Saving the World Through Zoning – Small Town Success Stories

New Partners for Smart Growth
Baltimore, MD

January 30, 2015
Presentation objectives

• Explore the evolving relationship between planning, zoning and smart growth outcomes in small city and rural America.

• Understand the range of options available to small cities to achieve smart growth objectives and how to successfully engage community stakeholders to bring about regulatory reform.

• Learn how to find the “low hanging fruit” of regulatory reform in your community.
Smart Growth

**Smart growth** means building urban, suburban and rural communities with housing and transportation choices near jobs, shops and schools.

These strategies **support thriving local economies** and protect the environment.
What I hear about smart growth
Smart growth is ugly.

Riomaggiore, Italy
We have no history with it.
Nobody would want to live there.
It just doesn’t work here.

Pearl District, Portland, OR
Shut up and drive!
“Trend is not destiny.”
-Lewis Mumford
As a national leader in the field, Smart Growth America has accumulated extensive experience working with communities across the nation.
Smart Growth America providing free technical assistance

- We are now offering technical assistance to local communities interested in building stronger local economies and realizing fiscal cost savings while protecting human health and the environment.
Smart Growth America providing free technical assistance

- This assistance helps local leaders in urban, suburban and rural communities create local smart growth strategies that make sense for your community.
## 12 Smart Growth Tools

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Pittsburgh, PA

- Sustainable Land Use Code Audit
- BIG ideas
- Energy conservation/alternative energy
- Green infrastructure and stormwater management
- Housing diversity and choice
Derry Township, PA

- Smart Growth Zoning Code for Small Cities
- BIG ideas
- Energy conservation/alternative energy
- Green infrastructure and stormwater management
- Housing diversity and choice
Unnamed Place

- Implementing Smart Growth 101
- Lessons learned
Sustainable Land Use Code Audit
3 Basic Steps

1. **Inventory** of sustainability topics, policies, and goals,
2. **Audit** of existing code and ordinance provisions, and
3. **Priority** amendment selection.
1. Inventory

Taking Stock:

What Does Sustainability Mean To Your Community And What Are Key Goals?

GHG reductions?  Save energy?  Green businesses?
Reduce vehicle miles?  Renewable energy?
Provide housing diversity?  Recycling?
Food production/community gardens?
Natural resource protection?
1. Inventory

Sample topics might include:

• climate change
• alternative energy and conservation
• urban agriculture/farmland conservation
• recycling/waste reduction
• water quality/conservation
• community health
1. Inventory

Sources for Community Policies and Goals
In Key Sustainability Areas:
• Comprehensive plan/city master plan
• Neighborhood plans
• Climate action plan
• Housing plan
• Parks, trails, open space, and recreation plan
• Other
1. Inventory

Three Policy Inventory Options:

• Create new comprehensive plan with sustainability focus
• Distill sustainability policies and goals from existing plans
• Add new sustainability chapter to comprehensive plan
1. Inventory

Product: Summary of community sustainability goals

• 2-3 pages per topic
• List of references and sources
• Perspectives from staff and stakeholders
2. Diagnosis—Assessing Your Codes and Regulations

Think B-I-G!

- **B**arriers to sustainability
- **I**ncentives to promote sustainability
- **G**aps in the code
2. Diagnosis

Methodical chapter-by-chapter assessment of zoning code:
• Definitions
• Purpose statements
• Zone districts and use tables
• Accessory uses and non conforming uses
• Specially planned and planned unit developments
• Dimensional standards
• Supplemental regulations – lighting, home occupations, etc.
2. Diagnosis

DON’T FORGET...Other regulations related to land use:

- Subdivision regulations
- Design review standards
- Historic preservation code and guidelines
- Landscape and tree protection regulations
- Streets and public works specifications
- Utility department regulations – water, sewer, electricity
- Building and energy codes
2. Diagnosis

B) Diagnose the Code - Think B-I-G

- Find Barriers to sustainability
- Create Incentives to encourage sustainability
- Fill regulatory Gaps

![Diagnosis: Open Space, Parks, and Trails table]

- **Potential zoning revisions**
- **National best practices**
2. Diagnosis

Sources for best practices:

• U.S. EPA web site and publications
• RMLUI Model Sustainable Development Code
• LEED For Neighborhood Development (US Green Building Council)
• Nearby communities’ experience and legislation
• Research by other communities (Tucson, Miami-Dade County, Salt Lake City)
3. Priorities

Setting Priorities for Code Amendments and Revisions

What should we amend first?
3. Priorities

A) Set priorities

• Staff driven with direction from elected officials, focus groups, surveys, etc.
• What will make the most difference to achieve my community goals? What is politically attainable?
• Are there “low-hanging fruit” amendments that can be showcased as early successes?
• What are potential costs and benefits?
3. Priorities

Product: List of 20-30 priority code amendments

- Set timelines and goals for amendment adoption
- Full sweep of code amendments?
- Organize in achievable “bundles” of code revisions?
- Strategic multi-year approach?
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This technical assistance program is funded under a grant from US EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities through their Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program

http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/buildingblocks.htm
We have the freedom to make informed, humane, and intelligent choices about the kind of world we want to leave for our children and grandchildren. We also have the freedom to make uninformed, selfish, and stupid choices. Which will it be? - Greg Pahl
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