Smart Growth Principles of Development

What is smart growth?

Smart growth is an approach to development that encourages a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and community engagement. The 10 principles below are considered the foundation of a smart growth approach — click on each principle to learn more.

1. Mix land uses

Mixing land uses means building homes, offices, schools, parks, shops, restaurants, and other types of development near one another—on the same block or even within the same building. Mixed land uses bring more people to a neighborhood at a variety of times of day, which can support businesses, improve safety, and enhance the vitality of an area. Mixing land uses also makes it possible for people to live closer to where they work or run errands and means they don't need to drive a car to get there. Mixed-use neighborhoods are in-demand, meaning this approach can boost property values and keep them stable, protecting the investment of homeowners as well as tax revenues for municipalities.

2. Take advantage of compact design

Compact design means making more efficient use of land that has already been developed. Encouraging development to grow up, rather than out, is one way to do this. Infill development—building on empty or underutilized lots—is another. Building within an existing neighborhood can attract more people to the jobs, homes, and businesses already there while also making the most of public investments in things like water and sewer lines, roads, and emergency services.

3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices

Building quality housing for families of all life stages and income levels is an integral part of a smart growth approach. Housing constitutes a significant share of new construction and development in any city, but its economic importance is sometimes overlooked. Adding housing in commercial districts can breathe new life into these neighborhoods in evenings and on weekends. And more importantly, the housing options available in a community will influence families' economic opportunities, costs of living, and how much time they spend commuting each day. Diversifying housing options within existing neighborhoods can give everyone more choices about where to live.

4. Create walkable neighborhoods

Walkable neighborhoods are in high demand across the country and it's hardly a mystery why. Walking is a convenient, affordable, and healthy way to get around that never goes out of style—so long as people can do it safely and conveniently. Walkable places are created in part by mixing land uses and taking advantage of compact design, but are activated by smart street design that makes walking not only practical but safe and convenient to enjoy.

5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place

Unique, interesting places that reflect the diverse values, culture, and heritage of the people who live there have the greatest staying power. Projects and neighborhoods that incorporate natural

features, historic structures, public art, and placemaking can help distinguish a place from its neighbors to attract new residents and visitors, and support a vibrant community for the people who already live there.

6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas

Preserving open spaces like prairie, wetlands, parks, and farms is both an environmental issue and economic issue. People across the country want access to natural recreation areas, which translates into demand for housing and tourism. Meeting that demand improves a city's ability to attract employers, while also supporting agricultural industries. Preserving open spaces can also make communities more resilient, protecting them from natural disasters, combating air pollution, controlling wind, providing erosion control, moderating temperatures, protecting water quality, and protecting animal and plant habitats.

7. Direct development towards existing communities

Developing within existing communities—rather than building on previously undeveloped land—makes the most of the investments we've already made in roads, bridges, water pipes, and other infrastructure, while strengthening local tax bases and protecting open space. Regulations, zoning, and other public policies sometimes make this approach unnecessarily difficult for developers, however. Local leaders can and should change policy to encourage development within existing neighborhoods.

8. Provide a variety of transportation choices

Providing a variety of transportation choices—high-quality public transportation, safe and convenient biking and walking infrastructure, and well-maintained roads and bridges— helps communities to attract talent, to compete on a global scale, and to improve the day-to-day lives of their residents. To make this happen, elected leaders and transportation agencies must change how they prioritize, select, invest in, build, and measure transportation projects at the local, regional, and nationwide level.

9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective

Developers play a crucial role in how towns and cities are built. Many developers who want to build walkable, urban places but are thwarted by restrictive regulations or complicated approval processes. Municipalities interested in encouraging smart growth development can and should examine their regulations and streamline the project permitting and approval process so that development decisions are more timely, cost-effective, and predictable for developers. By creating a supportive environment for development of innovative, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use projects, government can provide smart growth leadership for the private sector.

10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

Every community has different needs, and meeting those needs requires a different approach from place to place. Communities suffering from disinvestment may need to focus on encouraging development downtown; communities with robust economic growth may need to focus on addressing social equity. The common thread is that the needs of every community and the strategies to address them are best defined by the people who live and work there.

Smart growth is not possible without the perspective of everyone with a vested interest in a town, city, or neighborhood. Smart growth is about building a future for a community that everyone can

participate in, and gathering the ideas, feedback, and support of everyone in a community is the only way to do that. This process is not only inclusive and equitable, it also will give projects built-in support and staying power.

Asset Management

Whether infrastructure is viewed through a holistic economic or a holistic environmental lens, the result is the same: an integrated sustainability vision. Asset management includes maintaining and increasing equipment efficiency and reducing leaks. More sophisticated approaches include extracting value from "waste," like methane and heat from sewage. Most fundamentally, it involves reducing financial liability with *less* infrastructure-intensive, low-density development that can be sustained through existing revenue streams.

In Lions Bay, development based on Smart Growth principles offers the opportunity to enhance the quality of life of Villagers, contribute to supporting a very constrained tax base that is not financially sustainable over the long term, and address the need to take action on climate change. Smart Growth offers the opportunity to replace aging infrastructure (both public and private) by "building back better" at virtually no cost to the Municipality.

Small infill development, including the construction of duplexes and triplexes to replace single family dwellings have negligible impact on our operational costs and the owner pays for connection costs and ongoing usage costs through utilities fees. Because all of our developable areas are within already serviceable distance from our infrastructure, there are no additional assets (eg: water mains, PRV's, etc.) required, with the possible exception of a hydrant here or there.

Even larger multi-family developments within established neighbourhoods (eg: the recently proposed 29 units for 175/185 Kelvin Grove Way) would not add in any significant way to our operational costs as the property owner would've had to pay for the water main upgrade and road restoration so that would've been a clear net benefit to the Municipality.

This kind of thoughtful development is the antithesis of urban sprawl, which admittedly does result in inefficient use of municipal infrastructure resources, with examples provided below:

- A study of land and infrastructure needs for the Central Okanagan over the next forty years found conventional low-density residential development would require 20,645 acres and cost $1.57 billion to service. More compact development would reduce land needs by half and cost $1.04 billion to service.

- A study of two City of Surrey developments found infrastructure in a smart growth development would cost $12,000 per unit less than in a conventional development, based on equivalent average home sizes. The diversity and clustering of housing also decreases land use, land costs and the amount of paved surfaces.

- More compact development costs local governments 30% less than low-density development, according a study of the vast Greater Toronto Area.

- Envision Utah scenario planning process resulted in a compact growth plan that will save the region about $4.5 billion in infrastructure spending, leave 171 square miles of additional open space, and reduce per capita water use by more than 10%.

- Given the disproportionate amount of growth in low density development and increased costs of servicing these areas, a Southwestern Ontario analysis found for every $1 dollar raised in development fees and property taxes $1.40 needs to be spent on servicing.

- The cost of rehabilitating existing local government infrastructure across Canada to an acceptable level of repair, i.e. the accumulated "infrastructure deficit", was estimated to be $36 billion in 2004.

- The BCIT Centre for Infrastructure Management found that improving management and efficiency could reasonably create additional annual financial capacity of $4 to $6 billion within existing Canadian public sector budgets. Approximately half of all public infrastructure in Canada is managed by local government.

**** For a wide range of materials on how Smart Growth principles are essential to helping local governments take effective action on climate change, refer directly to the BC Climate Action Toolkit at: http://www.toolkit.bc.ca/***