



FOCUS ON

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES & SMART GROWTH



A TRENDS IN AMERICA SPECIAL REPORT



Inside the Report

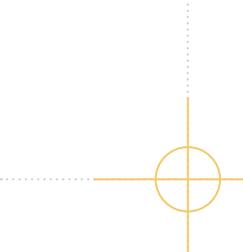
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About the Authors

Doug Myers is an energy and environment policy analyst and Sean Slone is a transportation policy analyst at The Council of State Governments.



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FOCUS ON: SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES & SMART GROWTH

Executive Summary

- ▶ Haphazard development occurs as a result of a lack of coordination between state and local departments responsible for transportation, housing and the environment. It results in the inefficient use of land and requires the extensive use of automobiles to travel from point to point, thereby reducing physical activity and increasing emissions of greenhouse gases.
- ▶ The principles of smart growth—mixing commercial and residential land uses in pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods; preserving open space for recreation and environmental protection; and providing a variety of transportation choices such as light rail and rapid bus transit—may help communities become more sustainable.
- ▶ In March 2009, Obama administration officials announced a government partnership known as the Sustainable Communities Initiative to:
 - ▶ Coordinate federal transportation, environmental protection and housing investments;
 - ▶ Identify strategies to provide more choices for affordable housing near employment opportunities;
 - ▶ Provide more transportation options to lower transportation costs, shorten travel times and improve the environment;
 - ▶ Better coordinate transportation and land uses; and
 - ▶ Foster safe, livable, healthy communities.
- ▶ The Sustainable Communities Initiative has a four-year goal to have every major metropolitan area in the country conduct integrated planning and investment, which will have an impact for both local and state governments.
- ▶ Investments in transportation infrastructure have yielded private investment returns more than tenfold. Although the recession has slowed the development of all real estate-related projects, the principles comprising smart growth will likely continue to drive future developments.
- ▶ Many states and localities are already seeking to instill the principles of smart growth. Utah and Denver are investing in transit-oriented development. Much like the federal initiative, Massachusetts is seeking more intergovernmental collaboration in making communities more sustainable. In Oregon, a study examined the impact of policies aimed at reducing driving. Cheyenne, Wyo., has a new master plan to guide community development while Kansas City, Mo., hopes to revitalize its downtown by making it a “greener” place. And a new California law seeks to encourage cities to reduce emissions through better land use planning.



SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES & SMART GROWTH

When the U.S. Secretaries of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development announced a new partnership aimed at making communities more sustainable earlier this year, they were traveling well-trod ground. The debate over how to best influence the ways in which our communities are planned and how growth is managed has raged at both the state and local levels for decades. Urban sprawl—identified as the negative trait that squanders our available land, limits our physical activity, contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, and makes each community seem as generic as the next—has long prompted state and local initiatives around the country to incorporate the tenets of smarter growth. This brief examines the federal call to action and the state and local initiatives under way to make communities more sustainable.

The Sustainable Communities Initiative

In March 2009, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan announced a partnership known as the Sustainable Communities Initiative. The Environmental Protection Agency signed on to the partnership in June. The goal of the initiative is to coordinate federal transportation, environmental protection and housing investments and identify strategies to provide:

- ▶ More choices for affordable housing near employment opportunities;
- ▶ More transportation options to lower transportation costs, shorten travel times and improve the environment;
- ▶ Better coordination of transportation and land uses; and
- ▶ Safe, livable and healthy communities.

An interagency task force under the initiative set a goal to have every major metropolitan area in the country conduct integrated housing, transportation and land use planning and investment over the next four years. The federal departments will make planning grants available to metropolitan areas and create mechanisms to ensure the plans are carried through to localities. States and metropolitan areas are currently required to develop 20-year long-range transportation plans and four-year Transportation Improvement Programs. The Department of Transportation will work with metropolitan

planning organizations to conduct integrated planning as part of their next long range transportation plan update and will provide technical assistance to help them assess future growth alternatives that better coordinate land use and transportation planning. Administration officials hope these federally mandated planning efforts will make more effective use of federal dollars available for housing and transportation.¹

Transportation Secretary LaHood told the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee earlier this year: “One of my highest priorities is to help promote more livable communities through sustainable surface transportation programs. Actions on many fronts will be required to enhance the quality of life associated with reduced commutes, limited transportation noise and other environmental impacts, and convenient access to centers of commerce and intercity travel hubs. ... Integrating transportation planning with community development and expanding transportation options will not only improve connectivity and influence how people choose to travel but also enable communities to consider the design of transportation and land use together.”

LaHood cited the importance of improvements to walking and bicycling facilities, connectivity to transit to reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions and mixed-use neighborhoods with highly connected streets.

“Benefits include improved traffic flow, shorter trip lengths, reduced vehicle-miles traveled, safer streets for pedestrians and cyclists, lower per capita greenhouse gas emissions, reduced dependence on fossil fuels, increased trip-chaining (combining several errands into one trip), and independence for those who prefer not to or are unable to drive,” he said. “In addition, investment in street networks stimulates private sector economic activity, increases the viability of street-level retail businesses and professional services, creates housing opportunities, and extends the usefulness of school and transit facilities.”²

U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd of Connecticut called for the White House to create an Office of Sustainable Development that would incorporate transportation, housing and urban development into federal energy and climate change policies.

In a letter to the president earlier this year Dodd wrote, “The choice is clear: Americans can

continue policies that encourage unchecked sprawl, leading to increased congestion and energy use, the further loss of open space, and a less competitive economy. Or we can develop our communities and our country in a sustainable way that increases the availability of public transportation, improves efficiency, and reduces oil consumption and carbon emissions, to help us meet the challenges of the 21st century.”³

What is Smart Growth?

The sustainable communities push will sound familiar to anyone who has studied the concept of smart growth, which incorporates various aspects of planning and development, taking into account what advocates see as desirable outcomes in health, transportation, environment, housing, economic development and quality of life. According to the EPA-funded Sustainable Communities Network, the principles of smart growth include:

- ▶ Creating a range of housing opportunities and choices;
- ▶ Creating walkable neighborhoods;
- ▶ Encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration;
- ▶ Fostering distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place;
- ▶ Making development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective;
- ▶ Mixing land uses;
- ▶ Preserving open space, farm land, natural beauty and critical environmental areas;
- ▶ Providing a variety of transportation choices;
- ▶ Strengthening and directing development towards existing communities; and
- ▶ Taking advantage of compact building design.⁴

Many of these principles are designed to address the problem of unsustainable, unhealthy sprawl and to increase the density and accessibility of our communities. Robert Puentes is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., and is the director of the Metropolitan Infrastructure Initiative. He told the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee earlier this year that: “Density matters tremendously to urban and metropolitan places and is critical to the economic health of our country. However, many places are finding themselves unequipped to deal with the nation’s projected growth and to accommodate truly well-designed density. Part of the problem



is that there is too little integrated decision making that crosses disciplines and joins-up solutions. Too often, policies and rules are narrowly defined, poorly coordinated, and work at cross-purposes.”⁵

Transit-Oriented Development

One way states and communities hope to make the principles of smart growth a reality is by providing more incentives for the growth of transit-oriented development, which creates mixed-use, higher density communities that encourage people to live, work and shop near transit facilities and decrease their use of automobiles.

Investment in public transportation can be the key to creating these denser developments and in the process can help bring economic development. An investment of \$73 million in a streetcar line in Portland, Ore., for example, helped attract \$2.3 billion in private investments within two blocks of the line. In Little Rock, Ark., \$20 million for a streetcar line attracted \$200 million, and in Tampa, Fla., \$60 million for streetcars leveraged \$1 billion in new investment.⁶

But like many sectors of the economy, transit-oriented development has experienced a downturn in recent months, and analysts expect demand for these projects to remain soft for several years as the recession continues. Hessaam Nadji, managing director of Marcus & Millichap,

a commercial real estate brokerage firm, told CoStar Realty Information earlier this year: “The problem is, the prime areas for transit-oriented demand are those where development costs are incredibly high. It’s not plug and play—it’s more expensive and difficult development.” Even federal stimulus dollars for new infrastructure may not be enough by themselves to lead a recovery of the market for such developments, Nadji said.⁷

Transit-oriented development is also a concept that is not without its skeptics and detractors. Samuel Staley, director of urban and land policy at the Reason Foundation, told a Congressional committee in 2009 that, “many in the professional planning community seem to take on faith the belief that mass transit is a substitute for the automobile when it comes to transportation choice. Unfortunately, transit is not a substitute for the mobility provided by automobiles for the vast majority of residents in U.S. urban areas.”⁸

Michael Allegra, the assistant general manager at the Utah Transit Authority, cited other problems. “City councils and planning commissions, especially in smaller cities ... have not updated their codes to reflect rising demand for different types of housing and for locations adjacent to transit service,” he told Congress. “There is also a lack of real experience with genuine transit-oriented development on the part of many developers. Some have misrepresented their projects as transit-oriented development, when in fact they are no such thing.”⁹

So what is genuine transit-oriented development? According to a 2003 article in the American Planning Association’s Planning magazine, there are 12 characteristics that demonstrate the difference between transit-oriented development and simply “transit-adjacent development” (in close proximity to transit, but with a design not significantly influenced by it). True transit-oriented development includes:

- ▶ Development that is within a five-minute walk of the transit stop, or about a quarter-mile from the stop to the edge of the development;
- ▶ Development where there are places to work, live, learn, relax and shop for daily needs creating a balanced mix of uses that generates 24-hour ridership;
- ▶ A zoning code generating buildings that shape and define memorable streets, squares and plazas, while allowing uses to change easily over time;
- ▶ Block perimeters limited to no more than 1,350 feet generating a fine-grained network of streets, dispersing traffic and allowing for the creation of quiet and intimate thoroughfares;

- ▶ No minimum parking requirements;
- ▶ Maximum parking requirements—for every 1,000 workers, as few as 10 parking spaces but no more than 500 spaces are provided;
- ▶ Full market rates charged for all parking spaces, with the exception of validated parking for shoppers;
- ▶ Major transit stops offering free attended bicycle parking, repairs and rentals, and minor stops providing secure and fully enclosed bike parking;
- ▶ Transit service that is fast, frequent, reliable and comfortable, with 15 minutes or less between vehicle trips;
- ▶ Roadway space allocated for walkers and cyclists and traffic signals timed primarily for their convenience;
- ▶ Automobile level-of-service standards are met through congestion pricing measures, or disregarded entirely. Automobile level-of-service is a measure of the convenience of motor vehicle travel (such as time delay at intersections) and roadway capacity. Congestion pricing charges users of a transportation network during periods of peak demand as a way of reducing traffic congestion.
- ▶ Traffic-easing road design and speed limits that are 30 miles per hour on major streets and 20 miles per hour on smaller streets.¹⁰

STATE POLICIES & INITIATIVES

Utah Bets Big on Transit-Oriented and Mixed-Use Development

Utah has been a leader in promoting sustainable growth issues for more than a decade. A public-private, nonprofit corporation known as Envision Utah, created by the business community in 1997, is partially funded by the EPA to perform research and advocate for growth policies. Envision Utah served as a neutral facilitator, bringing together residents, elected officials, developers, conservationists, business leaders and others to make decisions about the state’s future growth. A series of workshops and public values research resulted in the Quality Growth Strategy, which provides voluntary, locally-implemented, market-based solutions. More than one hundred Utah communities have partnered with Envision Utah to assess their growth concerns.

As one of the fastest-growing states in the nation and, according to Standard and Poor’s DRI, the sixth most urbanized state (due to the concentration of 80 percent of the state’s population along the Wasatch Front), Utah is in a unique position to incorporate many of the tenets of

smart growth in the years ahead. Envision Utah estimates nearly 900 square miles of new land will need to be developed to keep up with population projections for 2030.¹¹

In the Salt Lake region, the state's largest metropolitan area, Envision Utah estimates that two-thirds of the buildings that will exist in 2040 have not yet been built.

"We have an opportunity to change the course of our future and strike a better balance for the development of our future," Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker told the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in July.¹²

Fortunately, Becker said, his city seized the opportunity.

"In the Salt Lake Valley, as elsewhere throughout the country, urban sprawl and population growth have dictated our need for higher, more efficient transportation capacity," Becker said in a speech in March to the Rocky Mountain Land Institute. "Today we are responding with sustainable planning strategies, transit-oriented developments, light rail lines, and re-implementation of streetcars ... After two successful light rail lines and a new, 40-mile commuter rail in the last eight years, Utah voters have increased their taxes to build 70 (more) miles of rail in the next seven years."¹³

Western states may be known for their wide-open spaces, but Utah realizes that land available for development needed to accommodate a growing population is not unlimited. Envision Utah developed a plan that seeks to strategically accommodate one-third of the Salt Lake area's future development on 3 percent of available land and make it accessible to transit stops and existing road corridors.

"In addition to creating neighborhoods that reflect consumer preferences and minimize public infrastructure investments, lower per capita water use and more active neighborhoods supporting improved public health, our region would see 10 percent less driving, resulting in cleaner air, less traffic congestion and \$6.4 to \$8.8 billion in savings in roadway investments," Becker said in his July remarks to Congress.¹²

The Utah Transit Authority's Michael Allegra touted several Salt Lake-area projects that attempt to follow that strategy during an appearance before a U.S. Senate committee in spring 2009. They included:

- ▶ The City Creek Project, a \$2 billion mixed-used development downtown modeled after an Italian piazza;
- ▶ The Gateway residential and commercial complex, a revitalized old rail yard that now contains 20 percent of all downtown housing and is surrounded on three sides by transit; and



- ▶ Daybreak, the largest master-planned transit-oriented development in the state, which in its first phase provides for 20,000 residential units and more than 30,000 jobs.

In all, Allegra said, the region's long-range transportation plan is expected to result in 80,000 acres of developable land, and one million people will live within half of a mile of a major transit station. More than \$7 billion in new land development is under construction or committed for construction around the new Utah Transit Authority rail stations.⁹

Secretary LaHood praised Envision Utah's Quality Growth Strategy at a U.S. Senate hearing in June. "It was a priority for those involved in developing this plan to ensure that families could live near one another throughout their lives," he said. "When there is a mix of housing types in a walkable neighborhood, the Envision Utah effort found that it is more possible for grandparents to live within walking distance of their grandchildren."¹⁴

Moreover, as Becker told Congress this year: "Providing our citizens with the real option of being able to live, work, shop and recreate in the area where they live would reduce vehicle-miles traveled, improve air quality, improve public health, strengthen neighborhoods, reduce public infrastructure expenditures and significantly reduce global warming pollution."¹²

LINKS | Envision Utah: <http://www.envisionutah.org/>

Massachusetts Seeks Collaboration

In 2007, Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick issued an executive order creating the Development Cabinet, which he chairs. The

other members include the state's lieutenant governor and the secretaries of Administration and Finance, Energy and Environmental Affairs, Housing and Economic Development, Labor and Workforce Development, and Transportation and Public Works. The group convenes bi-weekly to identify ways to work together.

In addition, the Patrick administration released a set of sustainable development principles that guide the creation and implementation of state agency policies and programs, as well as investments in land and infrastructure. To achieve consistency with the principles across the state, municipalities are asked to modify their planning, regulatory and funding actions.

The state incentivizes communities to do this with a grant and loan program called Commonwealth Capital. State funds are provided to communities to encourage them to follow planning and zoning measures consistent with the sustainable development principles. The sustainable development principles are:

- ▶ Concentrate development and mix uses
- ▶ Advance equity
- ▶ Make efficient decisions
- ▶ Protect land and ecosystem
- ▶ Use natural resources wisely
- ▶ Expand housing opportunities
- ▶ Provide transportation choice
- ▶ Increase job and business opportunities
- ▶ Promote clean energy
- ▶ Plan regionally¹⁵

LINKS | Patrick administration's Smart Growth/Smart Energy Programs: http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/pages/state-policy.html

Oregon Gauges the Impact of Reduced Driving

Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski proposed to set specific targets for reducing the total number of miles driven in Oregon in order to meet the state's greenhouse gas emission goals. The advocacy group Upstream Public Health collaborated with Oregon Health and Science University, Human Impact Partners and a health and transportation expert advisory committee on a health impact assessment in May 2009 to evaluate health impacts of several policies to reduce driving.

A health impact assessment, according to the World Health Organization, is "a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program, or project may be judged in terms of its potential effects within the population."¹⁶

The Oregon study examined 11 policies to reduce driving in six metro areas, among them:

- ▶ Maximizing residential and employment density;
- ▶ Requiring new developments to be mixed-use;
- ▶ Improving street connectivity;
- ▶ Improving pedestrian/bicyclist infrastructure of neighborhoods;
- ▶ Locating desirable destinations near residential neighborhoods;
- ▶ Increasing the coverage area for public transportation across all metropolitan regions;
- ▶ Promoting use of public transit; and
- ▶ Increasing costs for driving individual vehicles by increasing fuel taxes; or
- ▶ Raising parking fees; or
- ▶ Instituting a tax for vehicle miles traveled; or
- ▶ Charging motorists more to use a roadway, bridge or tunnel during periods of the heaviest use, which is known as congestion pricing.

In assessing these policies, the health impact assessment reached several findings including:

- ▶ The positive health benefits of alternative forms of transportation are best promoted by implementing a combination of policies.
- ▶ Creating affordable neighborhoods that are high density, mixed use and highly connected will make people more active, decrease air pollution and reduce car crash fatalities.
- ▶ Employer parking fees would better promote health than a gas or vehicle-miles traveled tax because it would shift people away from driving to public transit.¹⁷

LINKS | Upstream Public Health Report: http://www.upstreampublichealth.org/HIA_Report_VMT.pdf

SMART GROWTH IN CITIES

Cities and municipalities are also taking the reins in seeking to create communities that are healthier, produce less greenhouse gases, are more compact and networked by mass transit, and that make living and working in them a more holistic experience. Cities such as Denver, Kansas City and Cheyenne, Wyo., are at the forefront of the smart growth concept, with each evolving in ways suited to their environment. And while their evolution is unique, they each share common elements that support their goals and propel them forward.

Cheyenne's Master Plan

Wyoming's PlanCheyenne—a community master plan for Cheyenne—was established to



integrate and guide the city's future development in building, transportation, and parks and recreation design.¹⁸ The municipal planning organization's goal is to foster mixed-use communities that are easy to traverse via whatever method chosen (by vehicle, bicycle or on foot). Communities should also be safe, aesthetically appealing, contain open spaces such as parks, and maintain their local character and foster the values of the city's residents, such as preserving ranchland, according to the goals of PlanCheyenne. By integrating all aspects of development, city planners and builders can more easily identify what actions best suit the plan's goals. In doing so, the city recognized the need to revise its building and development codes to make them compatible with the plan's goals.¹⁸ The city initiated a new project known as the Unified Development Code, which aims to review and revise, as well as clarify, the code (by providing easy to understand illustrations, for example) to ensure it adheres to and advances the city's vision. The code is expected to be adopted this fall.

Perhaps one of the most important keys to PlanCheyenne's success is the planning department's communications outreach. By holding community workshops, producing non-technical, illustrative fact sheets and showing before and after photos, as well as discussing the impacts with residents, the plan has garnered widespread support and has made it easier to move smart growth projects forward.¹⁹

LaHood told a Senate committee in June that, "By involving the public early in the planning process and coordinating transportation activities with other activities related to healthy, sustainable communities, we improve the quality of life for all Americans. Collaborative, interdisciplinary decisions get good results, particularly more public support and reduced costs and time to complete transportation projects."¹⁴

To date, Cheyenne has built its first smart growth development, The Village, converting a seven acre ranchette (small ranch) into 40,000 square feet of restaurant, retail and office space, with second-story condominiums and 24 townhomes on a village green.¹⁹ Cheyenne also purchased 18,800 acres, mostly for preservation, and installed 15 wind turbines in the city landfill, which provide enough electricity to power about a third of the city's residences.¹⁹

LINKS | Cheyenne Area Master Plan Executive Summary: http://www.plancheyenne.com/pdf/final/1/Cheyenne_exec_summ_Final_Apr07.pdf

Denver on the FaTrack

Denver is among a number of municipalities around the country experimenting with transit-oriented development. In 2004, Denver voters approved a 0.4 percent sales tax increase to help fund a program called FaTracks, which is expected to cost \$6.9 billion and will provide 122 new miles of passenger rail, 18 miles of bus corridors, and six new rail corridors with about

60 stations. Anticipated federal funding of \$1.4 billion will help defray the costs as will a combination of other sources, including public-private partnerships.²¹

The passage of FasTracks resulted in considerable development along proposed corridors, including more than 2,500 residential units, 2.7 million square feet of retail space, and 4.5 million square feet of space for medical-related use. While more is planned, the current economic downturn has caused delays to proposed transit lines, as well as cancellations of some proposed mixed-use developments due to a lack of available financing and more strict lending requirements. Yet many economists agree the real estate market will rebound and the values that have driven transit-oriented development—especially the focus on environmental preservation—will persevere.²⁰

LINKS | RTD Fastracks Transit-Oriented Development 2008 Status Report: http://www.rtd-fastracks.com/media/uploads/main/TOD_Status_Report_2008.pdf

Revitalizing Kansas City

U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri has proposed a Green Impact Zone that would revitalize Kansas City's inner city—an area comprising 150 blocks—where nearly 31 percent of the population is in poverty²² in the hopes of making it a desirable place to live and work.

The project's plans include, among other things, weatherizing homes to reduce consumers' energy costs (since low-income individuals and families spend a disproportionate percentage of their income on energy), tearing down derelict buildings, providing job training in the green energy sector and improving mass transit to allow residents easy access to employment.

The federal government has committed \$42.5 million to the Green Impact Zone. Of those funds, approximately \$40 million has been allocated for the creation of a bus rapid transit line and a new bridge to accommodate the line. This is important to enhancing the community because 20 percent of the population within one mile of the proposed line does not have access to an automobile.²² In addition, billions of dollars in other sources of potential stimulus funds have been identified.

To increase its scope and effectiveness, the Green Impact Zone is a collaborative effort between various city departments, Kansas City's metropolitan planning organization (the Mid-America Regional Council), neighborhood

groups, and nonprofits focusing on development and energy.²³

LINKS | Green Impact Zone of Missouri: <http://www.house.gov/cleaver/Cleaver%20Green/pdf/greenzone.pdf>

Impact of Senate Bill 375 on California Cities and Municipalities

Senate Bill 375, passed by the California legislature last year, intends to reduce sprawl and the resulting long commutes in the state's municipalities. The goal of the bill, which was signed into law on September 30, 2008, is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through better land-use planning.²⁴

Each of California's 18 metropolitan planning organizations will set greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets from cars and light trucks—the largest source of emissions in the state, accounting for 30 percent of all emissions—in conjunction with input from the Air Resources Board.²⁴ The overall goal will be to reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled. Developers will be given incentives to build mixed-use communities. Projects that meet certain requirements will be exempt from or have fewer requirements from environmental impact reviews.²⁵ This will serve to eliminate some costs for developers and reduce project startup time.

In keeping with smart growth principles, the bill also seeks to ensure the housing needs of the community, especially low-income residents, are met by requiring rezoning of certain areas within a specified time-frame.²⁵

LINKS | Senate Bill 375: http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/sen/sb_0351-0400/sb_375_bill_20080930_chaptered.pdf

Office of the Governor Fact Sheet: <http://gov.ca.gov/fact-sheet/10707/>

COMMONALITIES AND UNIQUENESS OF DESIGN

Smart growth initiatives around the country seek to revitalize downtrodden areas or to establish rules for the creation of new developments, generally with an eye toward making them compact and mixed-use, as well as offering multiple means of transit (especially environmentally friendly ones), reducing the number of vehicles on the road, increasing pedestrian

traffic, and preserving the environment. Smart growth projects involve the public and stakeholders of the community in which they reside, ensuring that public concerns and needs are taken into account and planned for accordingly. They also aim to preserve the historic nature of each community and embody the values of its residents.

With an administration in Washington looking to encourage the development of more sustainable communities by offering consultancy expertise and grant-funding opportunities, states and municipalities may look to initiatives like the ones in this brief to guide them down the path to smarter growth.

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Headquarters
Lexington, KY
859.244.8000
www.csg.org

Washington
Washington, DC 20001
202.624.5460
www.csg.org

East
New York, NY
212.482.2320
www.csgeast.org

Midwest
Lombard, IL
630.925.1922
www.csgmidwest.org

South
Atlanta, GA
404.633.1866
www.slcatlanta.org

West
Sacramento, CA
916.553.4423
www.csgwest.org