

Growing Strong Communities: The rural version of smart growth

New Partners for Smart Growth Conference 2006

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Regions are Growing...

- Current development trends are characterized by low-density housing, farmland conversion, and dependence on cars.
- The US Census estimates that our population will grow by 50 million people by 2020.



Where will these people live?

Development patterns and land conservation

- 80% of residential development occurs on urban fringe or beyond
- 94% of that development on 1 acre or more
- How do we accommodate new growth?



USDA Economic Research Service

Current Patterns of Growth: Urban, Suburban, and Rural

- Low density single family housing
- Separate uses
- Disinvestment in Brownfields and older communities
- Conversion of farmland
- Conflict between land used for production and land used for consumption
- Decline of small towns



Environmental Law and Policy Center

No Single Cause of Current Patterns



Land Use, Regional Growth and Development Affected By:

- **Markets**
- **Federal Policies**
- **State and Regional Policies**
- **Local Laws and Practices**
- **Action of Developers, Lenders**
- **The Public**

With Respect to the Environment, Not All Development is Created Equal

- Development with the following attributes has less environmental impact
 - infill development
 - development on previously developed land
 - compact development
 - mixed use
 - variety of transportation options
 - transit-oriented development
 - places with a balance of jobs and housing
 - places with centers (single or multiple)

Smart Growth Principles

- Mix land uses.
- Take advantage of compact building design.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- Create walkable neighborhoods.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Smart Growth Network

What's going on in rural America

- Definitions
 - Non metropolitan U.S.
 - Places 50k or less
 - Incorporated and non incorporated place 50k or less and self identifiers
- Numbers
 - 2000 census: 55mil
 - 13,000 local govts
 - 2288 counties
 - 83% of U.S. land
 - ~90% incorporated places 10k or less
 - 1/3 rural counties are declining

Source: US Census; USDA ERS

What is rural?

- Much has changed:
 - 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner calls the frontier closed – U.S. evolving into an urban nation
 - 1900, 34% of U.S. citizens lived in urban areas
 - 2000, 80% of U.S. citizens lived in urban areas
 - Economy, culture, transportation has changed
 - If historical rural had some homogeneity, that's clearly changed; in general, though regional difference existed then and still do today
 - Proximity to metro areas defines rural as much as anything today...

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

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** had regional transportation (RR or river transport)
- Form varied by region



Marshall Town, IA



Middletown, CT

Source: Library of Congress, American Memory Collection

Rural Changes (post WW II, really post 1970)

- Baby boom
 - Need for cheap land
 - Rise in auto-use
 - Local regulations
 - Interstate Hwy,
 - Declining cities...
- What does this mean:
 - ~6% rural population lives on farms
 - ~8% of all rural employment is farm
 - Only ~2% rural population is farming as primary occupation
 - Employment is diverse, service sector rising & underemployment a problem

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

Rural land is being converted at an alarming rate

- By 2030, we will build half as much again as we have to date.
- 1982 – 2001 34 million acres of open space converted to developed land
- 1982 to 1997 10 million acres of forest land converted to developed land
- 2030 projections – additional 26 million acres to be developed
- How and where this development takes place will profoundly impact the environment



Image Source: US EPA

Values for smart growth in small towns and rural areas:

Community benefit, fairness, and opportunity

- Grow existing places: take care of assets and investments
- Build great new places – places that young people don't want to leave
- Keep the good things that are part of rural life
 - Preserve rangelands, forests, agriculture lands

Image Source: US EPA



What does smart growth mean in rural areas

- The land: Keep the good things that are part of rural life
 - Working lands that are economically viable
 - Fiscal benefits of open space/ag/forests/range land/historic landscapes
 - Land trusts
 - Purchase development rights
 - Support local ag
 - Diverse economy
 - Conservation



What does smart growth mean in rural areas



Image Source: US EPA

- Existing places: Grow the historic investment
 - Main Street
 - Infill
 - Redevelopment
 - Take advantage of existing infrastructure investments
 - Adapt the local uses

What does smart growth mean in rural areas

- New places: Build places people – young especially – want to stay in
 - Compact, walkable, mixed use
 - Historic connection
 - Form is part of the rural paradigm of places



Rural community types

- Gateway to recreation/tourism
- Resource dependent (farming/natural resources)
- Adjacent to metro areas/edge community
- In the path of growth
- Traditional Main Street
- Second home
- How do we apply introduce smart growth principles?
 - What's driving growth?
 - What's the conventional pattern?
 - What's the smart growth pattern?

Mississippi Main Street Program

Established in 1989.

- Earned the designation as the "nation's #1 Main Street Program."
 - Includes programs for communities whose population is less than 5,000.
 - Program has generated
 - \$1.5 billion in investment
 - 2,900 new businesses
 - 18,500 new jobs



Image Source: US EPA

Making Sure Codes work for Smart Growth



Town of Davidson, NC

- Land Plan and Ordinance reflect smart growth goals:
 - downtown protection and enhancement
 - open space preservation
 - streets designed for all modes
 - silent on density, but strict on design
- Require charrettes for new developments -- community input and buy-in.
- 12.5% of units in new developments must be affordable

Images: US EPA

Albemarle County, Rural Areas Plan and Neighborhood Model for the County's Development Areas

- Neighborhood Model works in concert with Rural Area Planning
 - Encourages development where infrastructure exists
 - Encourages the development of good places when building new (walkable, mixed-use, compact neighborhoods)
 - Protects rural areas by concentrating development capacity in Development Areas

Source: Albemarle County



Land conservation as smart growth tool: What's the strategy?

- *Land Preservation: an essential ingredient in smart growth* (Tom Daniels and Mark Lapping, JPL 2005)
 - Planning should be a combination of "for development" and for preservation
 - In smart growth, 2 strategies work in concert
 - Public interest in land preservation (at the ballot box, etc...)
 - Tools allow for permanent preservation
 - Strategic preservation enhances development, provides fiscal benefits, creates "win win" (TDR)



Cascade Land Conservancy

- Strategic conservation: Cascade Land Conservancy
 - Begin discussion on the connection between conservation and development: *The Cascade Agenda* and *Cascade Dialogues*
 - Bring together local government, land owners, and public to conserve important tracts of land and develop and grow in the right places

Source: Cascade Agenda

CHAPTER 3: THE COMMUNITIES THAT DEFINE US
OUR AGRICULTURAL AND RECREATION LANDS



Our Agricultural Lands

CHAPTER 7: THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT



Introduction

Introduction
The Cascade Land Conservancy is a non-profit organization that works to protect and restore natural resources in the Cascade region of Oregon. The organization is committed to the conservation of land, water, and wildlife, and to the promotion of sustainable development. The organization's work is guided by the following principles: 1) Conservation of natural resources; 2) Promotion of sustainable development; 3) Education and outreach; 4) Collaboration with other organizations and the public.

U.S. Forest Service



Source: US Forest Service

- US Forest Service
- Land development outside of forests impacts forest ("Green line" no longer sufficient)
 - Land conservation and better patterns of development requires cooperation and collaboration
 - USFS is engaging on this issue – not through regulation but by sharing information
 - Publication aimed at state, local, and federal decision makers, foresters, citizens, private forest owners, and conservationists

Current/Next Steps

- What's work leading to...
- Audience: Decision makers, citizen planners, outdoor users
- Product: Primers on rural smart growth
- Organization: Note regional differences and provided tools, resources, policies, and strategies by community type
- Note also the broad strategy:
 - 1) Rebuild existing small towns
 - 2) Compact, mixed use, and walkable new places
 - 3) Preserve/conservate the traditional characteristics of rural life: land, ag, forest, hunting and fishing access, etc..

For more information

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Source: Library of Congress, American Memory Collection
