

# Smart Growth Codes Makeover: Lessons for Making the Transition

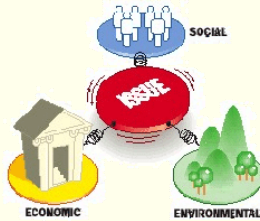


Challenges and Opportunities in the Process of Growing Smarter



## Redefining Success

Learn to communicate in terms that people outside your circle will understand.



Define victory in terms of interests, not positions.

### 10 smart growth principles

1. Mix Land Uses
2. Take Advantage of Compact Building Design
3. Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices
4. Create Walkable Neighborhoods
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 Towards 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



From the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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Too often we measure success simply in dollars. If the new project has units that the market supports selling at \$800,000, political leaders tout its success but in the next breath lament the lack of affordable housing in their communities. Smart Growth rightfully generates wealth, but more importantly Smart Growth strategies present an excellent opportunity for cities striving to redevelop to meet the triple bottom line of economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and social equity. For cities to successfully redevelop, they need to have the right policies in place that allow for community priorities to set the agenda and provide tools for developers that make the urban experience a competitive one. Across the country, cities are transforming themselves and bringing residents back with renewed interest and dollars to spend rebuilding municipal economies.

## Measuring the Opportunity for Change

### **Be politic, not political.**

Understand what is driving the opportunity for reform, then take the next step to understand what the consequences of change are and to whom they apply.



“Be fair. Appear fair. Get the facts, and cook the politics if you need to – not the other way around.”

*Congressman John Dingell*

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When is your community ripe for a transition to Smart Growth? The answer is always “Now”. The more important questions are those of scale and approach. Smart Growth demands a positive interaction among developers, citizens and political leaders for success. While revolutionary reforms are possible, you are much more likely to be faced with the challenge of incremental change.

What is prompting interest in Smart Growth in your community? Common drivers include demographic changes, environmental regulations or crises, political opportunities, economic forces and just plain common sense. Successful institutionalization of Smart Growth will come if you understand those drivers and what their attendant costs are. For example, politicians are often hesitant to advance a major change for fear of retribution at the polls. Environmental leaders don't jump on board Smart Growth projects that compromise other ecological concerns like clean water. Developers don't build projects that don't show a strong bottom line.

## Focusing on the Fundamentals



- Municipal Certification Program
- Six Core Standards
- Balanced Public-Private Sector Interests
- Integration with state/federal programs



"...a 2-year-old program that's **"Extreme Makeover"** meets **"This Old House."** - Detroit Free Press

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Not every community needs to dramatically change its development regulations to advance Smart Growth projects. Indeed, many communities implement excellent policies in the context of existing zoning and planning rules. The Redevelopment Ready Communities program of the Michigan Suburbs Alliance points the way for cities to move toward a Smart Growth environment

## Focusing on the Fundamentals



- Community Visioning and Education
- Continuing Education for Officials
- Tools for Effective Development
- Development Regulations
- Marketing of Development Sites
- Development Planning and Review Processes

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### **Standard One: Lead the dialogue on the need for redevelopment with the community to reach consensus and commitment on a vision.**

With every development project, it is essential to create focused and consistent public involvement opportunities that inform citizens about the social and economic benefits of Smart Growth. Without public support, development projects can become complicated and drawn out, something no developer wants to experience. Upfront visioning and planning set development priorities that are supported by affected residents and businesses, providing clear direction and guidance for potential investors and developers. Many communities have basic public engagement processes, but they may be implemented too late or never in the development process to be effective in attracting new development opportunities.

### **Standard Two: Create a process for ensuring that elected and appointed officials and staff involved in the redevelopment process have received adequate training and technical support to make informed decisions about development.**

Local officials who are informed about development processes and available incentive programs and receive regular training to improve their decision making skills have a greater ability to attract significant new investment to the community. A turnover in officials from the election and appointment cycle can provide gaps in understanding about key development issues. Ongoing training ensures a community's continued compliance with applicable laws and reduces exposure to potential lawsuits.

### **Standard Three: Define and communicate the redevelopment incentive programs that your local government will use to facilitate redevelopment.**

Development or redevelopment in urban communities is significantly different than greenfield development. Communities should recognize all "extraordinary redevelopment costs" (i.e. the costs that differentiate the redevelopment site from a greenfield site such as those incurred to mitigate contamination, acquire and combine smaller sites, and replace deteriorating infrastructure). Local governments must be willing to utilize available tools to bridge the extenuating circumstances generally encountered with brownfield development.

### **Standard Four: Adopt zoning ordinance amendments that facilitate redevelopment**

Existing development regulations, including zoning ordinances, often prevent communities from executing innovative redevelopment plans that encourage mixed uses and other modern types of development.

### **Standard Five: Identify, publish and proactively market information on available redevelopment sites and uses**

Most developers do not recognize that older communities are viable opportunities for investment. As a result, those cities need to work extra hard to market specific redevelopment sites in order to attract the development community. To facilitate redevelopment, it is essential that cities know what parcels of land are available for redevelopment, provide a site analysis describing existing conditions, identify the desired land use and provide potential developers with a comprehensive list of all redevelopment sites, including both vacant parcels and redevelopment parcels.

### **Standard Six: Enhance and streamline the site plan review process to speed appropriate development**

Over the course of decades, many cities have acquired layers of well-intentioned development review and approval requirements such as multiple hearings and reviewing bodies. Many of these requirements are outdated and unnecessarily increase the time and expense associated with development review, threatening to not only stymie the development process but frustrate and even drive away developers. In older communities needing to attract redevelopment, such a process runs counter to a competitive strategy that responds to development interests in a timely manner.

## Fomenting the Revolution

### This Time, It Might Be Televised

1. Build broad-based local coalitions
2. Integrate new fields (e.g. community health, public safety and senior care)
3. Hone in on generally accepted practices
4. Build on small successes to garner support for larger, more complex efforts
5. Reach out to innovators to showcase new models
6. Consider legacy-building and upward mobility of politicians when seeking a champion



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The move to Smart Growth has been a quiet but powerful revolution. Former foes are now allies and prominent leaders of the development community are embracing Smart Growth principles with the confidence that they lead to a profitable industry. While few developers are wearing Birkenstocks and hemp dresses and you'll be hard pressed to find environmentalists at the groundbreaking of the next skyscraper, both are finding common ground in sustainable development.

The challenge of the coming decade is to institutionalize Smart Growth by ensuring that the public policies necessary for its support are in place and have a strong – nearly innate – following among mainstream political leaders. This is a task for advocates, educators and political activists alike.

While government works slowly, visionary advocates and cutting edge developers have the opportunity to advance more complex and startlingly vivid approaches to sustainable development. Innovations like form-based codes and transit-oriented development are the next



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