



CALIBRATING
SMART GROWTH
AND
SUSTAINABILITY
FOR SMALL AND
RURAL COMMUNITIES

RMLUI
ROCKY MOUNTAIN
LAND USE INSTITUTE

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SESSION OVERVIEW

- 1. Key issues and challenges**
- 2. Recalibrating Smart Growth and sustainability to make it more relevant**
- 3. Incorporating Smart Growth and sustainability into Comprehensive Plans**
- 4. Key implementation challenges**
- 5. Helpful resources**
- 6. Q & A**

KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACING RURAL AND SMALL TOWN AMERICA



THE CHANGING FACE OF RURAL AND SMALL TOWN AMERICA

Changing demographics

- More diverse
- aging population
- outflow of young adults—birth rates declining

Health issues

- Obesity above national rates for all age groups
- Lack of access to healthy food choices
- Populace is very auto-reliant
- Lack of access to health care

Economic issues

- Higher poverty rates, lower incomes
- Shrinking workforce
- Reduced options for jobs
- Energy industry (pros and cons)



THE CHANGING FACE OF RURAL AND SMALL TOWN AMERICA

Housing “calamity” looming

- Increased demand for different housing types vs. oversupply of single-family homes

Cost Pressures

- Lower incomes, pressure from second homes and resort communities

Rental share of housing market

- Will increase substantially nationwide and be particularly challenging in nonurban areas



GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

- Declining downtowns
- Incompatible development at edges
- Loss of community character
- Loss of natural areas and open lands
- Limited housing choices
- Lack of transportation options
- Limited planning capacity
- Opposition to planning & regulations

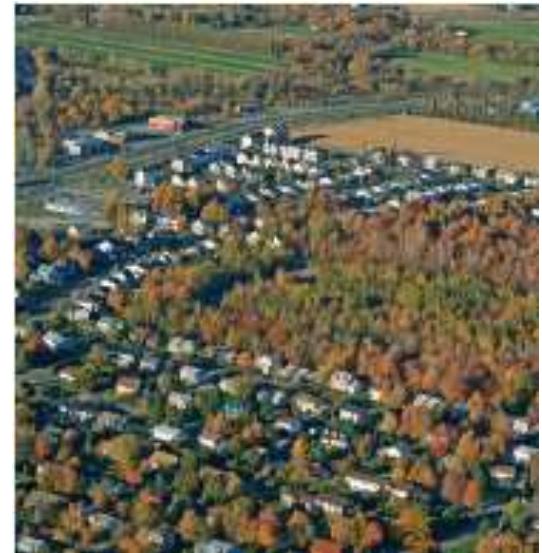


RECALIBRATING SMART GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY TO MAKE IT MORE RELEVANT



DEFINING RURAL SMART GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY?

- Urban smart growth is well-defined...not so much with rural smart growth
- Many different development types and pressures vs. urban areas...and politics
- Some urban smart growth tools (e.g., high-density mixed use, transit-oriented development) may not be appropriate
- Fewer financial, technical, staff resources in rural areas



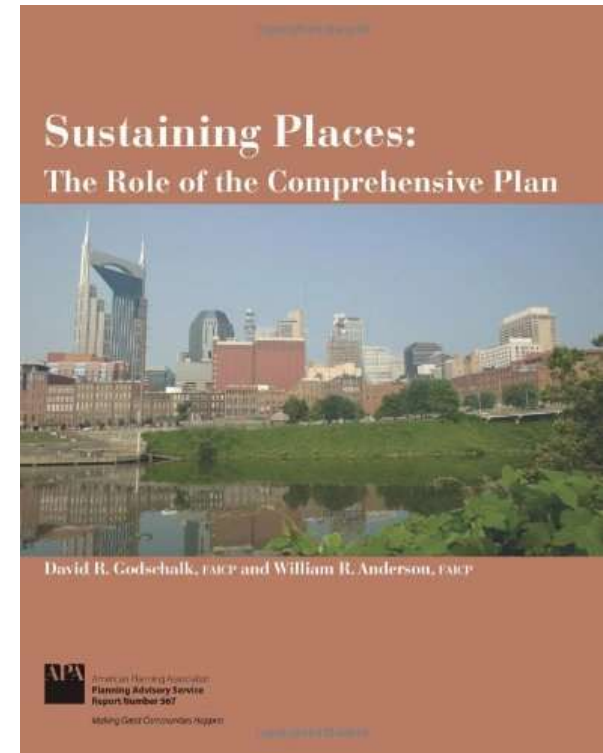
SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES

- 1. Mix land uses**
- 2. Compact development patterns**
- 3. Range of housing opportunities**
- 4. Walkable neighborhoods**
- 5. Distinct, attractive communities**
- 6. Preserve working farmlands, open space, critical environmental areas**
- 7. Direct development towards existing communities**
- 8. Provide a variety of transportation choices**
- 9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective**
- 10. Stakeholder and community collaboration in development decisions**

Source: smartgrowth.org

SUSTAINING PLACES PRINCIPLES

1. Livable Built Environment
2. Harmony with Nature
3. Resilient Economy
4. Interwoven Equity
5. Healthy Community
6. Responsible Regionalism
7. Authentic Participation
8. Accountable Implementation



Source: American Planning Association

SMALL TOWN AND RURAL CHARACTER

Physical environment



Social landscape



RURAL SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES

- 1. Development directed towards towns, not countryside**
- 2. Compact development pattern that retains small town community character**
- 3. Range of housing opportunities, walkable neighborhoods in town**
- 4. A variety of transportation choices**
- 5. Preserve working farmlands and critical resource areas**
- 6. Resilient economy**
- 7. Stakeholder and community collaboration in development and policy decisions**



INCORPORATING SMART GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY INTO COMP PLANS



WHY SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PLANS?

Sustainability

... is a defining challenge of our time

Plans

... are important tools for creating more sustainable places



INCORPORATING SUSTAINABILITY IN PLANS

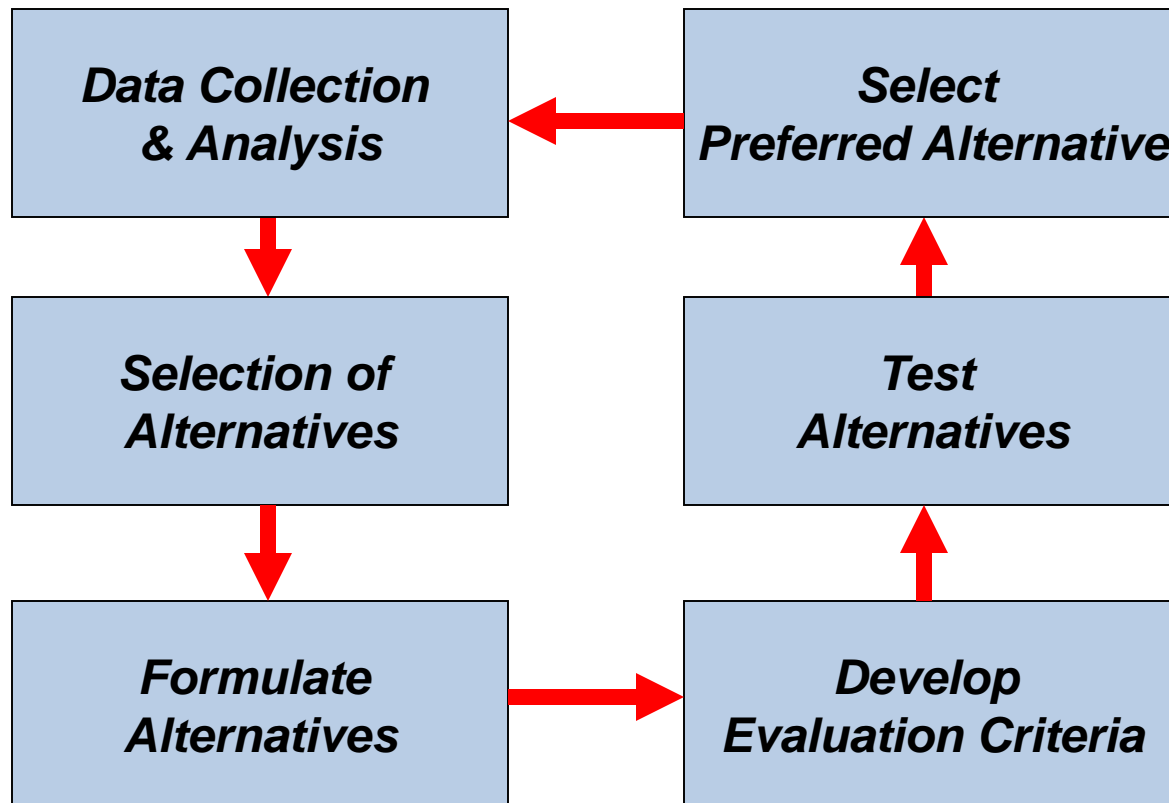
What's Different?

1. Organizational structure and plan process
2. Linked issues
3. New topics and new approaches
4. More emphasis on measuring and monitoring progress
5. Interwoven with Smart Growth Principles



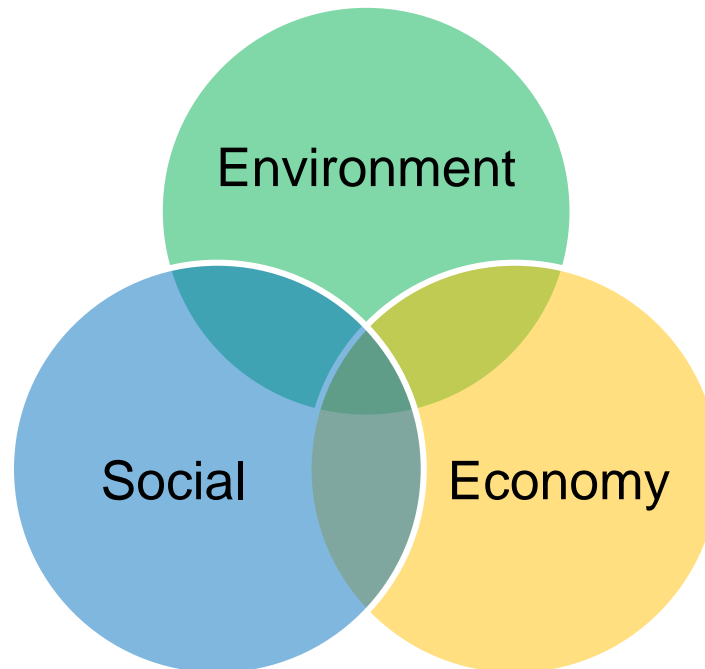
STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

Typical



STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

Sustainability Approach



Approaching sustainability as a process that underpins the plan as well as a lens through which policy choices can be viewed and evaluated.

SUSTAINABLE PLAN ELEMENTS

Community

- Appearance and Design
- Arts and Culture
- Economic Development
- Parks and Recreation

Built Environment

- Community Facilities & Infrastructure
- Housing/ Neighborhoods
- Land Use and Growth
- Transportation/Mobility

Natural Environment

- Air Quality
- Environmental Resources
- Environmental Hazards
- Open Space

-
- Community Health
 - Fiscal Sustainability
 - Diversity
 - Equity
 - Housing Attainability
 - High Performing
 - Regional Collaboration

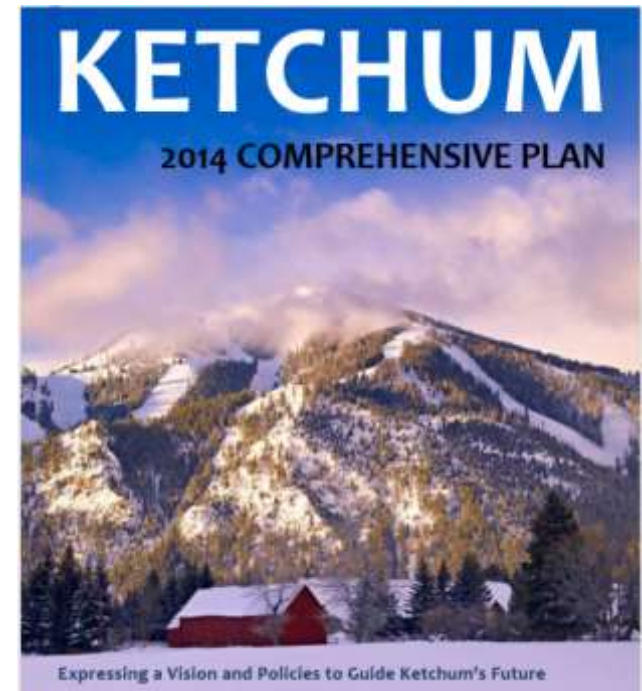
- Energy Conservation & Green Building
- Green Infrastructure
- Community Spaces

- Resiliency and Climate Change
- Waste Stream Reduction/Reuse
- Agriculture
- Food Production & Security
- Renewable Energy

KETCHUM, IDAHO – 2014 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Driven by Ten Core Values:

1. A Vibrant Downtown
2. A Strong and Diverse Economy
3. Community Character
4. A Variety of Housing Options
5. Environmental Quality and Scenic Beauty
6. A Well-Connected Community
7. Enlivened by the Arts and Culture
8. Working as a Region
9. A Greener Community
10. A Healthy Community



"A truly sustainable community is one that takes a long-range view, balancing and integrating economic, environmental, social, and physical considerations within its local decision-making"

BURLINGTON, VT – MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

“A Sustainable Burlington”

1. Ecological integrity
2. Economic security
3. Empowerment and responsibility
4. Social well-being

Plan Elements:

- **Land Use Plan**
- **Natural Environment**
 - Includes a section on urban ecosystems
- **Built Environment**
- **Historic Preservation**
- **Transportation**
- **Economic Development**
- **Community Facilities and Services**
- **Energy**
 - Devoted almost exclusively to renewable energy and reduction of energy production
- **Housing**
- **Education**

LINKED ISSUES

EXAMPLE : TRANSPORTATION

Traditional

- Adequate road capacity
- Road and sidewalk miles
- Metrics
 - VMT
 - LOS
 - Mode shift

Linked Approach

- Complete Streets
- Relationship to:
 - Energy use
 - GHG emissions
 - Travel cost/social equity
 - Multi-modal
- Mobility performance measures:
 - Quality of access
 - LOS for all travel modes
 - Connectivity Index

VARYING APPROACHES

- **Incorporate sustainability into existing Comprehensive Plan**
- **Standalone Community Sustainability Plan**
- **Targeted amendments**
- **Complete overhaul of Comprehensive Plan**






CARBONDALE, CO

Focused on a Sustainable Future

2.2 Small Town Character Vision and Goals

Vision for a Sustainable Future

 Community	The community identity is tied inextricably to Carbondale's small town form and compact size. The agricultural periphery will continue to delineate a distinct geographic identity for the town. The well-loved downtown will remain the heart of the community – a thriving, historic, identifiable center of commerce, town culture, civic life, and celebrations.
 Ecology	A compact small town form with attractive multimodal options will reduce dependence on the personal automobile, therefore contributing to improved air quality and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
 Economy	Carbondale will maintain a balance between growing and evolving economically and maintaining the small town character that attracts visitors, residents and employers and keeps businesses in town.

KEY IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES



SCALING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Did we bite off more than we can chew?

Consider the following:

- Is there political support?
- Who will take ownership of the task?
- Volunteer overload
- Is the timeframe for completion plausible?
- Are staff resources available?
- What type of maintenance is required for the policy, regulation, or initiative?



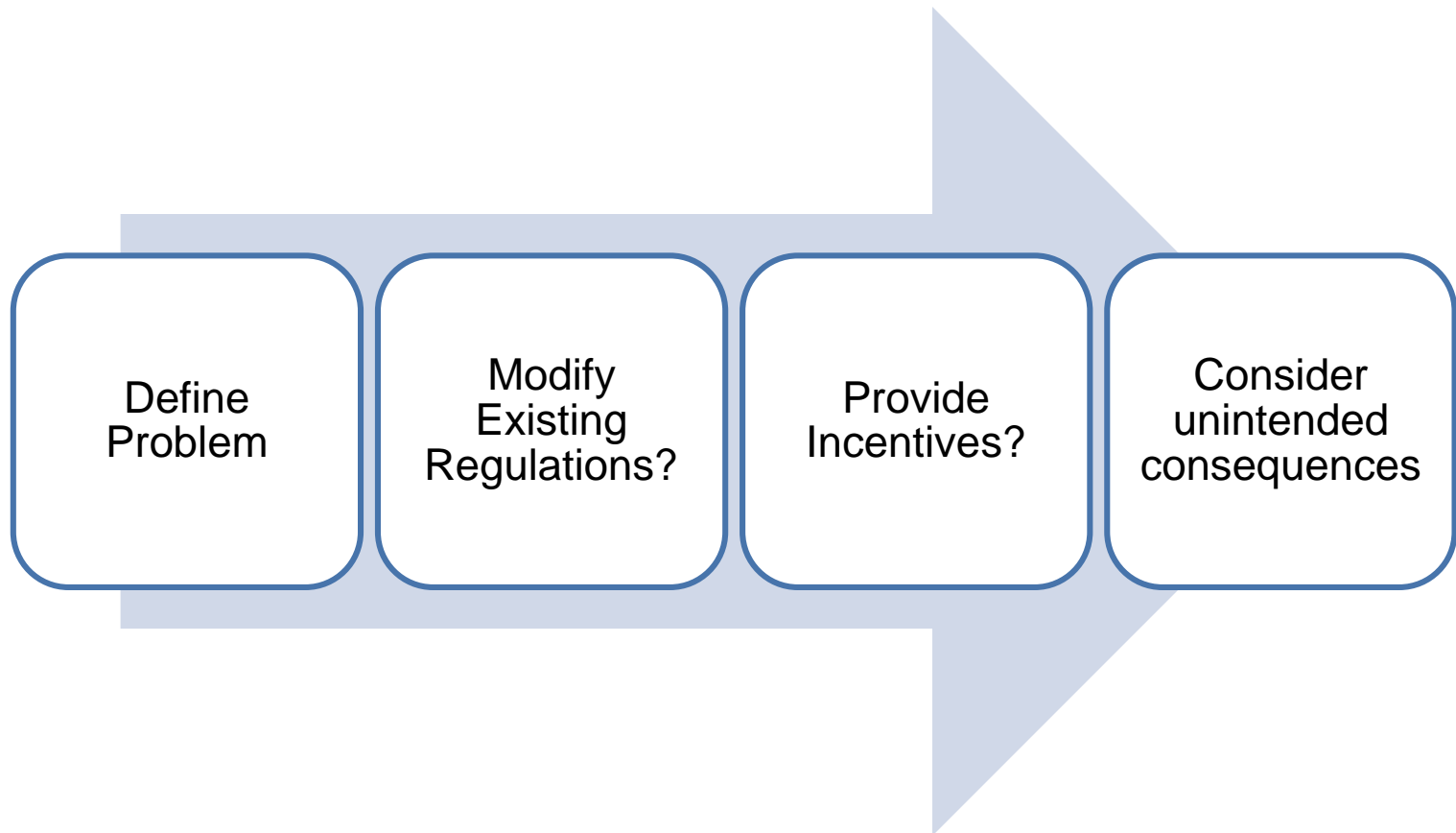
OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO REGULATIONS

Evaluate proposed solutions in appropriate context:

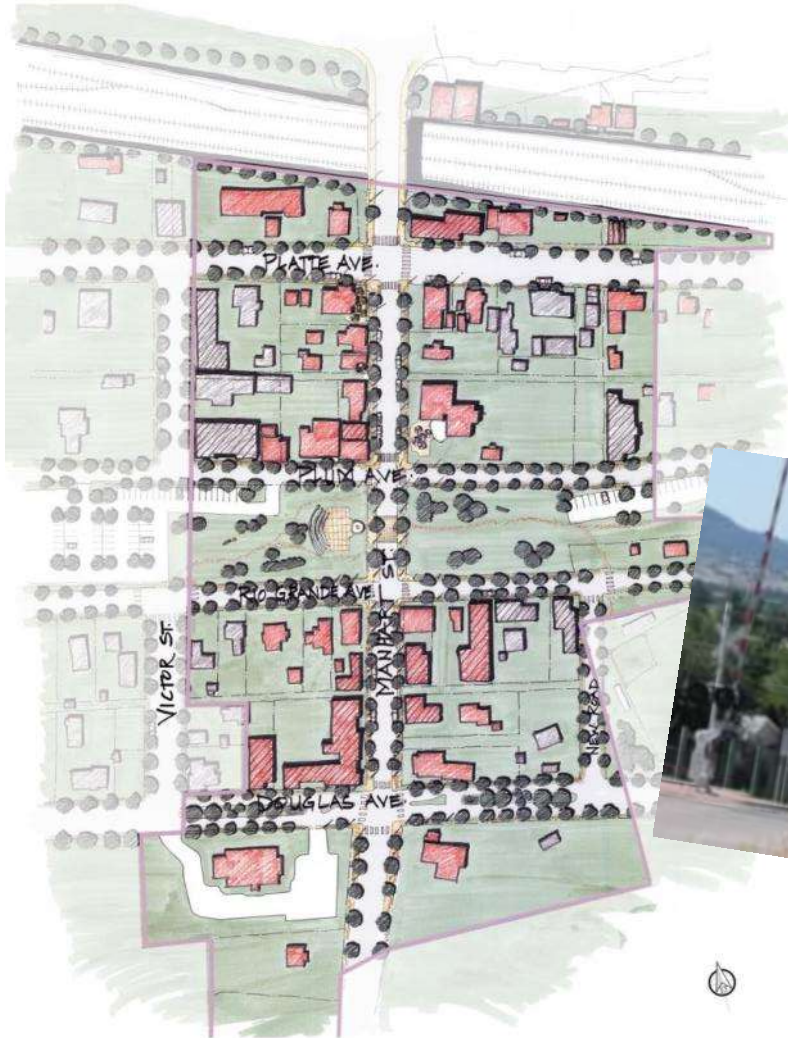
- Are regulations needed to make a shift in market trajectory?
- Can existing regulations be slightly modified to mitigate the issue?
- Is a non-regulatory approach better?
- Can it be enforced?



OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO REGULATIONS



SEDALIA, CO



DEFINING APPROPRIATE DENSITY (THE “D” WORD)

Don't you dare:

- **Block my view**
- **Bring in crime**
- **Increase traffic**
- **Erase our history**
- **Ruin small-town character**
- **Go changin'**



DEFINING APPROPRIATE DENSITY

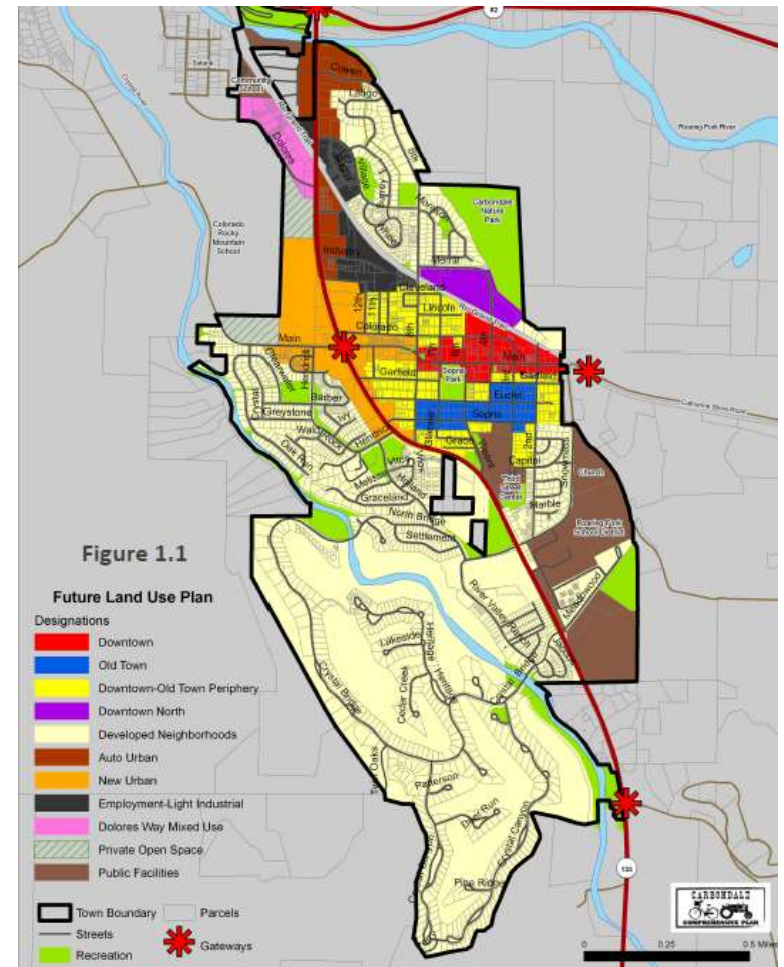
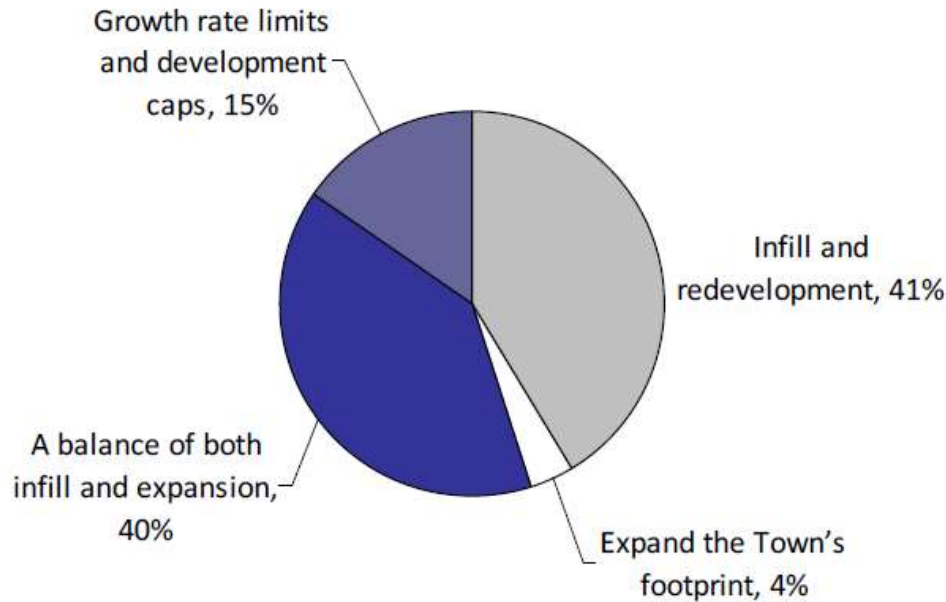
Try instead:

- Visual preference survey
- Scenario testing
- Tours of other towns
- Highlight synergies
- Consider density maximums in growth areas
- Find a champion
- **EDUCATE EARLY AND OFTEN!**



CARBONDALE, CO

Infill and Redevelopment



INCREASING HOUSING DIVERSITY

- **Improve housing diversity in strategic locations.**
- **Improve visitability.**
- **Revise standards to maximize housing affordability.**
- **Think about permitted uses!**
 - Continuum of care
 - Live/work
 - Accessory dwelling units
 - Single-family attached



ALIGNING WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS

Getting to “Maybe”

- **Require pre-application meetings or ‘DRC’**
- **Align infrastructure standards with development code**
- **Brainstorm flexible standards with other agencies and departments**



RIGHT-SIZING THE CODE AND PROCESS

More districts than people?

- Fewer districts; flexible uses and standards

Simplify procedures

- Who, when, what, and how?
- Administrative procedures

Fix ongoing issues

- Variances
- interpretations

Can staff administer the provisions?

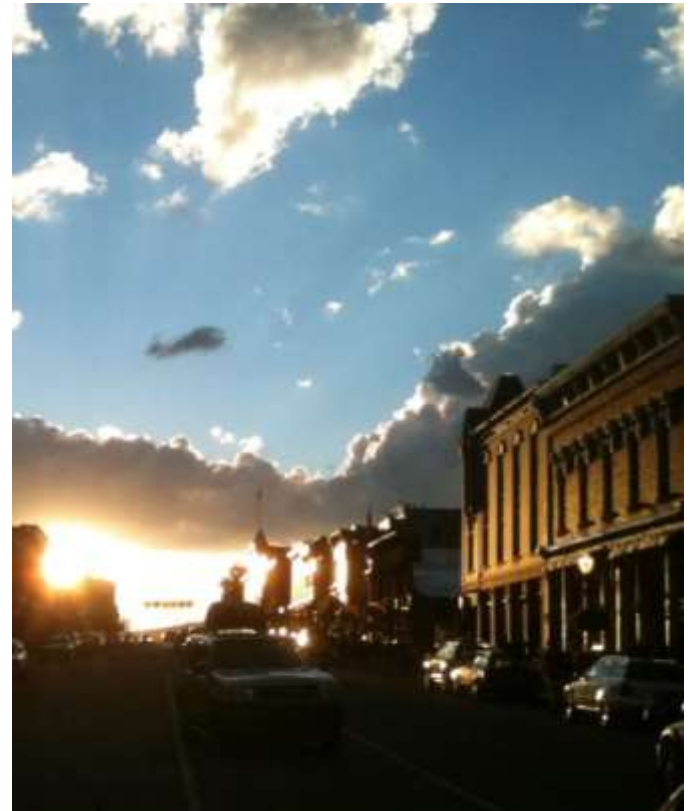
Are we implementing the plan?

- If not, should we be?



OTHER SMALL TOWN TIPS

- Beware the complex codes
- Don't just copy a neighbor
- Decide on an enforcement philosophy
- Share the resources
- Love your main street
- Don't mix mandates and aspirations
- Divide and conquer
- Know your advocates



LESSONS LEARNED...

1. Communicate

- Listen— people in small towns know the issues they are facing!
- Reinforce community values and introduce new ones.

2. Build Capacity

- Engage others and build teams, talk with leaders, and create partnerships.

3. Implement

- Prioritize what you take on. It's ok to take small steps.
- Celebrate successes – make sure that the community sees progress.

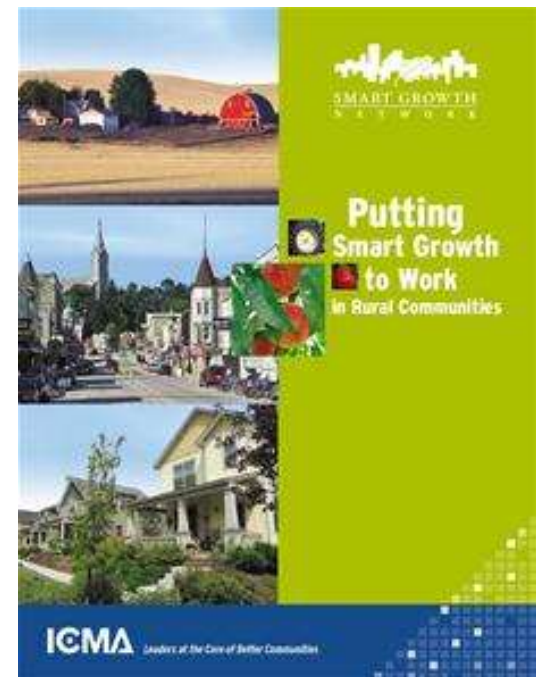


HELPFUL RESOURCES



PUTTING SMART GROWTH TO WORK IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

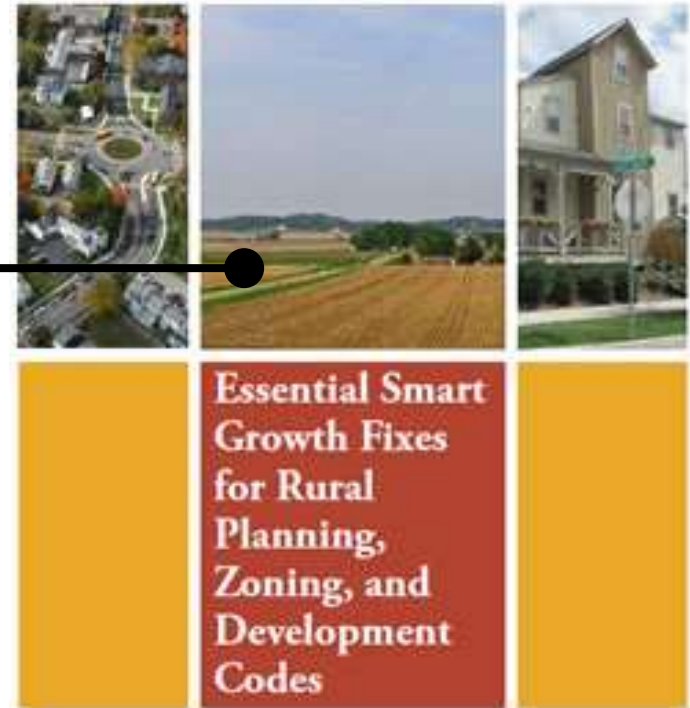
1. **Support the rural landscape** by creating an economic climate that enhances the viability of working lands and conserves natural lands.
2. **Help existing places thrive** by taking care of assets and investments such as downtowns, Main Streets, existing infrastructure, and places that the community values.
3. **Create great new places** by building vibrant, enduring neighborhoods and communities that people, especially young people, don't want to leave.



Source: icma.org

OFFICE OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES – EPA

1. **Essential Smart Growth Fixes for Rural Planning, Zoning, and Development Codes**
2. **Federal Resources for Sustainable Rural Communities**
3. **Sustainable Design and Green Building Toolkit for Local Governments**



Source: <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/publications.htm>

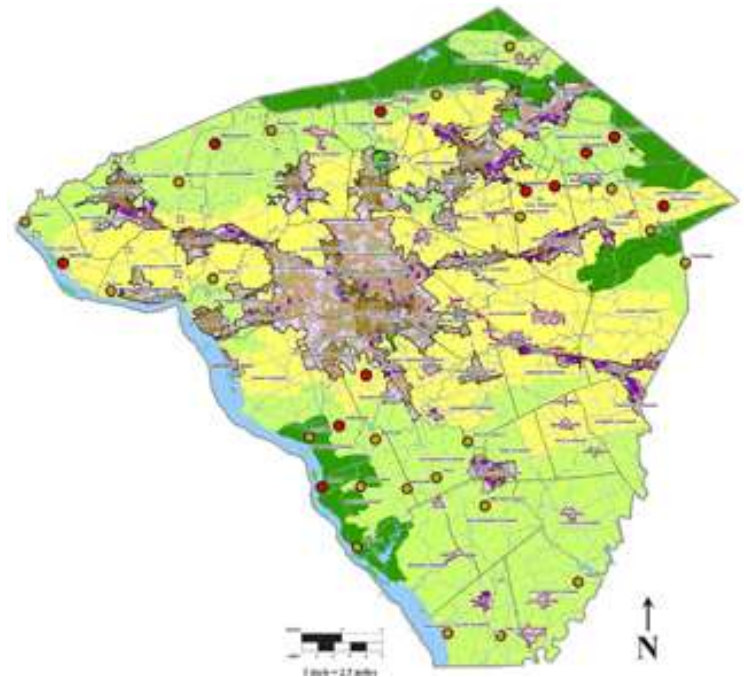
ESSENTIAL SMART GROWTH FIXES

1. **Determine Areas for Growth and for Preservation**
2. **Incorporate Fiscal Impact Analysis in Development Reviews**
3. **Reform Rural Planned Unit Developments**
4. **Use Wastewater Infrastructure Practices That Meet Development Goals**
5. **Right-Size Rural Roads**
6. **Encourage Appropriate Densities on the Periphery**
7. **Use Cluster Development to Transition From Town to Countryside**
8. **Create Annexation Policies and Development Standards That Preserve Rural Character**
9. **Protect Agricultural and Sensitive Natural Areas**
10. **Plan and Encourage Rural Commercial Development**
11. **Promote Housing Choices**
12. **Address Premature and Obsolete Subdivisions**

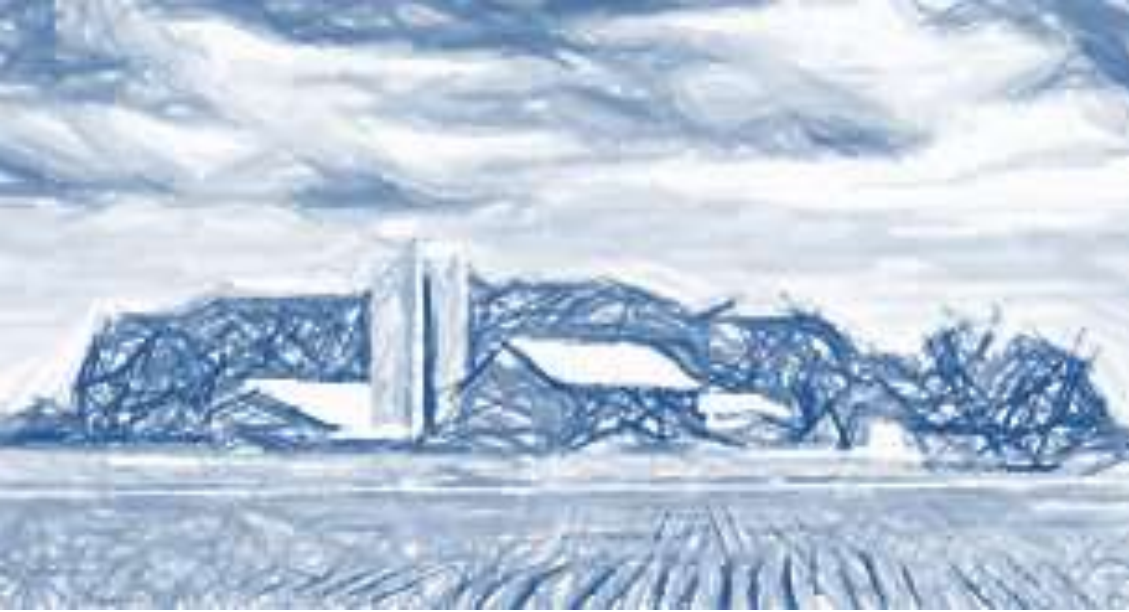
LANCASTER COUNTY, PA SMART GROWTH TOOLKIT

Tools in the Toolkit:

- Heritage
- Rural Areas
- Sustainable Growth
- Traditional Communities
- Tourism
- Green Infrastructure
- Grey Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Housing
- Economic Development



Source: www.co.lancaster.pa.us



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C L A R I O N

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