



What Is Smart Growth?

Smart growth is development that serves the economy, the community, and the environment. It changes the terms of the development debate away from the traditional growth/no-growth question to “how and where should new development be accommodated?” Smart growth is development that simultaneously achieves:

- **Economic development and jobs**—that create employment and business opportunities, improves local tax base, provides neighborhood services and amenities, and creates economically competitive communities.
- **Strong neighborhoods**—that provide a range of housing options giving people the opportunity to choose housing that best suits them. Smart growth provides the choice to walk, ride a bike, take transit, or drive. It maintains and enhances the value of existing neighborhoods and creates a sense of community.
- **Healthy communities**—that provide families with a clean environment. Smart growth balances development and environmental

“The goal of smart growth is not no growth or even slow growth. Rather, the overall goal is sensible growth that balances our need for jobs and economic development with our desire to save our natural environment.”

*Parris Glendening, Governor,
State of Maryland*

“With smart growth we will save acres, save money on roads and sewers, keep homes more affordable, and make our cities and town centers thrive. That’s good growth.”

*Christine Todd Whitman,
as Governor of New Jersey*

protection—accommodating growth while preserving open space and critical habitat, reusing land, and protecting water supplies and air quality.

Prevailing development patterns of the last 50 years have brought benefits and concerns for communities across the country. Though supportive of growth, communities are questioning the economic costs of abandoning infrastructure in the city and rebuilding it further out. They are questioning the

necessity of spending increasing time in cars, locked in traffic or traveling miles to the nearest store. They are questioning the practice of abandoning brownfields in older communities while developing open space and prime agricultural lands at the suburban fringe, which damage our environment.

Smart growth recognizes the many benefits of growth. It invests time, attention, and resources in restoring community and vitality to center cities and older suburbs. Smart growth in new developments 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 other environmental amenities. Smart growth recognizes connections

Smart Growth Principles

- **Mix land uses**
- **Take advantage of compact building design**
- **Create a range of housing opportunities and choices**
- **Create walkable neighborhoods**
- **Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place**
- **Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas**
- **Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities**
- **Provide a variety of transportation choices**
- **Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective**
- **Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions**

between development and quality of life. Smart growth is:

- Not anti-growth; it's about *better growth*—growth that makes sense. Smart growth leverages new growth to improve the community and finds ways to meet economic, environmental, and quality-of-life goals.
- Not anti-automobile; it's about having *transportation options*—to drive, walk, bike, or take public transit.
- Not anti-suburb; it's about *building better places to live* in existing suburbs, cities, and new communities. It's about protecting existing investments and quality of life in areas where people, communities, and governments have already made a commitment.

“Smart growth is pro-growth. We know that developers, banks, and the entire community rely on growth to fuel the economy. The goal is not to limit growth, but to channel it to areas where infrastructure allows growth to be sustained over the long term.”

*Hugh L. McColl,
Chairman and CEO, Bank of
America*

- Not about big government; it's about *improving market efficiency*, making it legal to construct the small towns and neighborhoods we used to build, making brownfield redevelopment easier, and getting more value from the tax dollars we spend on roads, sewers, and other taxpayer investments.

The features that distinguish smart growth vary by community. No two streets, neighborhoods, or cities are

SUISUN CITY, CALIFORNIA

In 1989, the *San Francisco Chronicle* rated Suisun City, California, a town of 25,000 people midway between San Francisco and Sacramento, the worst place to live in the Bay Area. At that time, Suisun City's historic Main Street was a strip of boarded-up storefronts, vacant lots, and auto body shops. Several blocks away, an oil refinery sat at the head of the heavily polluted, silt-laden Suisun Channel. Today Suisun's harbor is filled with boats and lined with small businesses. A train and bus station that connects the city to the rest of Northern California sits a few blocks away. The town is diverse, walkable, and picturesque. Its crime rate is low and its housing affordable.

How did Suisun City transform itself in a decade? Was it the beneficiary of a huge government redevelopment grant or a gift from a rich foundation? No such luck. Instead, Suisun City's residents, businesses, and elected officials agreed on a common vision for their town's future. Clean-up polluted Suisun Channel and make the waterfront a focal point of their town, they said. Re-establish historic Main Street as a social and retail gathering place. Strengthen municipal finances by encouraging tax-generating commercial development such as retail shops and restaurants along Main Street and the waterfront.

In its rebirth, Suisun City avoided large-scale redevelopment projects such as shopping centers and industrial parks that would have obliterated its historic, small-town character. Suisun City is still a work-in-progress. But this once-troubled town has turned the corner. Suisun City is invigorated with new businesses and residents, rekindled community spirit, and unbridled optimism about its future.

identical. There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. Smart growth in Portland, Oregon, has different characteristics than smart growth in Austin, Texas—and it should. For that reason, smart growth does not prescribe solutions. Rather, it provides choices and seeks to build on proven successes. The Smart Growth principles (see box on opposite page) reflect the experience of localities that have successfully created smart growth communities. These communities had a vision of where they want to go and of what things they value in their community.

Spurring the smart growth movement are demographic shifts, a strong environmental ethic, increased fiscal concerns, and more nuanced views of growth. People know there is a better way to grow. The result is both a new demand and a new opportunity for growth that emphasizes preservation of open space and farmland, greater choice in housing and transportation, efficient investment of limited infrastructure dollars, and the strengthening of existing neighborhoods. Smart growth can make these alternatives a reality.

**To learn more about Smart Growth and the
Smart Growth Network, please go to
<http://www.smartgrowth.org>.**

EPA's mission is to protect public health and the environment. How and where communities grow and develop impacts public health and the environment. Therefore, EPA works with states and communities to find ways to grow while minimizing environmental and health impacts. Studies have demonstrated that smart growth development approaches have clear environmental benefits, including improved air and water quality, increased wetlands preservation, more brownfield sites cleaned and reused, and increased preservation of open spaces.