

TMACOG Growth Strategies Council Principles of Growth Strategies

In 2000, the TMACOG Growth Strategies Council was consulted by TMACOG's Executive Committee to comment on how Facility Planning Areas being drafted by the Environmental Council will impact land use and future development. The Growth Strategies Council did not have a general statement to address the request and endeavored to develop a document that would address this and similar issues and fit in with the mission of the Council. The approach taken was to develop a set of principles that could be consulted and used as guidance during the course of a planning effort to stimulate comprehensive thought on land management/quality of life related issues.

During the next year, the Growth Strategies Council completed a process to create, extensively review and revise, and recommend the Principles of Growth Strategies. Beginning with text published by Smart Growth America, the Council began working on revising the text to better fit the current conditions in Northwest Ohio. The document was comprised of two sections. The first page offers the goals of Smart Growth and page two presents principles to meet those goals. To make these revisions, the Council followed a method called to "Single Text Procedure" led by University of Toledo Professor of Law Robert Hopperton.

In the Single Text Procedure, a document was submitted to Council members for review and, at each meeting, Council members were asked to consider what they found unacceptable in the document and how the text could be modified to meet their approval. After comments are received, the process would begin again at the next meeting with a revised document based on those comments. No votes were taken on the overall document during the review period. This process was repeated until there were no longer any items Council members found unacceptable and had no further suggestions to strengthen the text. A vote was then taken at this time for Growth Strategies Council approval.

On September 21, 2001 a Growth Strategies Summit was held to introduce the Principles of Growth Strategies to the larger community and receive their comments. Attendees were asked to participate in one of three workgroups to discuss the Principles and make recommendations. Group facilitators took notes and reported those comments. The notes were reported to the Growth Strategies Council. No further modifications were made to the document at that time.

Presentations were made to TMACOG's Commuter Services, Environment, and Transportation Councils for their review and endorsement. Each Council voted to approve the Principles of Growth Strategies on November 19th, November 14th, and November 7th respectively. The Principles of Growth Strategies were formally adopted by TMACOG at the General Assembly on January 31, 2002.

In 2003, the Growth Strategies Council revised the Principles to include a seventh goal on public health and the environment. The revised Principles of Growth Strategies were approved by the TMACOG Executive Committee on September 17, 2004.

Smart Growth Gives People More of What They Want

Attitudes towards growth are changing. People increasingly consider sprawl* to be a problem.

Can smart growth really give people what they want?

To answer this question, we must understand exactly what smart growth is and why it is the sensible choice.

Seven Goals of Smart Growth

Defining smart growth by way of its outcomes—outcomes that mirror the basic values of most Americans.

1. Neighborhood Livability

The central goal of any smart growth plan is the quality of the neighborhoods where we live. They should be safe, convenient, attractive, and affordable. Sprawl development too often forces trade-offs between these goals. Some neighborhoods are safe but not convenient. Others are convenient but not affordable. Too many affordable neighborhoods are not safe. Can all these elements be brought together?

2. Better Access & Less Traffic

One of the major outcomes of sprawl is traffic. Putting jobs, homes and other destinations far apart and requiring a car for every trip, sprawl makes everyday tasks a chore. Smart growth's emphasis on mixing land uses, clustering development, and providing multiple transportation choices helps us manage congestion, pollute less and save energy. Those who want to drive can, but people who would rather not drive everywhere or don't own a car have other choices.

3. Thriving Cities, Suburbs, Towns & Agricultural Communities

Smart growth puts the needs of existing communities first. By guiding development to already built-up areas, money for investments in transportation, schools, libraries and other public services can go to the communities where people live today. This is especially important for neighborhoods that have inadequate public services and low levels of private investment. Building a strong urban core will positively impact surrounding communities. It is also critical for preserving what makes so many places special—attractive buildings, historic districts, cultural landmarks, and farms.

4. Ethnic Diversity & Social Equity

Smart growth allows people of all incomes levels and ethnic backgrounds to share the benefits of prosperity. It encourages demographic diversity by emphasizing reinvestment in the urban core and in mixed and lower income areas. Enriching areas of high concentrations of financially challenged minorities infuses development with racial equity and encourages thriving, culturally varied neighborhoods.

5. Lower Costs & Lower Taxes

Sprawl costs money. Opening up green space to new development means that the cost of new schools, roads, sewer lines, and water supplies will be borne by residents throughout metro areas. Sprawl also means families have to own more cars and drive them further. This has made transportation the second highest category of household spending, just behind shelter. Smart growth helps on both fronts. Taking advantage of existing infrastructure keeps taxes down. And where convenient transportation choices enable families to rely less on driving, there's more money left over for other things, like buying a home or saving for college.

6. Keeping Open Space Open

By focusing development in already built-up areas, smart growth preserves rapidly vanishing natural treasures. From forests and farms to wetlands and wildlife, smart growth lets us pass on to our children the landscapes we love. Communities are demanding more parks that are conveniently located and bring recreation within reach of more people. Also, protecting natural resources will provide healthier air and cleaner drinking water. Preserving farmland protects the viability of the agricultural community and the quality of life provided by our rural landscapes.

7. Better Personal Health from a Healthier Environment

Smart growth improves public health by preserving open space, offering alternative transportation choices, and providing a built environment that promotes active living. Sprawl measurably reduces personal health. Increased driving time results in more air pollution and incidence of respiratory disease. Low density development discourages physical activity, contributing to obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Pedestrian safety is compromised and the mobility of elderly, disabled, and low-income residents is restricted. Uncontrolled growth and the loss of green space can also drastically affect both surface and groundwater quality.

How is Smart Growth Achieved?

After years of experience with an assortment of projects, it is becoming apparent that some approaches work best. Though approaches will vary across regions and community types, the fourteen principles listed on the reverse form the basis for a sensible and effective smart growth plan. These goals and principles constitute a "work in progress." They should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis by TMACOG and by communities of the TMACOG region.

*SPRAWL has been defined in a variety of ways including the following:

- Sprawl is dispersed development outside of compact urban and village centers characterized by rates of land development higher than population growth.
- Sprawl is the spread-out, skipped-over development that characterizes the non-central city metropolitan areas and non-metropolitan areas. Sprawl is one- or two-story, single-family residential development on lots ranging in size from one-third of an acre to five acres, accompanied by strip commercial centers and industrial parks, also two stories or less in height and using a similar amount of land.
- Sprawl may include eight components: 1) low residential density; 2) unlimited outward extension of new development; 3) leapfrog development; 4) spatial segregation of different land uses; 5) decentralized land ownership; 6) primacy of automobile transportation; 7) fragmentation of governmental land use authority; and 8) disparity in the fiscal capacity of local government.

Fourteen Principles of Smart Growth

To achieve smart growth, communities should be encouraged to:

1. Mix Land Uses.

New development may work best if it includes a mix of stores, jobs and homes. Single-use districts often make life less convenient and require more driving.

2. Take Advantage of Existing Community Assets.

From local parks to neighborhood schools to transit systems, public investments should focus on getting the most out of what we've already built.

3. Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices.

Not everyone wants the same thing. Communities should offer a range of options: houses, condominiums, affordable homes for low-income families, and "granny flats" for empty nesters.

4. Foster "Walkable," Close-Knit Neighborhoods.

These places offer not just the opportunity to walk—sidewalks are a necessity—but something to walk to, whether it's the corner store, the transit stop or a school. A compact, walkable neighborhood contributes to peoples' sense of community because neighbors get to know each other, not just each other's cars.

5. Promote Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place, Including the Rehabilitation and Use of Historic Buildings.

In every community, there are things that make each place special, from train stations to local businesses. These should be protected and celebrated.

6. Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty, and Critical Environmental Areas.

People want to stay connected to nature and are willing to take action to protect farms, waterways, ecosystems, and wildlife.

7. Strengthen and Encourage Growth in Existing Communities.

Before we plow up more forests and farms, we should look for opportunities to grow in already built-up areas.

8. Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices.

People can't get out of their cars unless we provide them with another way to get where they're going. More communities need safe and reliable public transportation, sidewalks, and bike paths.

9. Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair, and Cost-Effective.

Builders wishing to implement smart growth should face no more obstacles than those contributing to sprawl. In fact, communities may choose to provide incentives for smarter development.

10. Adopt "Smart" Building Codes

Modern building codes can be a barrier to rebuilding older communities. They often require an entire building to be brought up to modern standards before any part of it can be used, forming a barrier to the small businesses and others that are often the leaders in revitalizing older neighborhoods.

11. Encourage Citizen and Stakeholder Participation in Development Decisions.

Plans developed without strong citizen involvement don't have staying power. When people feel left out of important decisions, they won't be there to help out when tough choices have to be made.

12. Acknowledge That They Are Part of a Larger Northwest Ohio Community and That Their Actions Affect Their Neighbors.

Communities at a minimum should consult with and coordinate with other jurisdictions to consider the impacts of land use policies and decisions on the communities and citizens beyond their borders.

13. Solve Disputes Through Mediation or Negotiation Rather Than Through Confrontation and Litigation.

Mediation, negotiation, and other techniques for managing conflicts and resolving disputes offer new opportunities for avoiding the expense and animosity that accompany prolonged rulemaking, tedious appeals, and endless litigation. When conflicts and disputes are being resolved cooperatively, the government role often changes to that of convener and facilitator, and the resourcefulness of citizens in devising common sense solutions can be tapped.

14. Use New Tools to Meet Challenges of Land Use.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other advances in technology also offer new opportunities for improving land use decision making. New computer technologies now make it possible to amass, organize, and present vast amounts of data. GIS, in particular, can map and help monitor natural systems and identify lands suitable for development and conservation. These techniques are already transforming the planning process and should be widely used by both the public and private sectors.