



Smart Growth and Community Development: The Rural Context

New Partners for Smart Growth
Seattle, Washington

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When you've seen one rural community...
You've seen one rural community.

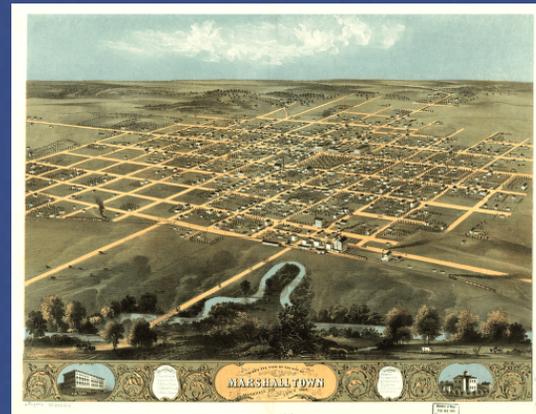


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Historic rural form: determined by economic necessity and transportation technology

- Small towns in rural areas served the agriculture economy
- Were mixed use, compact, walkable **and** many had regional transportation (RR or river transport)
- Form varied by region



Marshall Town, IA



Kingman, KS

Changing rural America

- Economy, culture, transportation has changed
- If historical rural had some homogeneity, that's clearly changed;
- Proximity to metro areas defines what's going on in rural America as much as anything today...
- 1/3 of rural counties are declining; 2/3 are growing
- ... And what else?
 - The need for economic diversity
 - The need for expanded choices in where to live, how to get around, where to work



Old rural economy?

Images: US EPA



Part of the new rural economy?

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Source: B. Winchester, Center for Small Towns; US Census



What are some of the issues and challenges small towns and rural communities?

- How to grow AND maintain small town/rural character?
- Is there capacity – people and funding – to get the policies right?
- Are new policies – the right policies – politically possible? Do leaders want to lead?
- What's the local economy like? It's certainly not what it was when the small town or city was founded.
- Land and Place: How can the people who want to stay on their land do so?
- What are the transportation policies and investments that will allow for growth and the maintenance of the small town/rural character?

Strategies for better growth in small towns and rural areas:

- 1. Support the rural landscape:** Create an economic climate that enhances the viability of working lands and conserves natural lands.
- 2. Help existing places to thrive:** Take care of assets and investments such as downtowns, infrastructure, and places that the community values.
- 3. Create great new places:** Build vibrant, enduring neighborhoods and communities that people, especially young people, don't want to leave.



To support the rural landscape, communities have:

- Supported the resource economy in the region: promoting CSA and farmers markets; local products, and direct sales.
- Cultivated economic development strategies supportive of the traditional rural landscape; used conservation easements, purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, and tax policy to protect the land.
- Strategically purchase threatened and endangered properties and/or development rights.



Image: USDA



Image: US EPA

To help existing towns thrive, communities have:

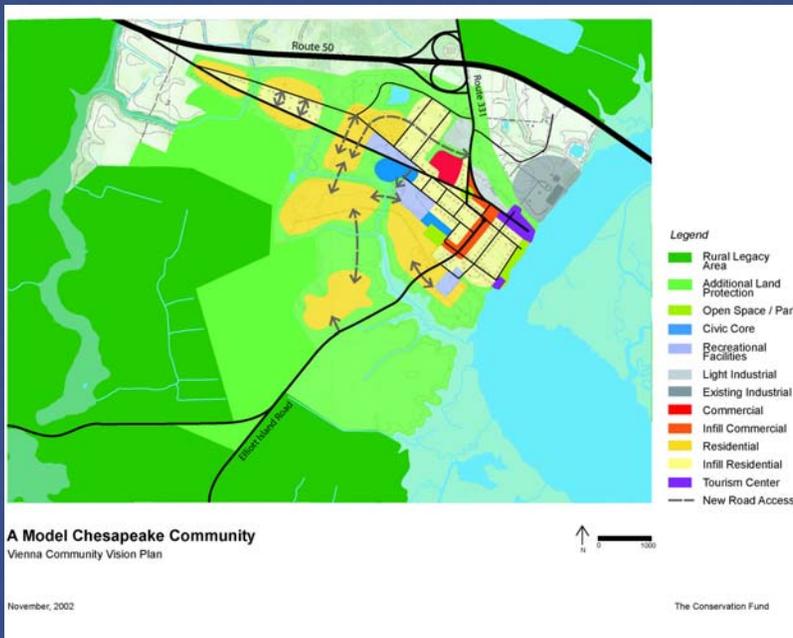


- Reduced barriers to infill and brownfield redevelopment.
- Updated zoning ordinances and development codes to support traditional mixed use development.
- Adopted “fix-it-first” policies, such as rehabilitating existing schools and the Main Street Approach™

Image Source: US EPA

To promote the development of great new places, communities have:

- Created comprehensive plans that call for the development of traditional villages and hamlets in appropriate places *and* aligned the underlying zoning with these plans.
- Recognized developers that build great places.
- Where possible, accommodated growth through the expansion of the historic grid so new neighborhoods are integrated into the existing town.



Vienna, MD: Model Chesapeake Community



Image Source: Vienna, MD





Photo courtesy of Jeff Speck, NEA

Smart growth in a rural community: How could it work in the landscape?

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The game has evolved in 2009: Partnership for Sustainable Communities

Mission: To meet the President's challenge for our agencies to work together to encourage and fully assist rural, suburban, and urban areas to build sustainable communities, and to make sustainable communities the leading style of development in the United States.

The Partnership is focused on ensuring that federal investments, policies, and actions do not subsidize sprawl and, instead, support development in more efficient and sustainable locations.



Partnership for Sustainable Communities



SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP

What we want to do: Increase All Community Benefits

- Reduce household transportation costs.
- Attract private investment.
- Avoid infrastructure costs.
- Strengthen neighborhood property values.
- Protect farmland and open space.
- Deliver equitable investments.
- Improve public health and mobility for all ages.



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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP

What we want to do:

Strengthen Our Rural Communities

- Jobs and affordable homes are often far apart, especially in resort towns
- Best farm land and treasured open space under pressure from development
- Strong rural towns protect our landscapes, heritage, and the rural way of life
- Nearly 50% of EPA brownfield grants each year go to rural communities.



Partnership work affords a broader conversation on smart growth in rural America



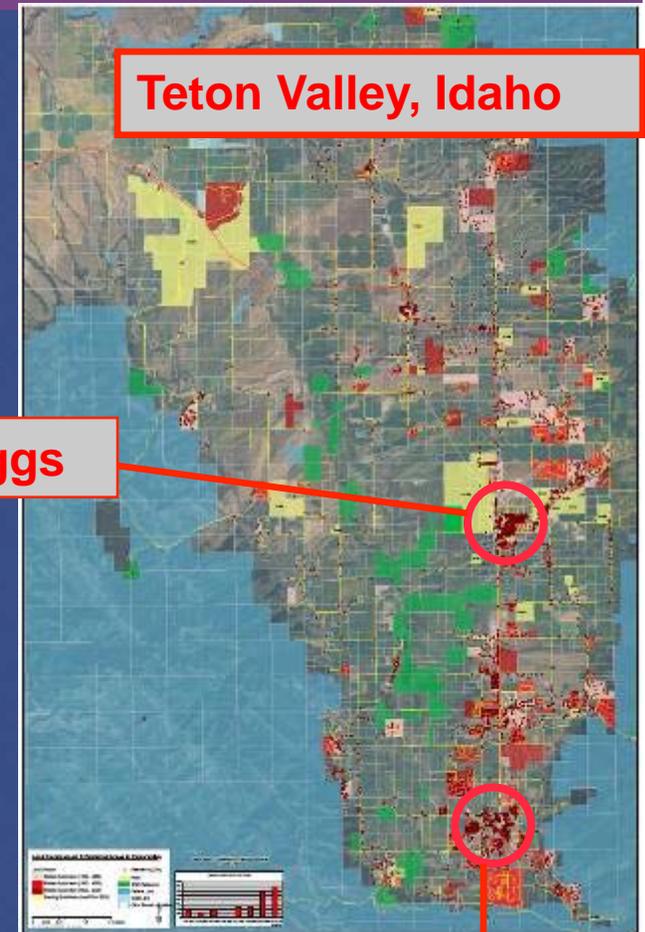


Transportation: Intra-city/Inter-city? Intra-town/Inter-town?

- Intra:
 - Mobility, pedestrian environment, bike-able, land development pattern, transit if density and population supports
 - Mixed uses and compact development are transportation solutions
- Inter:
 - Economic necessity: Greenwood, MS and trunk rail
 - Economic choice: Commuters, recreation, tourism: Teton County, Idaho, Ogunquit, Maine

Smart Growth assistance in Victor and Driggs, Idaho, 2006

- Rapidly growing cities in Teton Valley, Idaho (pop. ~1300 each)
- Accommodate growth in the cities:
 - Articulate the vision: community wants a thriving, revitalized downtown and development that respects the land
 - Revise policies and codes to allow for compact, mixed-use development
 - Strategic public investment



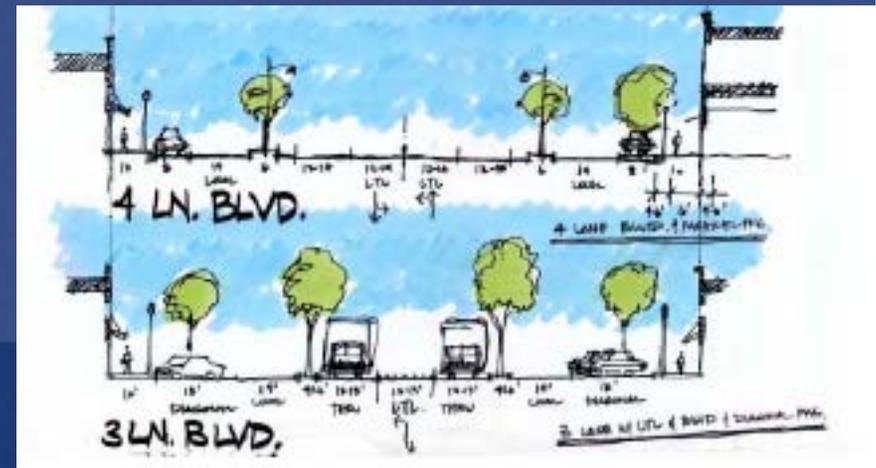
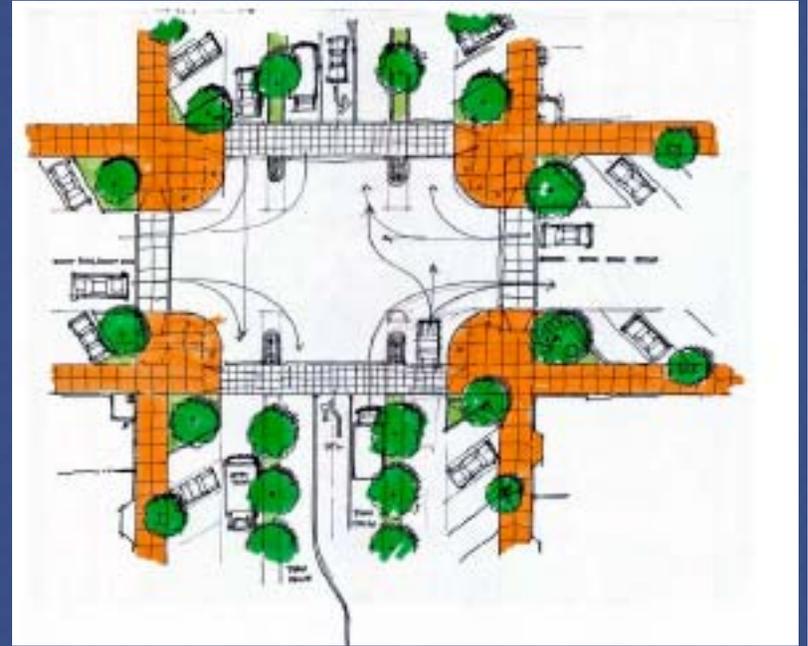
Transportation challenges: Within a community Victor, Idaho

- State highways in downtowns create challenges:
 - Traffic
 - Noise
 - Pedestrian safety
 - Economic development



One solution

- Public investments in road infrastructure can support community goals AND address challenges created by state highways in downtowns
- Boulevards can separate local and through traffic, provide pedestrian refuges, and help create attractive places for ground floor retail



Can we work with USDA?

Waverly, Iowa: Scoping Smart Growth Assistance

- Policy priorities we've heard from Waverly's leaders:
 - Establish green infrastructure strategies city-wide.
 - Conduct an audit of Waverly's development regulations to identify opportunities to integrate smart growth concepts.
 - Increase housing options and infill strategies in Waverly to accommodate the demand for housing as a result of the floods as well as new growth
- Pending upcoming discussions with Waverly, assistance work will occur this spring



Committed to the future of rural communities.

The logo for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), consisting of the word "FEMA" in a large, blue, serif font.



The logo for the state of Iowa, featuring the word "IOWA" in a large, blue, serif font above the phrase "life | changing" in a smaller, orange, sans-serif font.

Partnering with other agencies in rural America: USDA Rural Development

- Working with USDA Rural Development
 - Scoping technical assistance projects
 - Looking for places that Agency/Department goals overlap in support of SG/sustainable community outcomes
 - Transfer of knowledge and expertise between/among staff
- What have we learned?
 - USDA has a big footprint in rural America (infrastructure and people resources)
 - Policies and spending criteria can work with or against SG/Sustainable outcomes.



Thank You

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www.epa.gov/smartgrowth

www.smartgrowth.org



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