

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** October 16, 2000

## **Americans Want Growth and Green; Demand Solutions to Traffic, Haphazard Development**

*Smart Growth America poll results to be released as elections approach*

**CONTACT:** Alex Goldschmidt, Smart Growth America, (202) 207-3355 x112, [agoldschmidt@smartgrowthamerica.org](mailto:agoldschmidt@smartgrowthamerica.org)

*Washington, DC* – Fed up with traffic gridlock worsened by runaway sprawl, Americans favor "smart growth" to reduce traffic congestion, preserve existing communities and protect the environment and open space, according to a new national poll. These findings, released today in a report showing strong public concern about land-wasting development or sprawl, suggest that the average American is ahead of many public officials in supporting solutions to sprawl.

Commissioned by Smart Growth America, a new nationwide coalition of over 60 public interest groups, the poll shows that 78 percent of Americans support policies to curb sprawl, the haphazard and wasteful development that is damaging the environment and draining resources from established communities. Over 80 percent of respondents think government should give priority to maintaining services and infrastructure in established communities before subsidizing new sprawl. Over 80 percent also favor more cooperation on growth management among local governments, creating zones for green space and farmland, and tax incentives to renovate older houses and revitalize economically depressed neighborhoods.

The report also cites other evidence that Americans' attitudes towards growth are changing: rapid growth in the use of public transportation, strong voter support for smart growth ballot measures, and increased demand for housing in cities and close-in suburbs. For a copy of the report and the poll results, go to [www.smartgrowthamerica.org](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org).

The poll shows that Americans support the policies that can curb sprawl: 66 percent of respondents said they support requiring all new residential development to have at least 15 percent affordable homes. And 60 percent of respondents favor investing more in public transit even if it reduces funding available for highway construction. Seventy-seven percent support making neighborhoods more pedestrian-friendly instead of building new highways.

"We've definitely touched a nerve," said Don Chen, director of the Washington-

based Smart Growth American coalition. "People believe that sprawl and traffic are out of control, and the vast majority want more open space, reliable public transit and neighborhood reinvestment. All the evidence shows that Americans support smarter growth, and our elected officials better start paying attention."

The survey shows that Americans strongly support the implementation of "smart growth" in their state, which was defined in the poll as "giving priority to improving services, such as schools, roads, affordable housing and public transportation in existing communities, rather than encouraging new housing and commercial development and new highways in the countryside."

Despite strong public support for curbing sprawl, most regions of the country have yet to update building and zoning codes to promote more productive land use, something supported by a growing number of developers and financiers who are frustrated at obsolete policies that thwart smart growth practices.

"There are many places where smart growth is virtually impossible due to antiquated land-use laws," said Jonathan Rose, a smart growth developer from New York and a board member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, The Enterprise Foundation, and the Natural Resources Defense Council, three members of Smart Growth America. "Communities should put in place the rules that will enable the kind of development they want and that will clearly limit the type of development they don't wish to proceed."

But achieving smart growth won't be easy. Funding to support affordable housing programs is severely deficient nationwide and the supply of affordable homes lags behind current demand. Investment in public transit—a key component of smarter growth—falls far behind spending to build new roads, even though use of public transportation has grown nearly twice as fast as driving since 1996.

"We need to ensure that all levels of government coordinate efforts to achieve smarter growth," said Chen. "In addition to a committed citizenry and business community, smart growth needs support from our elected leaders."

In September 2000, Smart Growth America commissioned the opinion research firm Belden, Russonello & Stewart to conduct a geographically balanced telephone poll among 1,007 adults aged 18 or older. The results were then weighted by gender, age, region and race to achieve a representative sample.

The Smart Growth America poll follows a 1999 survey by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, which found that Americans rank traffic and urban sprawl as their #1 local concern, tied with crime and ahead of jobs and education.

**Smart Growth America** is the only national organization dedicated to researching, advocating for and leading coalitions to bring smart growth practices to more communities nationwide. From providing more sidewalks to ensuring more homes are built near public transit or that productive farms remain a part of our communities, smart growth helps make sure people across the nation can live in great neighborhoods. For additional information, please visit [www.smartgrowthamerica.org](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org).

# # #