



## Thinking Strategically About Smart Growth Implementation

Draft as of 08/08/07

Communities make a commitment to implementing smart growth for many different reasons but it is not always clear how change can be brought about successfully. In rare cases, a whole transformation is possible through a new comprehensive plan or a whole new building code. Sometimes an incremental approach, such as a zoning overlay, is the place to start. All too frequently, smart growth advocates – elected leaders, staff planners, developers, nonprofit organizations – see no promising avenue toward change.

Yet those avenues **do exist** in many communities and need only to be recognized as such. Some communities have a pending comprehensive plan update. Some have an entrepreneurial developer who wants to plan and build a new urbanist neighborhood but needs help to change prohibitive zoning. Others have new leadership in the form of a mayor, city councilor, county executive or even Department of Public Works Chief who brings vision, energy and a desire to secure the community's future quality of life. Sometimes it is a seeming calamity – the closure of a military base or municipal airport that suddenly gives the community a large parcel of land—that inspires transformative redevelopment.

In such cases, mapping the route to smart growth requires more than just attempting to revise your policies, codes and zoning. To successfully diagnose where a community is positioned and the existing impediments to Smart Growth implementation, a broader and more comprehensive approach is needed. This is why the Smart Growth Leadership Institute has created this strategic growth assessment.

There is an old adage that the only thing constant in life is change – and any strategic analysis is essentially a snapshot of a moving target. However, there are a series of questions that can help provide important context for change and potentially suggest approaches for moving forward.



## HOW TO USE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

Consider this questionnaire as a surveyor's tool that will help smart growth advocates map the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges facing smart growth implementation in your community.

No community can achieve smart growth overnight. There are many tasks and many challenges and the process requires a long-term commitment from the advocates and from the community. This questionnaire will help you produce a "map" but it will be your job to identify the strategic path or paths you must take to build up the momentum your community needs to support the full implementation of smart growth.

Let's begin by assuming that your town has made some commitment to smart growth (perhaps just a rhetorical commitment to start) and has adapted or is considering adapting a plan that includes some smart growth principles as well. The following sections outline some of the questions you should ask yourself in creating a strategic assessment.

The questionnaire is organized under the following sections:

- A. **Urgency of Issues** – Does your community feel an urgent need to change its current pattern of development
- B. **Strength of Leadership** –Who are the leading advocates of smart growth? Are there other leaders you can tap?
- C. **Level of Commitment from Local Government** –How do your local government leaders (elected and appointed officials) feel about smart growth?
- D. **Support and Participation of Developers** –Do you have local developers (or developers in nearby communities) who understand and want to build smart growth projects?
- E. **Support and Participation of Community Groups** – Are the major civic groups in your community supportive of smart growth?
- F. **General Perception and Community Assets** – How does the majority of the community feel about smart growth? Are there examples of smart growth or traditional neighborhoods that are valued by your community?
- G. **Market Conditions and Demand for Smart Growth** – Is your community growing or declining? Is there a demand for walkable neighborhoods?
- H. **Catalytic Projects** – Are there major projects coming to your community that you can leverage to bring smart growth?

Each section will have a general question and several sub-questions. The sub-questions in sections A to G will present you with three columns: the first will ask you for the current conditions in your community (*how things are*); the second will ask what the desired conditions are (*how they should be*); and, the third will ask what needs to change to get your community from the current conditions to the desired conditions. Try to write your answers in the last column as action items that the smart growth advocates in your community can undertake. The next pages show examples of how you might respond to the questions.



### HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF HOW YOUR COMMUNITY MIGHT ANSWER SECTIONS A to G

**What are the major problems/issues in the community? What events (threats, opportunities) create urgency to act?**

	Current Conditions	Desired Condition	What needs to change?*
1. What is the biggest source of change in the community?	<b><i>Growing traffic congestion.</i></b>	<b><i>That the community recognizes the linkage between growing traffic congestion <u>and</u> sprawl.</i></b>	<b><i>Change how the issue is talked about in the local media. The debate should not be about just the road budget but how our communities don't encourage walking or biking.</i></b>
2. How are people reacting to the issues and how do we want them to react?	<b><i>People are asking for better traffic management/road expansion.</i></b>	<b><i>The community supports land use decisions that lessen automobile dependency</i></b>	<b><i>Change the discussion about traffic congestion so the community supports land use decisions that lessen automobile dependency.”</i></b>
3. How are the smart growth advocates leveraging this/these issues?			<b><i>1) More articles in the local paper making the connection between land use and dependence on cars. 2) Presentations to various groups and clubs (i.e. Rotary, Kiwanis)</i></b>

*\*What are the action steps to get from the current to the desired condition? Prioritize the steps.*



Section H, Catalytic Projects, will ask for action steps the smart growth advocates in your community can take to take advantage of large infrastructure, development or re-development opportunities that may be facing your community.

**HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF HOW YOUR COMMUNITY MIGHT ANSWER SECTION H**

	ACTION STEPS
37. Are there “catalytic” public works projects in the planning or design stages that could be used to set the table for smart growth? (For example: roads, transit projects, parks, convention centers, sports arenas, etc.)	<p><i>Yes: The state is planning to decommission the state hospital located right in the heart of the community.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. Discuss the redevelopment options for the project.</i></li> <li><i>2. Present a vision of a mixed-use, pedestrian friendly option for re-development. With work force housing.</i></li> </ol>

The last section of the questionnaire will ask you for an **Outline of Strategic Steps** that the smart growth advocates in your community can take to help implement smart growth. The section will help you organize and prioritize your answers in Sections A to H into a framework that helps you lead change in you community. The section will guide you through the task of creating a strategic framework that can help you successfully lead the transformation in you community. The last part of the section will also ask you to identify the most immediate and most strategic steps you need to take to begin the work of implementing smart growth or moving the process forward.



**A. URGENCY OF ISSUES:**

**What are the major problems/issues in the community? What events (threats, opportunities) create urgency to act?**

	Current Conditions	Desired Condition	What needs to change?*
1. What is the biggest source of change in the community? <sup>1</sup>			
2. How are people reacting to the issues and how do we want them to react?			
3. What are the issues that the local papers/local media seem to focus on?			
4. How are the smart growth advocates leveraging this/these issues?			
<i>*What are the action steps to get from the current to the desired condition? Prioritize the steps.</i>			

***Some hot button issues in many communities include:***

- *Growing traffic congestion;*
- *Rapid population growth with even more rapid spread of development;*
- *Population loss with continued spread of development;*
- *Concerns about energy dependence;*
- *Concerns about the local economy and staying/becoming more competitive;*
- *Quality of life issues;*
- *School overcrowding;*
- *Changing demographics not matching community facilities (e.g. - more elderly/less transit or more children/fewer sidewalks);*
- *Loss of community character; or,*
- *Loss of local businesses and retailers.*

***What big events are happening or are on the horizon? For example:***

- *Is the community landing or losing a major employer?*
- *Is a big new transit investment coming in?*
- *Is there a key site (old mall, former industrial site, closing hospital) becoming available for redevelopment?*

<sup>1</sup> *If there are several, which ones seem the most urgent?*



### B. STRENGTH OF LEADERSHIP

Where is the leadership on smart growth coming from?

	Current Conditions	Desired Condition	What needs to change?*
5. Are there leaders in the business community advocating for smart growth? <sup>2</sup>			
6. Are there leaders in the non-profit and civic community advocating for smart growth? <sup>2</sup>			
7. Are there leaders in the local government (elected or appointed) advocating for smart growth? <sup>2</sup>			
8. Among the elected officials, how many are for smart growth and how strong are their commitments? <sup>2</sup>			
9. Are the smart growth advocates engaging these leaders directly?			
10. Which sectors (business, local government, non-profit, civic) are in the best position to move the smart growth agenda forward?			

<sup>2</sup> List these leaders if you can.



	Current Conditions	Desired Condition	What needs to change?*
11. Who are the key constituents – the base of support for smart growth?			
12. What efforts are in place to broaden the support?			
13. What issues can you use to broaden the support?			
14. Where is the opposition coming from and who is leading the opposition?			
<i>*What are the action steps to get from the current to the desired condition? Prioritize the steps.</i>			



### C. LEVEL OF COMMITMENT FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### How deep and strong is your community’s political commitment to smart growth?

*It’s easy to say that this commitment is there, but think about the following questions:*

	Current Conditions	Desired Condition	What needs to change?*
15. Has a compelling alternative to traditional growth patterns been presented or discussed within your community? How was it received?			
16. Are your elected officials willing to take some political risk to actually put smart growth projects on the ground?			
17. Are your senior staff members (city manager, county CEO, department heads) willing to take some bureaucratic risk in order to change practices and put smart growth projects on the ground? Do they have the staff and budget to devote to these efforts?			
<i>*What are the action steps to get from the current to the desired condition? Prioritize the steps.</i>			

*Also Consider:*

- *Are there existing or past efforts to implement smart growth? How are they regarded? (Successes or failures?)*
- *Have any attempts to address these issues failed in the recent past? If so, why?*



### D. SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION OF DEVELOPERS

**How receptive are your developers to smart growth ideas?**

DEVELOPERS	Current Conditions	Desired Condition	What needs to change?*
18. Have local developers participated in the process that created new policies or a new vision?			
19. If the answer to the question above is "yes" –What was their reaction/opinion of the process and the product?			
20. Are local developers knowledgeable about smart growth?			
21. Are there local developers who have the knowledge and expertise to get smart growth projects off the ground?			
<i>*What are the action steps to get from the current to the desired condition? Prioritize the steps.</i>			

*NOTE: If the answer to c) and/or d) is "no," are they open to the learning from developers in other locales with more experience?*



### E. SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

**How receptive are your community and citizen groups to smart growth ideas?**

	Current Conditions	Desired Condition	What needs to change?*
22. Have local community groups participated in the process that created new policies or a new vision?			
23. If the answer to the question above is "yes" –What was their reaction/opinion of the process and the product?			
24. Is smart growth seen as a way to restrain/block growth? <sup>3</sup>			
25. Are there neighborhoods that are willing to accept higher densities in order to achieve smart growth goals?			
26. Do the community and citizen groups know how to have a constructive dialogue with developers about how to shape new growth and new development projects?			

<sup>3</sup> *Is the local discussion about smart growth becoming a cover for "no growth" or exclusion?*



	Current Conditions	Desired Condition	What needs to change?*
27. Are trusted organizations that can act as intermediaries to facilitate a more cooperative development process? (Including government entities, non-profits or business organizations.)			
28. Are there good examples of successful momentum or collaboration in the region? Are smart growth advocates citing those examples? (This may not even have to do with land use – it’s just a question about what works in getting people to collaborate.)			
<i>*What are the action steps to get from the current to the desired condition? Prioritize the steps.</i>			



### F. GENERAL PERCEPTION AND COMMUNITY ASSETS

Are there existing assets in the community or the region that are good examples of smart growth?

	Current Conditions	Desired Condition	What needs to change?*
29. Are any of the characteristic elements of smart growth already present in established districts in your community (e.g. central business district, original neighborhoods)?			
30. If yes, how are these elements valued by district residents? By the community as a whole?			
31. Are there successful on-the-ground examples of smart growth projects nearby? Is your community aware of these projects?			
32. Are there iconic projects (well-loved buildings, historic districts, old mills needing restoration and re-use) in the community? Have smart growth advocates linked these places/buildings to the issues of smart growth?			
<i>*What are the action steps to get from the current to the desired condition? Prioritize the steps.</i>			



### G. MARKET CONDITIONS AND DEMAND FOR SMART GROWTH

#### Do local market conditions lend themselves to a smart growth approach?

*Any successful smart growth implementation strategy will necessarily involve an understanding of the specific market. Is the area fast growing? Steady? Shrinking in population? What are the rents? The demographics? These factors play an important role in determining what steps will work. Although most of these factors may be outside your community's control, it is important to consider them in your strategy. Other questions to think about are:*

	Current Conditions	Desired Condition	What needs to change?*
33. Is demand for real estate development strong? What are the characteristics (age, family size) of most people moving into or leaving the area?			
34. Does there appear to be a market in your community for non-conventional development projects such as town homes and condominium housing and Main Street retail? If so, how strong and how well established is this market niche?			
35. Is your local community land-constrained in any way? Built-out within its borders or surrounded by greenbelts or other land that is off-limits for development?			
<i>*What are the action steps to get from the current to the desired condition? Prioritize the steps.</i>			



### H. CATALYTIC PROJECTS

*The campaign to implement smart growth can often be anchored by the presence of or the possibility of catalytic projects that may energize the community. The following questions point to those possible projects. If the answer to the question on the left "yes" – how are smart growth advocates leveraging these issues? What actions can they take to leverage these issues?*

	ACTION STEPS
<p>36. Are there “catalytic” public works projects in the planning or design stages that could be used to set the table for smart growth – roads, transit projects, parks, convention centers, sports arenas, etc.</p>	
<p>37. Are there major local government-controlled parcels of land (or state-parcels that you might get first crack at) that could be used to catalyze redevelopment (surplus schools, hospitals, obsolete facilities, tax-arrears properties)?</p>	
<p>38. Are there major governmental or institutional players in town (county or state agencies, universities, medical centers, research institutes, even private sector owners of large land holdings such as an underperforming strip shopping center, mall or stadium) that have significant landholdings and/or future facilities needs that could be used as a catalytic project?</p>	
	<p><i>Prioritize the steps listed for each item.</i></p>



## OUTLINE OF STRATEGIC ACTION STEPS

### **LEADING CHANGE**

To successfully implement smart growth, advocates must work towards changing not only the rules and regulations that shape the built environment. More importantly, smart growth advocates must work towards changing the knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, behaviors that make sprawl the de-facto option and discourage or prevent smart growth.

At the core of all our efforts as smart growth advocates and as leaders of your community is the task of changing the status quo. The task is the same whether our primary challenge is addressing the lack of information or attention on the effects of sprawl on our health, our use of energy or our climate; or to reverse the prevailing attitudes toward more walkable streets and neighborhoods; or removing the inherent bias for low-density, auto-dependent development in our regulatory framework.

For the change to become permanent, smart growth advocates must plan a continuing campaign of transformation that can claim quick wins and lay the groundwork for long term victories. In 1995, Professor John Kotter wrote an article entitled "*Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail*" for the Harvard Business Review. Kotter outlined the steps to successful change in any organization and the Smart Growth Leadership Institute has successfully adapted those steps into model for leading change in our built environment<sup>4</sup>.

There are 10 Steps to Successful Transformations and 10 tasks that the smart growth advocate must do to lead change:

- 1. Communicating a sense of urgency on the need to deal with growth issues**
- 2. Establishing a broad guiding coalition that would help support community changes to better address growth**
  - *Who are the current recruits?*
  - *Who do we need to bring on board in the future?*
- 3. Developing our vision for an alternative to the status quo**
  - *Focusing on beloved or admired neighborhoods and the desirability of modeling new development on those communities*
  - *Look to not-too-distant examples of exemplary and successful new development*
- 4. Approaches to communicating the new vision**
  - *Focus on several ways to get people excited about your vision*
  - *Expand your coalition*

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<sup>4</sup> by Harriet Tregoning, former Executive Director of SGLI



## **5. Engaging leading local governments**

- *Cultivate leadership here*
- *Look for even small regulatory reforms that make the new development possible*
- *Local governments might also have control of land or public sector investments that might be key*

## **6. Identifying and leveraging projects that will be catalysts for further change**

- *There are likely to be one or more “high leverage” projects that you can identify – large enough to change people’s expectations about the future, projects with enough momentum to be moving forward, and not so far along that you cannot take steps to change the project to better exemplify the new development direction.*

## **7. Allowing broad-based action by changing systems/structures**

- *Ultimately, you are looking to make the desired growth pattern the easiest, not the hardest thing to do – so going from easiest to hardest, begin to make those changes*

## **8. Generating short-term wins**

- *You will need early and nearly constant success/progress to implement a growth agenda—anticipate and ensure that you have some early wins and keep going*

## **9. Consolidating the gains and build on them**

- *Periodically assess what you have done, what progress has been made and use that progress as the basis for more ambitious changes*

## **10. Embedding changes in the culture**

- *Brand what you are doing and get it out there- it should be a point of civic pride*
- *With every success, reinforce the can-do spirit of the community, its vision, its foresight, and keep pushing to make things better.*

Using the model above, your answers to the questions from Sections A to H begin to suggest what a community’s best current opportunities may look like. As you begin to pull together a strategy, its outline may look like the list below.

You can list the highest priority action items from the questions in the previous sections that will address each strategy item.



### A Strategic Smart Growth Implementation Framework for My Community

ACTION STEPS

**How will you communicate a sense of urgency on the need to deal with growth issues?**

A	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
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**How will you establish a broad guiding coalition that would help support community changes to better address growth?**

B	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
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**How will you develop your vision for an alternative to the status quo?**

C	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
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**What approaches will you use to communicate the new vision?**

D	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
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**How will you engage leading local governments?**

E	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
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**How will you identify and leverage projects to become catalysts for further change?**

F	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
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ACTION STEPS
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**How will you change systems/structures to allow for broad-based action?**

G	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.</li><li>2.</li><li>3.</li></ol>
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**How will you generate short-term wins?**

H	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.</li><li>2.</li><li>3.</li></ol>
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**How will you consolidate the gains and build on them?**

I	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.</li><li>2.</li><li>3.</li></ol>
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**How will you embed changes in the culture?**

J	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.</li><li>2.</li><li>3.</li></ol>
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**FIRST STEPS**

Having answered the questions in the previous sections, it would help if you identified your first steps. You can start by identifying the easiest task, so you can generate quick wins and identifying the toughest but most strategic task so you can begin laying the groundwork for the long-term efforts. It will also help if you could estimate the timeframe required to accomplish the tasks and to list the resources you will need to complete them:

	<b>Timeframe for accomplishing the task</b>	<b>The resources required to successfully complete the task</b>
<i>The Quickest Task:</i>		
<i>The most difficult but most strategic task:</i>		

-end of form-