

CONNECTICUT APA

GROWTH MANAGEMENT POLICY STATEMENT DRAFT



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SMART PLANNING FOR RESPONSIBLE GROWTH
THE CONNECTICUT CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION
GROWTH MANAGEMENT POLICY STATEMENT

CCAPA has been an active participant in the development and refinement of legislation in Connecticut pertaining to planning and growth management over the past eight years. CCAPA has reviewed and considered the basis for and potential impact of growth management policies and strategies, commonly referred to by the term “smart growth.”

As a Chapter of the American Planning Association, CCAPA endorses the APA Policy Guide on Smart Growth, which provides a global perspective on the issue. Locally, CCAPA supported and assisted legislative leaders in the adoption of the growth management principles now embedded which establish the planning processes required of the State, planning regions, and municipalities in the State’s planning statutes. In testimony before legislative committees and at public forums, CCAPA supported the creation of a central state planning function to enhance planning coordination among state agencies and between state, regional, and local planning processes. This function, established by the Governor with Executive Order #15 in 2006, includes an interagency coordinating council, also a recommendation supported by CCAPA.

CCAPA’s strategic objective with respect to legislative advocacy and government relations, is to advocate for sound planning and development. Other than by its adoption of with the APA Policy Statement, CCAPA has not identified specific growth management *strategies* – as opposed to *principles* – that the Chapter endorses as priorities for Connecticut to pursue. Rather, the Chapter advocates smart planning to identify and implement strategies for accomplishing development and conservation goals.

Smart planning is embodied in the APA’s Smart Growth core principles and policy positions, in the basic growth management principles in Connecticut statutes, and in the State’s administrative functions that support and coordinate planning and growth management. CCAPA is committed to assisting its members and State leaders and agencies with identifying and implementing appropriate and workable growth management strategies through smart planning for all of the State’s communities, regardless of size or location. The Chapter recognizes that smart planning in Connecticut, at least for the foreseeable future, will be framed by the State’s home rule tradition, its strong environmental ethic, and its pressing economic and housing challenges.

INTRODUCTION

By now most of us have heard about smart growth. Many states, including Connecticut, have adopted programs consistent with smart growth principles. However, for various reasons, we believe it is time to consider a more comprehensive and integrated approach to “smart growth” in Connecticut.

The State of Connecticut has the highest median income in the nation, but paradoxically, we also have some of the nation’s poorest cities. For a small state, we enjoy a wide variety of lifestyle options, from lively downtowns, to serene rural settings, and everything in between. We have a successful and diverse economy, and a well-educated and capable work force. Our academic institutions are unparalleled. We have a lot to be proud of.

In spite of all these obvious assets, like most states, we also face considerable challenges. Farms and forests are being converted to residential subdivisions, far from employment centers. Traffic arteries are clogged for many hours of the day, frustrating commerce and commuters alike, as well as fouling our air. Scarce resources are channeled into our cities to support school systems, repair aging infrastructure, and to address pressing social needs.

Challenges abound. Revolutionary changes in telecommunications, finance, international trade, transportation and geo-politics have created a truly global marketplace. That new market place does not conform to the “old rules” of business. It demands performance, speed and efficiency. There is absolutely no question that current land use and related practices in this state will simply be unable in the long run to respond effectively to the demands of this new global model. Smarter growth might just be able to help Connecticut prosper in this new world economy.

The Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association believes that our state must assess the full range of smart growth principles and practices to determine which ones will best address these challenges. Any solutions that might ultimately develop from such an assessment will need the support of a wide variety of groups. More importantly, no one group should undertake such an assessment with preconceptions of what may or may not be appropriate in Connecticut. Regardless of what other states have done, Connecticut is not Arizona, or Oregon, or Florida.

Connecticut has a proud tradition of tackling problems in a thoughtful and measured way. This has led to the success we now enjoy. Smart Growth may or may not be a part of our future success, but we will not know for certain unless we take the first step.

WHAT IS SMART GROWTH?

Advocates of smart growth believe it will improve environmental quality, increase social and economic equity, improve lifestyles, and enhance community. For many, smart growth means revitalization of central cities and inner ring suburbs. For others it means a more compact, mixed-use form of development in the developing suburbs. Smart growth can also mean new investment in transportation systems that alleviate congestion and connect developed and developing places. The preservation of open space and the use of the natural environment as an organizing feature for development are also promoted as smart growth. Smart growth is brownfield redevelopment and open space preservation.

There is no agreed upon definition of smart growth for Connecticut – yet. However, getting to a definitive answer is taking on increasing importance. The Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association believes that smart growth is the integration of all of these ideas, and perhaps others, working in collaboration to improve the quality of life here in Connecticut. Our challenge is to bring together disparate views and meld them into an agreed upon set of principles and practices that define what we believe smart growth means to Connecticut. These principles and practices can then be the framework within which our communities and our regions organize and plan for their futures. Smart growth is not about regulation, but about empowering people at all levels, so they can then make decisions that taken together, make better sense for our common future.

WHY SMART GROWTH IN CONNECTICUT?

Generally speaking, growth is affected by a patchwork of often competing rules, regulations and policies, developed and administered at various levels of government. Private sector development interests try to meet market demands and keep up with their competitors, all subject to the patchwork of “rules” and of course, limited by available financing and other resources. To say that growth is “managed” in any comprehensive, strategic sense is far from accurate.

Based on our strong tradition of local autonomy, most real decisions affecting everyday development occur at the local level. For the most part, local authorities decide what can go where, and to what extent. Whether it’s a housing subdivision in your neighborhood, a new retail plaza, or an office park, chances are your town authorities make the decision.

This is an extreme over-simplification, but over time, thousands of these incremental and uncoordinated local decisions have created what we now know as “Connecticut.” In the past, development was allowed to occur more organically and it is common to have homes mixed with employment and services. For various reasons, many years ago people thought it was better to separate these uses. For the last 75 years or so, that’s what we’ve been doing. Smart growth practices try to mitigate the negative impacts of these choices by providing more options.

Smart growth puts money in your pocket

If you take a look at your personal finances, you'll quickly realize that some of your hard earned money goes to local, state and federal governments to pay for public goods and services. Housing costs, transportation, food, health care, utilities, and other "necessities" take another bite. To the extent smart growth helps governments reduce costs for major infrastructure, schools, social services, personnel and other demands, those savings can be passed on to the "consumer," you. At the same time, smart growth can reduce your personal costs of living by providing a wider variety of transportation options reducing reliance on the automobile, by reducing housing costs and increasing housing availability, and by creating healthier workable communities.

Smart growth preserves open space and conserves natural resources

The continuing spread of low density, auto dependent development degrades our air and water and reduces natural open space. Smart growth policies could help retain open spaces for recreation and wildlife; preserve farmland and forests, and better manage our finite resources to accommodate growth in a responsible way.

Smart growth promotes and enhances established city centers

Our existing established centers, including central cities, inner ring suburbs, and village centers, provide an alternative to the suburban lifestyle. To remain viable, these places need to reverse decades of gradual decline and abandonment. Their historic role as centers of commerce, culture, creativity and opportunity should be treasured. Responsible preservation of our architectural heritage and traditional urban places are to the built environment what conservation of open space is to the natural environment. It is possible to reinvest in our centers in a way that reinvents their role, while at the same time, permitting sensible development in other less developed communities.

Smart growth reinforces a sense of community

Physical form influences people's sense of community. Providing opportunities for people to gather, for spontaneous socialization, and to provide opportunities for quiet reflection and relaxation are all important aspects of community life. Individual communities provide these opportunities for residents, the more likely the residents will feel connected to each other and to the places where they live. This does not mean that only one particular type of development can accomplish this, but it means that providing more than one type of development in a network of settlements throughout the regions of our state will enhance everyone's quality of life.

Smart growth enhances physical form and character

All communities have their own unique character. This character is reflected in the interrelationship of the natural and built environment. Continuing low-rise auto-dependent development not only consumes a tremendous amount of resources, but if unchecked will destroy the unique qualities of the built and natural environments that make Connecticut communities special.

Smart growth promotes long-term economic growth

For communities or regions to be successful they must have the right combination of skilled workforce, access to markets, and the governmental, social, educational, and business institutions and services necessary to promote vibrant growth. To the extent that inadequate infrastructure, abandoned resources, inadequate capacity, and difficulties matching people with jobs exists, the status quo development pattern impedes the ability of Connecticut and its separate regions to grow and prosper for the long term. Smarter growth patterns are a compelling state interest.

Smart growth optimizes infrastructure investment

Within Connecticut there are two distinct sources of demand for infrastructure investment. Central cities and inner ring suburbs must replace aging infrastructure in order to provide adequate capacity for water, sanitary sewers, power, and telecommunications, so they can compete in the new economy and maintain the value of their neighborhoods as desirable places to live and invest. However, large portions of their population are moving into rural areas. Cities also have limited available land to develop as a means of enhancing their tax base.

Meanwhile, the less developed portions of the region find they are under increasing pressure to build expensive new facilities including roads, water and sewer utilities, schools, and increasing health and social service infrastructure. Smart growth can rationalize public infrastructure investment and direct it to support an agreed upon growth and development pattern.

Smart growth supports an efficient transportation system

Increasing traffic congestion constrains our ability to efficiently move people and goods. It also makes it increasingly difficult for employers to find workers within a reasonable commuting distance to where the jobs are located. Increasing traffic congestion also takes a tremendous toll on our air and water resources. There is increasing awareness of and commitment to deal with this issue in a systematic and comprehensive way. Connecting new transportation investments to a smart growth development pattern is essential to achieving long-term economic growth and improving quality of life.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The Chapter affirms its endorsement of the APA Policy Guide on Smart Growth, the growth management principles in CGS 8-23, and the administrative functions pertaining to responsible growth embodied in Governor Rell's Executive Order #15. The Chapter further affirms its commitment to promoting and advocating smart planning and adequate planning resources to assist the State and its municipalities in meeting conservation and development challenges and opportunities. This policy statement will be applied to the Chapter's consideration and potential endorsement of specific growth management strategies, refinements to legislative guidelines, and future policy statements pertaining to planning and growth management.

The Connecticut chapter of the American Planning Association is a private non-profit organization consisting of approximately 550 professional planners, planning commissioners, developers, consultants, engineers, attorneys, teachers, state and local government officials, and others interested in promoting sound planning throughout Connecticut. For more information visit CCAPA.ORG

