

Changing Landscapes

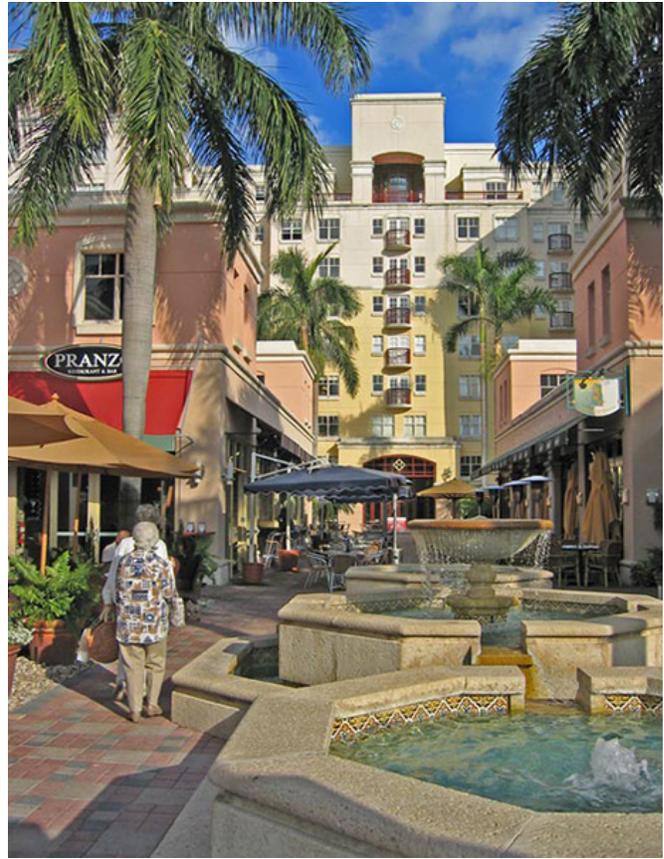
Land use planning curriculum for natural resource professionals

- P** rinciples, people, and policies
- L** and planning and pressures
- A** pproaches
- N** atural resource planning tools

A1: Using Smart Growth Principles to Plan Sustainable Communities

Overview

This factsheet introduces the principles and strategies of “smart growth,” a philosophy that planners, architects, and developers use to create communities that are walkable, affordable, and offer opportunities for residents to work and shop locally. Communities commonly use smart growth initiatives to avoid or alleviate the negative consequences of sprawl. This factsheet discusses how these approaches can be used to manage growth in concert with conservation, ecology, and quality-of-life values. Visit the [EPA Smart Growth Illustrated Web site](http://www.epa.gov) for visual examples of smart growth techniques being used throughout the United States.



A palm tree-lined pedestrian plaza leads to the entrance of an apartment building at the center of Mizner Park in Boca Raton, FL. (Photo: <http://epa.gov>)

“At the heart of the American dream is the simple hope that each of us can choose to live in a neighborhood that is beautiful, safe, affordable, and easy to get around. Smart growth does just that. Smart growth creates healthy communities with strong local businesses. Smart growth creates neighborhoods with schools and shops nearby and low-cost

ways to get around for all our citizens. Smart growth creates jobs that pay well and reinforces the foundations of our economy. Americans want to make their neighborhoods great, and smart growth strategies help make that dream a reality.”

—Smart Growth America

<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org>



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What is Smart Growth?

In the 21st century, smart growth has emerged as a key directive and guiding philosophy for local, regional, and statewide land use planning and policy making. National organizations have provided leadership and technical support for carrying out smart growth initiatives throughout the United States. These organizations include the American Planning Association and its Growing Smart program as well as the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), sponsor of the Smart Growth Network.

The term “smart growth” emerged as a response to poorly planned sprawl and uncoordinated development. Smart growth concepts and principles place a high priority on the goal of livable communities where land uses have been strategically located to promote compact development and take advantage of existing transportation networks and public infrastructure.

Smart growth recognizes the value of interconnected and walkable neighborhoods near schools, services, and shops. Smart growth calls for designing commercial developments that are tailored to the scale of a community, planning development on previously undeveloped land, and concentrating mixed-use development projects in growth centers that are walkable and served by public transportation. This type of design is also known as New Urbanism. Another key element of smart growth is protecting and providing open spaces, natural areas, and working landscapes for forestry and agriculture.

Smart Growth Principles

There is general agreement among planning professionals as to what comprises smart growth. The ICMA/Smart Growth Network publication *Getting to Smart Growth* sets forth 10 principles for smart growth:

1. Mix land uses
2. Take advantage of compact building design
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
4. Create walkable communities
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
7. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

These principles provide the basis for consensus-driven planning decisions that reflect the unique cultural, historic, aesthetic, and landscape characteristics of a particular community or region. The intent is to promote healthy communities that are economically vibrant and place a high value on providing opportunities for appropriate housing, jobs, and recreation to all its citizens. Another key component of smart growth is the recognition that the economic realities and capital budgeting process of a municipality (or State and region) are key determinants in land use development.



Provide Transportation Choices: A trail built on old railroad tracks runs through green space alongside the development. This provides easy access to neighboring areas for pedestrians and cyclists. (Photo: <http://epa.gov>)



Walkable Communities: A community park centrally located near town homes provides a safe place for children to play near their homes. (Photo: <http://epa.gov>)

A Note Regarding Smart Growth and Green Infrastructure (see Factsheet A3)

Green infrastructure (an interconnected network of open spaces and natural areas that provide ecosystem services, stormwater functions, and landscape values to a community) can be an integral component of planning for smart growth. Smart growth relies, in part, on identifying and including open spaces and working landscapes as part of an overall approach to managing growth and development. A plan for green infrastructure, by protecting valuable resources and recognizing their functional values, promotes smart growth by delineating those areas where development should **not** occur.

Smart Growth Strategies

A number of specific strategies are being employed at the local, State, and regional level to incorporate smart growth principles. A sampling of these strategies includes these:

Complete Streets

The complete streets methodology is based on redeveloping city and town thoroughfares with multiple transportation modes (pedestrian, bicycle, vehicular, and mass transit) and community character as core elements. Complete streets incorporate key smart growth principles such as walkable environments and traffic calming to promote livable neighborhoods.

Transportation-Oriented Development

Governments can promote smart growth by funding or supporting infrastructure and land use planning that creates compact, walkable, mixed-use districts around commuter rail stations.

Overlay Districts

Creating specific overlay districts or zones as part of a community's zoning ordinance can acknowledge, promote, and protect valued local resources such as historic villages and downtowns, scenic hillsides and ridgelines, and critical natural areas.

Planned Unit Development

Planned Unit Development is an effective tool in promoting mixed uses and creative design solutions for further development of sites in an urban area. The land use ordinance can set forth areas of flexibility that allow a Zoning Commission or Development Review Board to waive certain requirements. Incentives such as density bonuses can be awarded to developers who include affordable or senior housing units in the overall development plan.

Growth Centers

A number of States have enacted growth center legislation that includes incentives for municipalities that delineate specific areas where growth can and should occur. Growth centers often include the goal of focusing a town or region's future mixed-use development in compact, walkable land use patterns with access to existing infrastructure and public transit. Growth centers concentrate future growth in appropriate locations; this in turn protects open spaces and natural resources from unwarranted development impacts.

Brownfield and Greyfield Development

Promoting the redevelopment of brownfields and greyfields (paved over areas, derelict sites such as abandoned shopping centers) often promotes development of urban sites while inhibiting sprawl elsewhere in a town or city.

Transfer of Development Rights

Communities can protect important open spaces, natural areas, and working landscapes by adopting a transfer of development rights provision in the town's land use code. This allows landowners to sell or transfer the development capabilities of one parcel, worthy of protection, to another parcel in the municipality where development is preferred.

Adaptive Reuse

Communities lose part of their historic fabric forever when historic buildings languish from neglect or, even worse, are demolished. Adopting preservation ordinances can facilitate the revitalization of historic properties for new uses. This is a tool that can provide a framework as well as incentives for adaptive reuse while setting out a process for avoiding the demolition of valued resources, which contribute to community character and a sense of place.



A former metal-can manufacturing facility along the Baltimore, MD, waterfront has been converted into the Can Company, a 200,000-square-foot vibrant, mixed-use retail and office complex. (Photo: <http://epa.gov>)



The historic Elitch Theater in Denver, CO, is being restored as a performance arts space. Historic preservation and the arts create a vibrant neighborhood. (Photo: <http://epa.gov>)

Case Study — King Farm, Rockville, Maryland

King Farm is a community designed with many of the principles of New Urbanism in mind. This area contains 3,200 homes on 430 acres, making the gross residential density more than three times the city of Rockville. To support the potential population, over 2.2 million square feet of commercial space is included near the existing Metro station, and the mixed-use Village Center is designed to include 120,000 square feet of neighborhood retail space along with 49 apartment units and a stop for a possible future Transitway. Easy access to a variety of transportation options is available. These include the Metro, which provides rail access to Rockville, Bethesda, and much of the Washington metropolitan area; shuttle buses that run between the Metro station and King Farm; a series of bike paths that connect parks, schools, and the Metro; and an overall environment designed for pedestrians. Over one-quarter of the land in the community is reserved for parks and open space. King Farm contains numerous pocket parks, squares, commons, and community spaces, along with a 5-acre heritage park and two city parks (12 and 28 acres) that provide recreation facilities for the community. In 2001, King Farm won a Charter Award from the Congress for New Urbanism.

For more information about King Farm, visit their Web site at: <http://kingfarm.com>.



This view of the King Farm community illustrates how the population density rises from the single family homes in the front, to town homes, to apartments that are closest to the Metro station. (Photo: <http://epa.gov>)

Case Study – Old North St. Louis Revitalization Initiative

In 1981, after many years of decline, the downtown neighborhood of Old North St. Louis was embraced by a group of citizens for a recovery effort. The residents, business owners, and community leaders formed the Old North St. Louis Restoration Group to undertake the revitalization effort. The group sought out financing from a variety of sources, including block grants, historic tax credits, affordable housing financing, and donations. The group substantially improved the neighborhood through a variety of projects—establishing a range of housing options that incorporated reuse of abandoned historic buildings and development on vacant lots; carrying out streetscape enhancement projects that create safer options for pedestrians, including new sidewalks, benches, street trees, and streetlights; and establishing community gardens and a food co-op. Their smart growth efforts have reversed a 50-year trend of migration out of the neighborhood and have led to a population increase of 28 percent over the last decade.

For more information about Old North St. Louis, visit their Web site at: <http://onsl.org/>.



View of Old North St. Louis looking south down N. 14th Street at part of the Crown Square project that renovated 27 vacant historic buildings. (Photo: <http://onsl.org>)



New light poles get installed in Old North St. Louis on N. 14th Street. (Photo: <http://onsl.org>)

Relevant Factsheets

A2 – *The Power of Green in Community Development* – Defines the relationship between planning and land use and reviews how the concept of “place” fits into the planning process.

A3 – *Managing Stormwater with Green Infrastructure* – Provides an overview of principles and components, and examples of how communities are using green infrastructure to address stormwater issues.

N3 – *Regulatory Approaches to Protecting Natural Resources* – Demonstrates how planning approaches are used to protect natural resources.

N4 – *Nonregulatory Approaches to Natural Resource Conservation* – Summarizes nonregulatory tools and how they can be used for preservation or conservation.

N7 – *Minimizing Parcelization, Fragmentation, and Sprawl* – Demonstrates how mechanisms of planning can be used to manage undesirable development through the use of smart growth principles.

Resources

American Planning Association. 2002. Growing Smart User Manual for the Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook: Model Statutes for Planning and the Management of Change. Chicago, IL. 71 p.

Beaumont, Constance E. 1996. Smart states, better communities: how state governments can help citizens preserve their communities. National Trust for Historic Preservation. Washington, D.C. 394 p.

Heart, Bennet; Humstone, Elizabeth; Irwin, Thomas F.; Levine, Sandy; Weisbord, Dano; and others. 2002. Community rules: a New England guide to smart growth strategies. Burlington, VT: Conservation Law Foundation/Vermont Forum on Sprawl.

Smart Growth Network, International City/County Management Association. 2002. Getting to smart growth II: 100 more policies for implementation. 122 p.

Acknowledgements

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