

# School Buildings and Community Building



Matthew Dalbey, Ph.D.  
U.S. EPA Office of Sustainable Communities

# What's a Sustainable Community?

*An urban, suburban or rural community that has more housing and transportation choices, is closer to jobs, shops or schools, is more energy independent and helps protect clean air and water.*

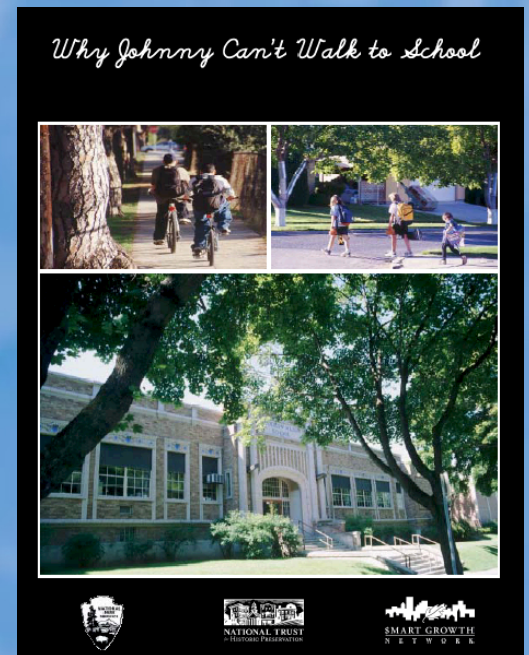


# Let's Establish a Baseline for this Discussion

- Something we can and should all agree on: Schools should provide students with a safe healthy place to get a good education.
- This is their primary goal.
- But...having established that, there is room for discussion.

# School siting and communities over time

- Schools and neighborhoods were interconnected – schools at centers of communities solved transportation challenges:
- Economic, social, cultural, and transportation changes impacted this (this is a long discussion!);
- Result: larger schools, far from communities they serve, abandonment of existing schools (compounding disinvestment in older communities), reliance on automobile and school buses for transport (both have significant fiscal impacts).



# What's the Connection? Schools & Community

- Schools both affect and respond to community growth.
- Schools are a major financial investment that the entire community bears.
- Schools can either work with or against a wide variety of community goals.



# School Investments Influence Community Goals

- Children's health
- Fiscal health of local and state government
- Open space and farmland preservation
- Traffic congestion
- Environmental goals – air quality, water quality, climate change
- Revitalization of downtown and existing neighborhoods
- Community character
- Social equity



## Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 Sec. 502. Model Guidelines for Siting of School Facilities.

Not later than 18 months after the date of enactment of this section, the Administrator, in consultation with the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall issue voluntary school site selection guidelines that account for—

- (1) the special vulnerability of children to hazardous substances or pollution exposures in any case in which the potential for contamination at a potential school site exists;**
- (2) modes of transportation available to students and staff;**
- (3) the efficient use of energy; and
- (4) the potential use of a school at the site as an emergency shelter.

## Stakeholder Process & Timeline

- December 2008 thru June 2009, EPA developed draft guidelines
- July 2009 -- Outside stakeholder group convened under Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee (CHPAC)
- April 7, 2010 – CHPAC letter to the Administrator transmitting School Siting Task Group (SSTG) report
- November 17, 2010 – 90 day public comment period
  - Received public comments Spring 2011
  - Incorporated and processed comments Spring and Summer 2011
- Final guidelines released Fall 2011



# Public health as the focus of equity and community in school siting decision making

- Top aim of the guidelines: Give communities a wide variety of tools to help them consider environmental impacts of school siting;
- Public health considerations come from a variety of sources – from the site itself to its location to the impact of public investments in schools on communities;
- From a sustainable community perspective, there is no tolerance for schools being built on contaminated sites.

# Public comments and incorporating concerns with the early drafts

- We heard:
  - Concerns that the guidelines did not include buffer zones;
  - Smart growth principles were privileged over environmental concerns.
- Final guidelines:
  - Expand the conversation about schools siting;
  - Suggest screening perimeters for assessing environmental concerns;
  - Grounded location in improved public health outcomes for school children and communities.