesy of: Phoenix Realty Group

Smart Growth promotes walkable communities and aims to enhance a sense of place.

Smart Growth is becoming an increasingly popular approach to community development. In a national survey conducted in 2000, 78 percent of respondents favored Smart Growth when it was defined as “giving priority to improving services, such as schools, roads, affordable housing, and public transportation in existing communities, rather than encouraging new housing and commercial development in the countryside” (Smart Growth America 2000). Natural resource professionals need to be familiar with Smart Growth principles and include them in a suite of land-use tools that

they can offer to decision makers and stakeholders. Smart Growth can be implemented using comprehensive planning and land-use regulations to guide, design, develop, revitalize, and build communities that

- preserve and enhance valuable natural and cultural resources;
- have a unique sense of community and place;
- equitably distribute the costs and benefits of development;
- expand choices for transportation, employment, and housing in a fiscally responsible manner;
- value long-range, regional considerations of sustainability over short-term incremental development decisions; and
- promote public health and healthy communities.

Guiding Principles of Smart Growth Include:

1. *Recognition that all levels of government and the private sectors play an important role in creating and implementing policies that support Smart Growth.*

Every level of government—federal, state, regional, local, neighborhood—should examine its policies and practices and replace those that have contributed to urban sprawl with those that foster Smart Growth.

Adapted From *The Florida Planning Officials Handbook*. Boles, G. 2005. University of Florida, Urban and Regional Planning Department, Gainesville, FL.

2. Conservation and enhancement of environmental and cultural resources.

Smart Growth protects the natural processes that sustain life; preserves agricultural land, wildlife habitat, natural landmarks, and cultural resources; and integrates biodiversity, ecological systems, and natural greenspace (green infrastructure) into development. It promotes innovative storm-water management, maintains or enhances natural air and water quality, and fosters resource conservation. Green architecture uses design and construction practices and materials that consume fewer natural resources, use renewable resources, and improve the comfort and health of the occupants.

3. Central city vitality.

Every level of government should identify ways to reinvest in existing urban centers, to re-use former commercial or industrial sites, redevelop older buildings, and bring new development to older, low-income, and disadvantaged neighborhoods.

4. Efficient use of land and infrastructure.

High-density development, infill development, and redevelopment of abandoned or degraded buildings result in more compact urban areas and more efficient land use. Efficient use of public and private infrastructure begins with developing neighborhoods that maximize the use of existing infrastructure. In areas of new growth, roads, schools, sewers, water lines, and other infrastructure should be planned as part of comprehensive growth and investment strategies. Regional collaboration for large infrastructure investments helps prevent inefficiency and redundancy.

5. Vital small towns and rural areas.

Urban sprawl can also occur around villages and small towns. Programs and policies need to encourage investment to improve the

economic health of small town downtowns and rural community centers. Compact development and efficient use of existing infrastructure can help rural communities get the most out of expensive basic infrastructure and services.

6. More housing choices and mixed-use centers accessible by multiple transportation modes.

Mixed-use developments include quality housing, varied by type and price, integrated with shopping, schools, community facilities, and jobs. Human-scale design and quality construction foster privacy, safety, aesthetics, and compatibility among uses and users. Land-use and transportation planning should accommodate the automobile while also providing opportunities for mass transit, bicycles, and walking.



Photo by: Knoxville Transportation Planning Organization

Providing safe conditions for cyclists and pedestrians encourages alternative transportation use.

7. A regional view of community.

Smart Growth promotes balanced, integrated regional development achieved through regional planning processes.

8. Creation or preservation of a “sense of place.”

Design and development can help promote a sense of place by incorporating the distinctive characteristics of a community and the

particular place in which it is located. Natural features, climate, culture, geography, historical landmarks, and ecology each contribute to the unique character of a community.

9. *Planning that promotes diversity, equity, and Smart Growth principles while encouraging participation of residents in all aspects of the planning process and at every level of government.*

All planning processes, as well as the distribution of resources, must be equitable. A diversity of voices must be incorporated into community planning and implementation decisions. Citizen participation ensures that planning outcomes are based on a variety of needs and objectives and result from collective decision making.

10. *One size doesn't fit all—a wide variety of approaches can accomplish Smart Growth.*

Every state and region is shaped by a unique blend of customs, politics, laws, natural conditions, and other factors. Each must develop its own approach to plan for growth and solve problems while encouraging meaningful involvement from public, private, and non-profit sectors.

References

Smart Growth America, “Americans Want Growth and Green; Demand Solutions to Traffic, Haphazard Development,” news release, October 16, 2000.