Smart Growth Audit Summary

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Smart Growth Implementation Toolkit
Growing Smarter

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 to find more resources available for download as well as links to other helpful sites.
The Goals of Smart Growth

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

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.

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You can download all these tools from www.smartgrowthtoolkit.net
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About the Smart Growth Code 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. It will help you to list the changes needed in policies and the changes needed in regulations (codes and zoning) to help your community achieve its vision for smarter growth.

The Summary will also help you compile the findings of the audits so you can:

- Identify the documents (including sections) that contain the policies or codes that need to be improved or changed;
- Identify the agency responsible for implementing changes in the document; and,
- Identify the decision-making body that is in charge of reviewing and approving the changes (like the county commission, or the planning review board or the city commission).

About its use
Use this tool only if you have conducted partial or complete audits using both the Smart Growth Policy Audit and the Smart Growth Code and Zoning Audit.

If you used only one of the Audit tools, then the summary provided at the end of each tool will be enough to help you collate your audit findings. If you used both Audits, then transfer your findings from each tool to this Audit Summary.

Organization
This form is organized into ten (10) sections representing the Ten (10) Principles of Smart Growth.

Each section will declare the relevant principle and explain why that principle is important to our communities.

Each section will ask you to list the changes needed in policies and the changes needed in regulations (codes and zoning). It will also ask you for the relevant documents (the documents containing the policies or regulations that need changing), the lead agency (which agency is responsible for implementing changes in the document), and the decision-making body (i.e. – the county commission, or the planning review board or the city commission.)

Note: the numbers in the first column are there for your convenience. You should list as many items as you need and not be constrained by the numbering.

Some caveats
The audit tools are 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 areas for improvement.

Visit the www.smartgrowthtoolkit.net
to find more resources and links to other helpful sites.