



Smart Growth Principles for the Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Good planning practice should generate patterns of growth that will benefit the people of Greater Boston and the communities where they live. With such growth comes new jobs, opportunities for advancement, homes for people of various incomes, and many other amenities of life.

By contrast, current growth patterns often waste precious resources, degrade the natural and built environment, and exacerbate inequality throughout the region. Over time, this can harm the region's competitiveness and damage many of the characteristics that make Greater Boston a special place to live.

"Smart growth" is designed to promote development while protecting the environment, encouraging social and economic equity, and conserving energy and water resources. Smart growth will refocus a larger share of regional growth within central cities, urbanized areas, near transportation nodes, and in communities already served by infrastructure. It will reduce the share of regional growth that occurs on newly urbanizing land, farms, and environmentally sensitive areas. It will encourage more density in some places, to save precious land in other places. Such principles, if applied conscientiously throughout the region, will promote the long-term sustainability of the Greater Boston area. They will help to ensure that decisions made today do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

As the regional planning agency for Greater Boston, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) adopts the following smart growth principles to guide our work.

1. Encourage community & stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Smart growth should respond to a community's own sense of how and where it wants to grow. The needs of every community and the programs to address them are best defined by the people who live and work there. An open public process that facilitates the participation of community residents and organizations provides community members with a direct stake in ensuring the success of revitalization efforts, and can lead to creative resolution of development issues.

2. Integrate people and place.

Smart growth must integrate **people-focused strategies**—efforts that support community residents and families—with **place-focused strategies**—those that support physical development and stabilize the community environment. This integrated approach is necessary to maximize community impact and to reduce unintended negative consequences to either the community or the environment.

3. Promote regional equity and reduce local and regional disparities.

Everyone wants to live in a community where the quality of life is high. If we cooperate across communities and plan carefully for the future, we can achieve a situation where neighborhoods share fairly in the benefits of development and none bears an unfair burden of the social costs associated with planning decisions. Metropolitan regions and communities that reduce local and regional disparities are more likely to compete successfully for national and international economic opportunities.

4. Strengthen regional cooperation.

Most community assets and problems do not recognize municipal boundaries. Regional cooperation is needed to address common concerns, such as traffic, and to protect common resources, such as watersheds. Regional solutions can also encourage the efficient use of funds. Smart growth encourages communities to work together collaboratively to enhance their assets as well as to solve their problems.

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

Smart growth promotes development that respects and enhances natural and built features and landmarks to create a sense of defined neighborhoods, towns, and regions. It fosters physical environments that reflect the culture and values of the people who live there, while supporting a more cohesive community fabric. It encourages localities to plan wisely for the future, and gives them the power and resources to implement those *plans over time*.

6. Preserve open space, farmland, and critical environmental resources.

Open space, both within and surrounding developed areas, enhances quality of life by providing community space, recreation opportunities, critical habitat for plants and wildlife, working lands for farming and forestry, and preserves the quality of critical environmental resources such as wetlands, watersheds, and drinking water supplies.

7. Encourage development in currently developed areas to take advantage of existing community assets.

Smart growth encourages development in areas where public investments have already been made in infrastructure, parks, schools, and other facilities, seeking to utilize these resources and to conserve open spaces and natural resources in undeveloped areas. In cities, this can mean focusing development on infill sites and abandoned brownfields; in towns, this can mean clustering development around town centers and transportation nodes. Recognizing that the extension of roadways, sewer lines, and other forms of infrastructure can often “drive” sprawl, government agencies should coordinate decisions about public investment in infrastructure in ways that prevent this unintended consequence and encourage smart growth.

8. Mix land uses.

Smart growth supports the integration of mixed land uses (such as residential, commercial, and civic uses) into neighborhoods, communities and the region as critical components of achieving better places to live and work. By locating a variety of uses in close proximity to each other at an appropriate scale, alternatives to driving, such as walking, bicycling and transit become viable. Diverse, well designed, mixed use development also enhances the vitality and quality of life in our communities and the region as a whole, eventually weaving a fabric that supports broader housing, economic development and transportation goals.

9. Take advantage of compact development design and create walkable neighborhoods.

Smart growth provides a means for communities to incorporate more compact development design as an alternative to conventional, land consumptive development. This permits more open space to be preserved, which also reduces the impacts of storm water runoff and flooding. By drawing uses into closer proximity to each other, compact development is essential to support broader transportation choices such as transit, bicycling and walking. It also reduces the cost of providing and maintaining services such as water, sewer, utilities and communications.

10. Promote economic development in ways that produce jobs, strengthen low and moderate-income communities, and protect the natural environment.

Economic development is a critical objective for our region's future. Families and individuals throughout Greater Boston need new jobs and opportunities for advancement in order to enhance their futures and to make the region stronger and more competitive. Good planning practice encourages economic development in ways that minimize disruption of the natural environment. We should also strive to direct a reasonable proportion of such development to areas that presently suffer from poverty, a weak job market, and abandoned or undeveloped “brownfield” sites. Programs that provide adequate training and retraining for workers will also help to encourage employers to locate or expand in Greater Boston.

11. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices in cities and towns throughout the region.

Promote diverse housing types in all communities to enable persons and households from a wide range of economic levels, cultures, and age groups to live and work within their boundaries. No single type of housing can serve the varied needs of today's diverse households. Smart growth represents an opportunity for communities to increase housing choice not only by modifying land use patterns on newly-developed land, but also by increasing housing supply in existing neighborhoods already served by infrastructure.

12. Promote more transportation choices through the appropriate development of land.

The ability to provide people with more choices in transportation is a key element of smart growth. Better connections between appropriate land use and transportation can support the provision of alternatives to auto use, including transit, para-transit, walking, and bicycling and serve as a guide for effective transportation investments.

13. Develop predictable, fair and cost effective regulatory approvals for smart growth oriented developments.

Developments that adhere to smart growth guidelines should be allowed to proceed through public review and regulatory evaluation with a minimum of delay and cost. This will encourage developers to "build smart" while it enhances the relationship among developers, residents, and government agencies.

14. Encourage fiscal policies that support smart growth.

Federal, state and local tax policies should encourage communities to base development decisions on sound planning principles, not tax benefits. Smart growth is best supported by tax policies that encourage careful planning and inter-local cooperation, and discourage "fiscal zoning," inter-local competition, and sprawl. Since sprawl often results in expenses that must be borne by the entire Commonwealth, the formula for the distribution of local aid, the "new growth" provisions of Proposition 2 ½, and other tools should be examined for mechanisms that might encourage smart growth and discourage sprawl.

15. Enable smart growth by reforming existing zoning.

Many of the principles of smart growth, such as mixed uses and higher densities, are difficult or impossible to achieve in Massachusetts under the state's zoning enabling law and current local zoning codes. For smart growth to succeed, reforms to zoning are needed to remove disincentives to smart growth.