



# Smart Growth Strategy Builder

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Smart Growth Implementation Toolkit

## Growing Smarter

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Communities across the country are facing tremendous opportunities to shape their future and provide solutions to the most pressing local, national and global challenges of our time. Community leaders, serving as stewards of the future, have the power to change previous patterns of unsustainable growth and realize the benefits of smarter growth.

A growing number of local political, civic and business leaders understand that with smarter patterns of growth and development, our towns, counties and cities can enjoy the fruits of growth without the costs of poorly planned development. They understand that smart growth strategies can help communities to generate more jobs, enjoy a more stable tax base, provide more choice in the location and cost of housing and build a healthy economy while reducing our impact on the environment, securing our energy independence and creating safe and healthy neighborhoods for our children, our seniors and our families. They understand that communities that choose to grow smarter are also improving their ability to compete in the global marketplace for investments and talent.

While the challenge of building healthier and safer communities has not changed, the opportunities to move away from previous unsustainable patterns have increased. These opportunities are driven by dramatic demographic changes and shifting lifestyle preferences in our population and by a growing understanding of our shared responsibility for the future of our planet. At the same time, the prospect of ever lengthening commutes and rising gas prices is leading growing numbers of people to seek locations where they are not completely automobile-dependent. More and more people prefer neighborhoods where they can improve their health by choosing to walk or bike to the grocery store or shrink their “carbon footprint” (reduce their greenhouse gas emissions) by taking public transit to work or to school. They want to live where they can still be active citizens as they age and where their

children and grandchildren can enjoy healthy physical activity everyday.

Shortsighted planning sacrifices the long-term fiscal health of our communities — starving our established downtown businesses, overlooking existing investments in our older communities, eating up our farms and open spaces and damaging our environment. Many communities are envisioning an alternative future. They want to rebuild our existing communities and design new ones to better respond to the needs and preferences of their citizens.

Getting there from where we are today can look like an overwhelming task because it asks community leaders to overhaul outdated plans. It requires rewriting laws and regulations to transform the existing development patterns.

The good news is that we can take advantage of the opportunities simply by allowing walkable, mixed-use development to happen in our communities. The tools in the Smart Growth Implementation Toolkit can help community leaders take the first step of removing the regulatory obstacles to smarter growth. The tools can help your community level the playing field to encourage development that meets your community’s goals and your citizens' aspirations.

*If you are new to the ideas of Smart Growth,  
visit [smartgrowthtoolkit.net](http://smartgrowthtoolkit.net)  
to find more resources available for download  
as well as links to other helpful sites.*

## The Goals of Smart Growth

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Smart growth can help communities achieve their shared vision by building on these goals:

### ***Healthier, Safer Communities***

The central goal of any smart growth plan or project is to improve the quality of the neighborhoods where we live. Our efforts should make our communities healthier, safer, more convenient, more attractive and more affordable.

### ***Protecting the Environment***

Neighborhoods designed to reduce our dependence on automobiles also reduce our impact on the environment. By creating streetscapes that encourage walking or biking, we create opportunities for individuals to reduce their carbon footprint.

### ***Better Access, Less Traffic***

Mixing land uses, clustering development, and providing multiple transportation choices helps us to encourage healthier lifestyles, manage congestion, pollute less and save energy.

### ***Thriving Cities, Suburbs And Towns***

By guiding development to existing towns and cities, we maximize our investments in transportation, schools, libraries and other public services. Our public dollars can serve the communities where people live today.

### ***Shared Benefits***

Building a comprehensive transportation system and locating jobs and accessible housing within reach of each other expands opportunities for all income levels.

### ***Lower Costs, Lower Taxes***

Taking advantage of existing infrastructure keeps taxes down. Convenient transportation choices also reduce our household transportation costs, leaving our families with more money for other needs.

### ***Keeping Open Space Open***

Protecting our natural resources creates healthier air and cleaner drinking water. From forests and farms to wetlands and wildlife, let us pass on to our children the landscapes we love.

In practice, smart growth implementation is shaped by ten principles:

1. Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices
2. Mix Land Uses
3. Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices
4. Create Walkable Neighborhoods
5. Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration
6. Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place
7. Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective
8. Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas
9. Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities
10. Take Advantage of Compact Building Design and Efficient Infrastructure Design

## The Smart Growth Implementation Toolkit

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The **Smart Growth Implementation Toolkit** is a set of practical tools to help your community grow smarter. It will help you untangle the thicket of policies and procedures that get in the way of smarter growth and sustainable development. The **Smart Growth Leadership Institute** developed the tools through a four-year technical assistance program funded by the **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**.

The tools are designed to help communities that are committed to (or are exploring) smart growth but struggle with implementation, with building support, with identifying the most problematic policies and with other issues that typically accompany a major change in development practice.

The tools will check if your community's policies and regulations are creating safer, healthier, more livable neighborhoods. They will examine whether the policies, codes, zoning and development requirements are helping your community to protect the environment and reduce energy consumption and if they are expanding housing options, lowering household expenses and making full use of existing community investments. The tools can help the community reach its goals, its vision for the future, and help leaders discuss how to retain the great parts of the community while improving other parts.

Each tool may be used independently or in combination with others. Each user should customize the tools appropriately for local or regional use. The tools are intended to be templates. The tools include:

### **Quick Diagnostic**

The Quick Diagnostic is a simple flowchart that will help you to understand which of the Smart Growth Implementation Tools can best help your community.

### **Policy Audit**

The Smart Growth Policy Audit will help you assess whether existing land use and development policies align with your community's aspirations for its future.

### **Code and Zoning Audit**

The Smart Growth Code and Zoning Audit will help you check if the zoning codes and regulations in your community implement your vision for smarter growth.

### **Audit Summary**

The Smart Growth Audit Summary will help you summarize the findings from the Smart Growth Policy Audit and the Smart Growth Code and Zoning Audit, and help you to begin to prioritize the opportunities that are ripe for action.

### **Project Scorecard**

The Smart Growth Project Scorecard will help you to evaluate how closely a proposed development project adheres to your community's vision for smarter growth.

### **Incentives Matrix**

The Incentives Matrix for Smart Growth Projects will help you mobilize available incentives to encourage specific smart growth projects in your communities.

### **Strategy Builder**

The Smart Growth Strategy Builder will help you implement smart growth in your community by identifying the most promising avenues to lasting change. It will help you map the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges facing smart growth implementation in your community.

*You can download all these tools from  
[www.smartgrowthtoolkit.net](http://www.smartgrowthtoolkit.net)*

## About the Smart Growth Strategy Builder

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The Smart Growth Strategy Builder will help you to create a strategy for building the momentum your community needs to achieve its vision for smarter growth. It will help you to think strategically about smart growth implementation.

Very few communities are ready to completely revise their policies, codes and zoning all at once. Leaders in most communities must first build support for the new community vision. Achieving your community's vision for smarter growth requires taking strategic steps that will gain quick wins and build long-term commitment.

This tool will help you map and understand the issues that either support or hinder smart growth. There will be many challenges but there will also be many opportunities. This tool will help you identify the opportunities and challenges in your community.

### About its use

Depending on what your community needs, you can **use this whole tool** or you can **use segments of this tool**.

Don't be constrained by the format of the tool. You can use the questions as a way to frame your thinking about smart growth implementation in your community.

- You can use this tool as a **group discussion guide** to help you discover what opportunities and challenges you may have overlooked as you build support around your community's vision. (e.g., *Are there local leaders or groups you have not yet tapped?*)
- You can use this tool to **learn how to lead change** in your community. What issues can help to build support for smarter growth?

- You can use **as a complete exercise** to examine all the critical factors that help or hinder your community's vision.

### Some caveats

This Tool is not intended to "grade" your community's performance. Don't use the tool expecting to measure how well your community (and its leadership) is doing in implementing smart growth. Use it instead to identify issues that you can leverage to build up support for smart growth.

This tool works best in a group discussion process to make sure you have the benefit of multiple viewpoints.

There is an old adage that the only thing constant in life is change – and any strategic analysis is essentially a snapshot of a moving target. Return to this tool often to see if any of the answers or assumptions you have made have changed and if your strategy needs to be adjusted accordingly

### A note about public officials

As you use this tool, consider that it may be inappropriate for public officials (elected or appointed) to answer questions about who supports or disagrees with smart growth in the local leadership. They may find their position prevents them from answering certain sections of this tool, especially if the answers must go on public record.

*Visit [www.smartgrowthtoolkit.net](http://www.smartgrowthtoolkit.net)  
for more resources and links to other helpful sites.*

## How to use the Smart Growth Strategy Builder

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### Organization

This tool is organized under the following sections:

- A. **Urgency of Issues** – Does your community feel an urgent need to change its current pattern of development?
- B. **Strength of Leadership** –Who are the leading proponents of smart growth? Are there other leaders you can tap?
- C. **Level of Commitment from Local Government** –How do your local government leaders (elected and appointed officials) feel about smart growth?
- D. **Support and Participation of Developers** –Do you have local developers (or developers in nearby communities) who understand and want to build smart growth projects?
- E. **Support and Participation of Community Groups** – Are the major civic groups in your community supportive of smart growth?
- F. **General Perception and Community Assets** – How does the majority of the community feel about smart growth? Are there examples of smart growth or traditional neighborhoods that are valued by your community?
- G. **Market Conditions and Demand for Smart Growth** – Is your community growing or losing population? Is there a demand for walkable neighborhoods?
- H. **Fiscal Considerations and Constraints** – Do current fiscal considerations or constraints make a good case for adopting smart growth principles?

- I. **Regional Growth Issues** – Are there regional growth issues that directly impact your community?
- J. **Catalytic Projects** – Are there major projects coming to your community that you can leverage to bring smart growth?

Each section will have a general question followed by several sub-questions that look into specific issues in your community. The sub-questions will be listed in the first of three columns.

Answer each sub-question using the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> columns. Use the 2<sup>nd</sup> column to answer the sub-question with a summary of your observations about *the current status of that issue in your community*.

Use the 3<sup>rd</sup> column to answer the sub-question with a *list of opportunities connected to that issue* in your community. Also list possible *ways to leverage that issue to build support* and bring your community closer to its vision of smarter growth. Try to write your answers in the last column as actionable items. (e.g., "*Do this...*")

The next pages show examples of how you might respond to the questions.

*Visit [www.smartgrowthtoolkit.net](http://www.smartgrowthtoolkit.net) for more resources and links to other helpful sites.*

## Examples

Here's an example of how your community might answer Sections A to I

**What are the major problems/issues in the community? What events (threats, opportunities) create urgency to act?**

	<b>What is the current status?</b>	<b>What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?</b>
<b>1. What is the biggest source of change in the community?</b>	<i>Growing traffic congestion. Community <u>does not</u> recognize the linkage between growing traffic congestion <u>and</u> sprawl.</i>	<i>Opportunity to change how the issue is talked about in the local media. The debate should not just be about the road budget but how our communities don't encourage walking or biking.</i>
<b>2. How are people reacting to the issues and how do you want them to react?</b>	<i>People are asking for better traffic management/road expansion. The community <u>is ambivalent about</u> land use decisions that lessen automobile dependency</i>	<i>Change the discussion about traffic congestion so the community supports land use decisions to reduce car use (by providing options). 1) Write more articles in the local paper making the connection between land use and dependence on cars. 2) Make presentations to various groups and clubs (i.e. Rotary, Kiwanis)</i>

*Use the **Smart Growth Quick Diagnostic** to see which other tools might help you after you complete the **Smart Growth Strategy Builder**.  
You can download all of the Smart Growth Implementation Tools from [www.smartgrowtoolkit.net](http://www.smartgrowtoolkit.net).*

**A. URGENCY OF ISSUES**

What are the major problems/issues in the community? What events (threats, opportunities) create urgency to act?

	<b>What is the current status?</b>	<b>What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*</b>
<b>1. What is the biggest source of change in the community? If there are several, which ones seem the most urgent?</b>		
<b>2. How are people reacting to the issues?</b>		
<b>3. What are the issues that the local papers/local media seem to focus on?</b>		
<b>4. How are these issues connected to land use, transportation and smart growth?</b>		
<i>*What are the action steps? Prioritize the steps.</i>		

**B. STRENGTH OF LEADERSHIP**

Where is the leadership on smart growth coming from?

	What is the current status?	What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*
5. Are there leaders in the business community calling for smart growth? <sup>2</sup>		
6. Are there leaders in the non-profit and civic community calling for smart growth? <sup>2</sup>		
7. Are there leaders in the local government (elected or appointed) calling for smart growth? <sup>2</sup>		
8. Among the elected officials, how many are for smart growth and how strong are their commitments? <sup>1</sup>		
9. Are the smart growth proponents engaging these leaders directly?		
10. Which sectors (business, local government, non-profit, civic) are in the best position to move the smart growth forward?		

<sup>1</sup> List these leaders if you can.

	What is the current status?	What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*
11. Who are the key constituents –the base of support for smart growth?		
12. What efforts are in place to broaden the support?		
13. What issues can you use to broaden the support?		
14. Where is the opposition coming from and who is leading the opposition?		
<i>*What are the action steps? Prioritize the steps.</i>		

**C. LEVEL OF COMMITMENT FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

How deep and strong is your community’s political commitment to smart growth? It might feel easy to say that this commitment is there, but think about the following questions:

	What is the current status?	What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*
15. Has a compelling alternative to traditional growth patterns been presented or discussed within your community? How was it received?		
16. Are your elected officials willing to take the lead in helping to put smart growth projects on the ground?		
17. Are your senior staff members (city manager, county CEO, department heads) willing to take the lead in order to change practices and put smart growth projects on the ground? Do they have the staff and budget to devote to these efforts?		
<i>*What are the action steps? Prioritize the steps.</i>		

Also Consider:

- Are there existing or past efforts to implement smart growth? How are they regarded? (Successes or failures?)
- Have any attempts to address these issues failed in the recent past? If so, why?

**D. SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION OF DEVELOPERS**

How receptive are your developers to smart growth ideas?

	What is the current status?	What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*
18. Have local developers participated in the process that created new policies or a new vision?		
19. If the answer to the question above is "yes" – What was their reaction/opinion of the process and the product?		
20. Are local developers knowledgeable about smart growth?		
21. Are there local developers who have the knowledge and expertise to get smart growth projects off the ground?		
<i>*What are the action steps? Prioritize the steps.</i>		

*NOTE: If the answer to c) and/or d) is "no," are they open to the learning from developers in other locales with more experience?*

**E. SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION OF COMMUNITY GROUPS**

How receptive are your community and citizen groups to smart growth ideas?

	What is the current status?	What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*
22. Have local community groups participated in the process that created new policies or a new vision?		
23. If the answer to the question above is "yes" – What was their reaction/opinion of the process and the product?		
24. Is smart growth seen as a way to restrain/block growth? <sup>2</sup>		
25. Are there neighborhoods that want smart growth? Are they receptive to improving their existing development patterns?		
26. Do the community and citizen groups know how to have a constructive dialogue with developers about how to shape new growth and new development projects?		

<sup>2</sup> Is the local discussion about smart growth becoming a cover for "no growth" or exclusion?

	What is the current status?	What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*
<p><b>27. Are there trusted organizations that can act as intermediaries to facilitate a more cooperative development process? (Including government entities, non-profits or business organizations.)</b></p>		
<p><b>28. Are there good examples of successful momentum or collaboration in the region? Are smart growth leaders citing those examples? (This may not even have to do with land use – it’s just a question about what works in getting people to collaborate.)</b></p>		
<p><i>*What are the action steps? Prioritize the steps.</i></p>		

**F. GENERAL PERCEPTION AND COMMUNITY ASSETS**

Are there existing assets in the community or the region that are good examples of smart growth?

	<b>What is the current status?</b>	<b>What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*</b>
<b>29. Are any of the characteristic elements of smart growth already present in established districts in your community (e.g. central business district, original neighborhoods)?</b>		
<b>30. If yes, how are these elements valued by district residents? By the community as a whole?</b>		
<b>31. Are there successful on-the-ground examples of smart growth projects nearby? Is your community aware of these projects?</b>		
<b>32. Are there iconic projects (well-loved buildings, historic districts, old mills needing restoration and re-use) in the community? Have you linked these places/buildings to the issues of smart growth?</b>		
<i>*What are the action steps? Prioritize the steps.</i>		

**G. MARKET CONDITIONS AND DEMAND FOR SMART GROWTH**

Do local real estate market conditions lend themselves to a smart growth approach? Is the area fast growing? Steady? Shrinking in population? What are the rents? The demographics? These factors play an important role in determining what steps will work. Although most of these factors may be outside your community's control, it is important to consider them in your strategy.

	<b>What is the current status?</b>	<b>What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*</b>
<b>33. Is demand for real estate development strong? What are the characteristics (age, family size) of most people moving into or leaving the area?</b>		
<b>34. Does there appear to be a market in your community for projects such as town homes, multi-family and condominium housing, and Main Street retail? If so, how strong and how well established is this market segment?</b>		
<b>35. Is your local community land-constrained in any way? Is it built-out within its borders or surrounded by greenbelts or other land that is off-limits for development?</b>		
<i>*What are the action steps? Prioritize the steps.</i>		

**H. FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS**

Do current fiscal considerations or constraints argue for adoption of smart growth principles? Will smart growth projects help to maximize returns from existing infrastructure investments (schools, roads, water, sewer)?

	What is the current status?	What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*
36. Do current development standards encourage the efficient (and economical) construction and use of infrastructure? <sup>3</sup>		
37. Do current development standards consider the costs of (extending) fire and police protection, public transit and garbage collection?		
38. Do current development standards consider school location and school capacity?		
39. Does infrastructure in developed areas have unused capacity? Will it be used more efficiently if infill development were encouraged?		
40. Will new development support itself or require a		

<sup>3</sup> Include decisions on school siting and school investments.

	What is the current status?	What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*
public subsidy? Do current development standards ensure that fees and/or tax receipts will be sufficient to operate and maintain the required infrastructure?		
41. Do current development standards provide enough flexibility so that the local economy can respond to changing economic conditions and market demands?		
42. Is the productivity of resource land (e.g. agricultural, scenic, environmental recharge areas) threatened by encroaching development? Is conversion of agricultural or scenic resources adversely affecting the economy of the region?		
<i>*What are the action steps? Prioritize the steps.</i>		

## I. REGIONAL GROWTH ISSUES

Are there regional growth issues that directly impact your community?

	What is the current status?	What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*
43. Is there a large geographical feature (i.e., a river, lake, or national park) that is threatened by unchecked growth? (including pollution or runoff)		
44. How does the local community feel about this shared natural resource?		
45. Are there growth (or growth management) related issues at the regional level?		
46. How are local smart growth leaders addressing or connecting these regional issues?		
47. How does the local community feel about these regional growth issues?		
48. Are there regional or state level smart growth advocates? Are local leaders working with the regional advocates?		

**J. CATALYTIC PROJECTS**

The campaign to implement smart growth can often be anchored by the presence of or the possibility of catalytic projects that may energize the community. The following questions point to those possible projects. If the answer to the question on the left is "yes" – how are smart growth leaders leveraging these issues? What actions can they take to leverage these issues?

	<b>What is the current status?</b>	<b>What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*</b>
<b>49. Are there “catalytic” public works projects in the planning or design stages that could be used to set the table for smart ? (e.g., roads, transit projects, parks, convention centers, sports arenas, etc.)</b>		
<b>50. Are there major local government-controlled parcels of land (or state-parcels that you might get first crack at) that could be used to catalyze redevelopment? (e.g., surplus schools, hospitals, obsolete facilities, properties in tax-arrears)</b>		

	What is the current status?	What are the opportunities? How can you leverage these opportunities?*
<p><b>51. Are there major governmental or institutional players in town that have significant landholdings and/or will need new facilities? Some examples include county or state agencies, universities, medical centers, research institutes, even private sector owners of large land holdings such as an underperforming strip shopping center, mall or stadium. Could these serve as a catalytic project?</b></p>		
<p><i>*What are the action steps? Prioritize the steps.</i></p>		