

Rural Land Planning
Understanding Sprawl and Smart Growth

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Understanding Sprawl and Smart Growth

What is Sprawl?

- What is sprawl?
- How do we define it?
- Is it good, bad, neutral?
- Is it different than suburbanization?
- Can we stop sprawl?
- If so, How? If not, why?

Understanding Sprawl and Smart Growth

What is Sprawl?

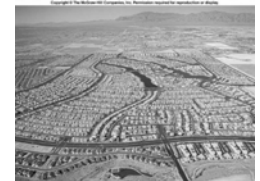
Considerations in defining sprawl:

- Sprawl is real—a naturally occurring phenomenon in urban regions.
- Sprawl is a highly subjective term—in the eye of the beholder.
- Increasingly, the term sprawl has replaced what had been called suburbanization, placing the anti-sprawl movement at odds with the lifestyle and living choices made by most people (in urbanized America).
- Merriam-Webster defines urban sprawl: “The spread of urban development (as houses and shopping centers) on undeveloped land near a city.” This definition carries with it no value judgment that sprawl is bad.
 - (Webster further defines suburban as “an outlying part of a city or town.”)

Understanding Sprawl and Smart Growth

Naturally Occurring Sprawl

- According to Zeng, Sui, and Li (2005), there are three types of naturally occurring sprawl:
 - **Continuous suburban expansion:** occurs when growth takes place just beyond an existing built-up area.
 - **Infill growth:** represents expansion beyond a previously leapfrog cluster.
 - **Leapfrog sprawl:** refers to the process whereby underdeveloped land beyond the built-up area is converted to suburban land use.



Understanding Sprawl and Smart Growth Modern Trends in Planning

What are the planning trends?

- Inner-city: Revitalization and Redevelopment
 - Inner-suburb: Stabilization and Retention
 - Outer-suburb: Bracing for Impact
 - Rural communities: Beyond Impact
- What is the role of planning in suburban and regional growth?
 - How do we plan for suburbanization and future development?
 - There are many perspectives
 - Growth Management
 - Smart Growth
 - New Urbanism



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Understanding Sprawl and Smart Growth Smart Growth America - Smart Growth Principles

- Create Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices: Providing quality housing for people of all income levels.
- Create Walkable Neighborhoods: Walkable communities are *desirable* places to live, work, learn, worship, and play.
- Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration: Growth can create great places to live, work and play -- if it responds to a community's own sense of how and where it wants to grow.
- Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place: Encourage communities to craft a vision and set standards for development and construction which respond to community values of architectural beauty and distinctiveness.



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Understanding Sprawl and Smart Growth Smart Growth America - Smart Growth Principles

- Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective: To be successful in implementing smart growth, it must be *embraced* by the private sector.
- Mix Land Uses: The integration of mixed land uses into communities is a *critical component* of achieving *better* places to live.
- Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas: Open space preservation *bolsters local economies*, preserving critical environmental areas, improving our communities quality of life, *and guiding new growth into existing communities*.
- Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices: Providing more choices in housing, shopping, communities, and transportation.
- Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities: Direct development towards existing communities already served by infrastructure and seeking to utilize the resources that existing neighborhoods offer.



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Understanding Sprawl and Smart Growth Smart Growth in Connecticut

Connecticut Growth Management Principles

- Redevelop and revitalize regional centers and areas with existing or currently planned physical infrastructure
- Expand housing opportunities and design choices to accommodate a variety of household types and needs
- Concentrate development around transportation nodes and along major transportation corridors to support the viability of transportation options
- Conserve and restore the natural environment, cultural and historical resources, and traditional rural lands
- Protect and ensure the integrity of environmental assets critical to public health and safety
- Promote integrated planning across all levels of government to address issues on a statewide, regional and local basis



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Sustainability and Smart Growth

A Balanced Growth Strategy for Connecticut

- Sustainable development is one of those phrases that is used so often that it has come to mean many things to many people.
- The most cited definition of sustainable development was created by the United Nations Brundtland Commission report "Our Common Future" 1987. The definition states:
 - "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."
 - the concept of 'needs,' in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
 - the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.
- This definition provides a global and broad framework of looking toward the future in context of our actions today.

Sustainability and Smart Growth

A Balanced Growth Strategy for Connecticut

- If we (state or towns) are to succeed in economic development—compete for investment, jobs, and taxes—that we must encourage and promote development
 - Development and growth do not have to be four letter words
- We must realize that development—growth and change—will occur. That also means that urban expansion (sprawl) will occur
 - Outward expansion is naturally occurring phenomenon in a free market economy where 90 percent of land is in private ownership
- The outcome should not be to slow growth, fight development, prevent change, or to stop sprawl.
 - These efforts distract us from developing meaningful strategies for growth
- Our outcome should be to encourage and manage growth—to grow more responsibly or more sustainable
 - This does not have to limit choice or favor one type of development or community over another

Sustainability and Smart Growth

A Balanced Growth Strategy for Connecticut

- If we are to strike a balance between development and conservation we need to approach the discussion around responsible growth from a realistic perspective.
- Connecticut (towns) must embrace growth and development if we are to maintain and enhance our economic prosperity.
- If we are to grow, then we must understand that we cannot and will not conserve and preserve all undeveloped land.
- In addition, we must realize that our cities and core areas could never accommodate all future growth.
- If we are to implement Smart (Responsible) Growth policies and strategies in Connecticut, then we need to make sure that the Smart Growth policies are scaled to fit the location and community where they are being implemented.

Sustainability and Smart Growth

A Core Area (Urban and Suburban) Strategy

- **Reduce barriers to investment:**
 - Reduce development fees (permit fees and inspection fees)
 - Encourage pre-approved shovel ready sites
 - Require as-of-right approval for land use decisions
 - Reduce strict historic preservation, building, fire, and health codes that don't apply well to older buildings, and lengthy permitting processes
- **Invest in housing and neighborhoods:**
 - Restructure housing programs to target investment and focus the outcomes on improving the housing stock, encouraging property maintenance, adding amenities, and improving the overall neighborhood.
 - Reduce focus on providing homes for low and moderate income households and serve a wider range of income levels.
- **Invest in building the working class:**
 - Stop the clustering of low income households into weak and distressed areas.
 - If the goal is to improve core areas then we need to build upon the strengths of the working and middle-class and retain and attract these households.
 - Government programs that target low and moderate households should be expanded to include households earning up to 120 percent of median household income.

Sustainability and Smart Growth

A Suburban Strategy

- **Encourage higher density commercial and residential development:**
 - Promote policies that encourage greater density in these areas.
 - The more development that can be accommodated in suburban (and core) areas, the less development pressure that will be placed on rural areas.
 - Encourage “responsible growth strategies” such as transit oriented development, mixed use and mixed income development, and affordable housing.
- **Invest in infrastructure:**
 - These areas are best suited for growth and we should invest in infrastructure in these communities to support and encourage more growth.
- **Encourage planning for growth and improved land use approval processes:**
 - Encourage as-of-right land use approvals and remove discretion from as-of-right approvals.
 - Local Plans of Conservation and Development should encourage growth and higher density growth...Zoning Regulations should reflect this.
- **Conservation in suburban areas:**
 - Conservation should target active recreation (i.e. the creation of parks and trail systems) since active recreation facilities and parks will enhance the built environment and enhance the quality of life in these areas.

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Sustainability and Smart Growth

A Rural Conservation Strategy

- **Target conservation efforts in rural areas:**
 - Policies and resources should encourage conservation of farmland, open space, and critical habitat in small towns and rural areas.
 - The State should develop a strategic conservation plan to protect our most valuable rural lands and focus programs in these areas.
- **Small town economic development:**
 - State policies should provide economic development assistance to small towns.
 - Small towns/centers are a vital part of our economy and character.
- **Infrastructure investment:**
 - Investments in infrastructure should be targeted into town centers and adjacent areas to support higher density development in and near the centers.
- **Conservation subdivision:**
 - Rural and small towns should encourage conservation subdivision regulations that allow for higher density development to reduce land consumption and preserve open space.
 - The state should encourage and promote the use of Alternative Treatment Systems for waste water disposal to accommodate higher density developments in town and village centers.

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A Rural Conservation Strategy

- **Support agriculture:**
 - Policies and strategies should support agricultural activities in rural areas, on prime agricultural soils, and where agriculture is economically feasible.
 - Policies should also support, encourage, and aid in making agriculture economically feasible.
 - However, we must be realistic in this approach and recognize that we are not an agrarian society and will never return to the agricultural economy of the 1700s and 1800s.
- **Rural development:**
 - While seeking to implement these conservation policies, it is important to recognize that rural areas also need to develop to serve the needs of rural populations.
 - Therefore, conservation and preservation programs should be targeted toward critical habitats and agricultural resources but not used to prohibit or limit development.

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Sustainability and Smart Growth

A Preservation Strategy

- **Historic preservation:**
 - Preservation policies and strategies should target economically feasible historic structures in urban, suburban, and rural areas.
 - The economic feasibility of redeveloping or preserving historic buildings is often undermined by excessive code compliance cost.
 - The state and towns must encourage flexible building and health and safety codes and flexible land use regulations to make preservation less costly.
- **Cultural preservation:**
 - Cultural assets should be preserved and supported. These sites provide opportunities for tourism, education, and recreation.
- **Natural areas and assets:**
 - Policies at the state and local level should focus preservation and conservation efforts on our most critical natural assets. These are State Parks, prime agricultural soil, critical habitat, endangered species, and scenic areas.
- **Preservation planning:**
 - The state and towns should conduct inventory of all of our historic, cultural, and natural resources and assets and develop plans for protecting and preserving such assets.
 - The process should prioritize assets based on their significance and value.
 - Preservation planning, strategies, and programs should not be viewed as a means to prevent growth and development, but to enhance our quality of life.

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Sustainability and Smart Growth

A Integrated Planning Strategy

- **State Plan of Conservation and Development:**
 - The state plan should provide a vision for Connecticut and the general policies to implement that vision and to help guide state agencies, regional planning organizations, and local planning commissions.
 - We must recognize that the State Plan is a vision and general guide for planning policies and that regional and local plans are created on a more detailed scale and are better suited to implement specific planning policies.
- **Regional Plans of Conservation and Development:**
 - The regional plans should consider and utilize the same Growth Management principles as the state plan.
 - This will provide an integration of state and regional planning policies and eliminate the need for consistency between plans that are created and intended for implementation at different scales.
- **Municipal Plans of Conservation and Development:**
 - Local plans should and do consider the State Growth Management principles.
 - This is an effective policy that ensures the integration of planning policies at both the state and local level.
 - We must recognize that the local planning commissions are the most qualified to make planning and policy decisions.
 - The most comprehensive and detailed plans are the local plans and therefore the best level to implement policy.

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Sustainability and Smart Growth

A Integrated Planning Strategy

- **Municipal Land Use Regulations and Municipal Plans:**
 - Municipal land use regulations are effective tools to implement many, but not all, aspects of the policies recommended within the local plan of conservation and development.
 - We must recognize that planning is the prediction of future outcomes with the risk of being wrong. This risk of being wrong is caused by changing circumstances, conditions, and the wants and needs of the community over time.
 - If this were not the case we would need to plan only once and never again.
 - Therefore, both plans and regulations need to be flexible and fluid to adjust to change.
 - It is for this reason that strict consistency between local land use regulations and plans of conservation should not be required.

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