What Is "Smart Growth," and How Does It Affect Your Community Work?

Smart growth as a concept has evolved from simply a more pleasant way to describe anti-sprawl work to an overarching description of more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly transportation, better brownfield revitalization, support for the inner core of our cities, better urban design, health arguments for local food and compact cities, energy efficiency, and equity and justice in urban development. For more specifics on how broad the smart growth idea has become, check out Smart Growth America.

Yes, we're saying that the concept is now so broad as to be close to meaningless. But YOU can
do some meaningful things locally to implement the good intentions behind this big idea:
1. Plan a walk audit, establish a pop-up bike lane to see how the neighborhood or city engineers like it, or paint an intersection.
2. Identify a community beautification project at your next neighborhood meeting.
3. Work with a property owner to place an attractive display in the window of a vacant commercial building.
4. Plan a tour of a neighborhood, commercial area, or even semi-abandoned industrial property that you would like to revitalize. Calling repeated attention to an opportunity or a challenge eventually yields results! But you have to keep doing it!

Realistically, this whole web of topics matters to your success as an urban neighborhood association in an obvious way, even if you can only afford to devote 10 percent of your effort to working on the broader metro area issues that smart growth implies. If you’re in a suburb, most of you are scrambling to invent the downtown you never had, or revive the historic one, to improve your tax base. Small city residents are probably experiencing small town sprawl. Rural areas definitely are suffering from losing the visual appeal of their rural character.

We're kicking off the new year by calling your attention to this issue, in part because we'll be starting to call important conferences and learning opportunities to your attention. First on our list is the New Partners for Smart Growth conference to be held in St. Louis, MO, USA, on Feb. 1-4. We’ll be rating the costs of conferences as low (50 USD and less), medium (50-150 USD), and high (more than 150 USD). This one falls in the high category (except there is a free workshop Feb. 1), but it’s a great value. More than 80 sessions and 17 tours provide new ideas, and superb networking opportunities at this multi-disciplinary conference abound. If you go, you are welcome to use our registration discount code: NP17UCDEV. Hurry, though, as registration rates go up on January 17.

Even if professionals have by and large moved on from talking about the word "sprawl," we know from our website that many of you haven’t. “Effects of Urban Sprawl” is still the most visited page of our website. If this topic resonates, take a look at our whole sprawl section.

Newest addition to the website: Beach Nourishment, of interest to our coastal communities. Some great visitor questions were submitted and answered also: Should I Start a Community-Based Non-Profit Organization, Who Is a Community Developer, Monitoring Community Development, Vines on a Home: Code Enforcement or Landscaping Enhancement, Building Codes Versus Deed Restrictions.

WOW! You folks have been busy!
If you have a question about smart growth or anything else community-development related, submit it and we'll answer on the website if applicable to a number of you.

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