Smart Growth

Why We Discuss It More than We Do It

The Smart Growth vision has a strong intellectual and emotional appeal, compared to more sprawl. However, though some places follow Smart Growth policies, they are outnumbered by those where such policies are commonly discussed but rarely practiced effectively. Why is this the case? Successful implementation requires adopting policies that give up long-established traditions, including local home rule and low-density living patterns. These intermediate steps are unappealing to most Americans. This article analyzes where Smart Growth advocates among urban planners, government officials, environmentalists, and real estate developers should focus their attention if they hope to move from vision to reality.

ANTHONY DOWNS

As I speak to audiences around the country about how to cope with growth, people often ask me, "Where is Smart Growth being implemented most effectively?" I usually reply, "Smart Growth is much more talked about than actually carried out in practice." That does not mean no regions are actually using Smart Growth policies. But it does mean that such regions are greatly outnumbered by others where Smart Growth principles are commonly discussed but not actually put into effect. Why is that the case?

The basic reason is that carrying out Smart Growth principles encounters many obstacles that are not obvious at the outset, but emerge strongly as advocates try to apply those principles. Those obstacles have inhibited the ability of urban planners, government officials, environmentalists, and real estate developers who promote Smart Growth to achieve their initial objectives. This article explores why I believe that is the case.

The Genesis and Nature of Smart Growth

Smart Growth was originally conceived as a reaction to what many planners believed were undesirable features of continuing growth through "suburban sprawl" (Burchell, Listokin, et al., 2000; Burchell, Lowenstein, et al., 2002; Downs, 2001a). Those undesirable features included the following:

- Unlimited outward and "leapfrog" expansion of low-density new development.
- Large-scale conversion of open space and environmentally sensitive lands to urban uses.
- Lack of choice among housing types and neighborhood configurations.
- Worsening traffic congestion and air pollution caused by more intensive use of automotive vehicles for ground travel.
- Costly requirements to expand roads, sewers, water systems, and other infrastructures outward rather than repairing and using those already in place.
- Failure to redevelop existing older neighborhoods.
- Segregation of land uses rather than a mixing of uses that reduces the need for travel.

Since Smart Growth was created to reduce or eliminate these perceived ills, its advocates tend to promote opposite principles of action. Thus, the most common principles of Smart Growth are the following:[1]

1. Limiting outward extension of new development in order to make settlements more compact and preserve open spaces. This can be done via urban growth boundaries or utility districts.
2. Raising residential densities in both new-growth areas and existing neighborhoods.
3. Providing for more mixed land uses and pedestrian friendly layouts to minimize the use of cars on short trips.
4. Loading the public costs of new development onto its consumers via impact fees rather than having those costs paid by the community in general.
5. Emphasizing public transit to reduce the use of private vehicles.
6. Revitalizing older existing neighborhoods.

Other Smart Growth principles less universally advocated include these:

7. Creating more affordable housing.
8. Reducing obstacles to developer entitlement.

8. Adopting more diverse regulations concerning aesthetics, street layouts, and design.

In reality, different groups in society emphasize different constellations of these elements, depending upon their own perspectives.[2] Thus, the real estate development community plays down limitations on outward development, big-city officials strongly favor redeveloping existing older areas plus repairing existing infrastructures, and urban planners and environmentalists accept all the above principles and stress using more public transit to cut down on vehicle trips and miles of travel.[3] Thus, Smart Growth does not mean the same thing to everyone. In reality, it has almost come to stand for "whatever form of growth you like best" in the opinion of whoever is speaking. Nevertheless, the first six principles set forth above are generally considered key elements of most Smart Growth programs actually being promoted across the nation.

Who Actually Originates Pressures to Implement Smart Growth Principles?

Pressures to put Smart Growth principles into practice tend to originate from three different groups. The first is *nongovernment environmentalists* who are appalled by sprawl and want to stop its absorption of so much open land. They normally operate out of private foundations and other groups that are not part of the public sector. The Sierra Club and the Nature Conservancy are examples of such groups. They function as private lobbyists trying to persuade the media, the public, and government officials to adopt broad Smart Growth policies (see, e.g., Benfield et al., 1999).

The second group consists of *urban planners and other local public officials* who work mainly for local governments. They seek to preserve local government fiscal resources and keep local taxes low. They believe Smart Growth principles will help them avoid building a lot of costly new roads and other infrastructures in outlying areas, shift new housing construction to higher densities that conserve land and infrastructure costs, and use land on in-fill sites easier to develop than far-out "greenfield" sites (see, e.g., American Planning Association, 2001, 2002; Meek, 2002). However, these officials are also susceptible to being influenced by local homeowning voters who want to keep housing prices rising by preventing large-scale new construction nearby, especially of lower-cost housing (Fischel, 2001). Finally, as local government officials, they are normally hostile to the idea of shifting any of their local authority over land uses to higher-level public agencies, such as regional agencies (Beaumont, 1999; Downs, 1994; Orfield, 1997).

The third group of Smart Growth promoters consists of *innovative private real estate developers* who are trying to get permission from local governments to build specific new projects. They promote Smart Growth principles to support their desires to create large-scale mixed-use projects, use higher densities than in surrounding areas, and create a variety of housing types in a single project. Their focus is almost always on a particular site, rather than on broad regional principles of development. Such developers are more likely to be in large-scale firms than small-scale ones. The former have more resources with which to cope with local delays and regulatory barriers to large-scale innovative projects, which the developers believe are worth waiting for because of their great profit potential (see, e.g. National Association of Home Builders, 1999; National Association of Industrial and Office Parks, 1999).

One thing these three main sources of promotion for Smart Growth have in common is that they do *not* include significant numbers of plain citizens—especially local homeowners, who are the majority in most suburban communities. To put it another way, *most pressures to adopt Smart Growth policies do not come from the citizenry at large but from one or more of these special interest groups.* In almost every community, all three of these promotional groups are relatively small compared to the general citizenry. Hence these groups are all challenged by the need to persuade lots of "plain citizens" to agree with their views. Such persuasion is necessary in our democracy in order to shift a powerfully entrenched set of policies like those embodied in suburban sprawl to something quite different. It is a wise old saying that "You can't beat something with nothing!" Therefore, to beat sprawl, these groups must persuade significant numbers of local citizens to support adoption of a new and different set of growth-related policies—that is. Smart Growth policies. How to accomplish such persuasion is a critical aspect of getting Smart Growth policies actually put into practice.[4]

How Applying Smart Growth Principles Generates Problems

Given the widespread hostility to continued suburban sprawl in America among professional planners and environmentalists, and even among many real estate developers, it seems that the major principles of Smart Growth ought to be in the process of being vigorously applied in most metropolitan areas. Yet I do not believe that is the case. True, quite a few areas have effectively implemented one or two principles of Smart Growth—the ones least difficult to implement. But few regions have put into practice the most problematic principles. And almost no areas (not even Portland, Oregon) have implemented all of Smart Growth's principles.[5] The main reason is that carrying out those principles requires adopting one or more of eight other principles of action that are not nearly as widely praised nor as readily accepted by the American public. These obstacles are described below.

Redistributing Benefits and Costs of Development

Smart Growth policies differ fundamentally from the sprawl-related development processes long dominant in almost all U.S. metropolitan areas. Therefore, changing from sprawl to Smart Growth almost inevitably involves redistributing the benefits and costs associated with urban development generally. For example, preventing growth from moving outward without limits from built-up areas by shifting to more compact growth concentrated very close to built-up areas changes the location of

future subdivisions. It reduces the chances that owners of far-outlying parcels will "capture" future subdivisions, thereby profiting from big increases in land values. At the same time, this shift increases the chances that owners of close-in sites will capture higher density projects, thereby benefiting from large increases in land values. In short, it greatly alters the potential benefit structure currently embodied in the status quo, turning some now-likely future gainers into losers, and vice versa. But every basic change in development strategy that causes such major shifts in who gains and who loses upsets widespread expectations among yesterday's potential gainers, thereby alienating them. This naturally makes those once-potential gainers hostile to the idea of such change. Moreover, a loss of a potential future benefit tends to be felt more intensely than the gain of such an uncertain benefit. True, this is nothing new; even just building a new highway also generates winners and losers among land owners affected by that road.

Long experience with human nature under an immense variety of circumstances indicates that most people resist major changes in the established status quo, unless it is clear that those changes will produce very specific benefits for them. Thus, a major problem with shifting federal finance from the existing income tax to a consumption tax is that such a shift would radically change who gains and who loses from federal fiscal operations. But most people are now accustomed to an income-tax-oriented regime. Therefore, they resist changing to a new regime that might affect them quite differently in ways they cannot foresee. The same problem plagues attempts to replace sprawl development with Smart Growth. Most Americans are accustomed to sprawl and its consequences, but they are not at all sure what would happen to them under Smart Growth. Faced with such uncertainty, they are reluctant to support such a major change, especially if they are among those groups who would lose existing benefits from sprawl. This is a serious difficulty associated with changing any fundamental arrangements in a complex society. It applies to almost all the specific obstacles described below.[6]

Shifting Power and Authority from Local to Regional Levels

Several key Smart Growth principles require government action at the regional or state level, not at the local government level where most powers over land use planning now reside. But achieving regional action requires shifting a significant degree of existing land use planning authority from local governments to some higher-level organization. In most metropolitan areas, no such higher-level organization exists, short of the state government itself. And even where such an organization does exist, most local governments do not want to yield any of their existing power over land use decisions to anyone else. "Home rule" powers are among the most vigorously defended of any authorities entrusted to local governments.

Yet this kind of power shift would be necessary for any real check on the outward expansion of urban development far beyond presently built-up areas. Although individual communities can adopt local urban growth boundaries, unless all such communities within a region adopt such boundaries that are closely coordinated (which almost never happens), no one community alone can stop growth from leaping out into open country beyond its boundaries. And even if all the localities in a metropolitan area adopted a coordinated set of urban growth limits, that would not prevent private developers from going outside the boundaries of that metropolitan area and starting new subdivisions in farther-out counties. This is precisely what is now happening in both the Washington, DC, and Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan areas. Only state governments are capable of *both* creating regional urban growth boundaries *and* stringently limiting growth outside those boundaries (as in Oregon), which can stop such long-distance "leapfrog" developments. But if these developments are not stopped, urban growth boundaries have only limited power to halt sprawl.

Federal law has already recognized the need for similar regional planning powers concerning transportation in the creation of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to supervise new major ground transportation facilities. In fact, rational development of strong public transit networks within any sizable metropolitan area requires controlling the placement of such facilities at the regional level. But planning highways and transit facilities regionally will not work well if that planning is not coordinated with the planning of where housing and other developments are to be located.

Yet currently that set of decisions is totally controlled at the local level by dozens of small governments through a process of "disjointed incrementalism." Moreover, there is very little willingness of local officials, or even state government officials, to shift any notable degree of power over local land use decisions from local to regional or state levels, even though such officials are among the strongest promoters of Smart Growth ideas. Until this changes, in the vast majority of U.S. metropolitan areas, most recent and likely fixture growth is going to continue to be in the form of outward sprawl unchecked by Smart Growth policies forcing development into more compact patterns.

The few American regions that have shifted significant land use planning power from local to regional bodies have done so primarily as the result of some situation perceived to be a crisis at the state level. In these cases, that perception galvanized the state government—which has ultimate legal power over local governments—to do what was necessary to overcome pervasive parochialism among local governments. Otherwise, each locality would have continued to act almost solely in what its officials perceived was the best interests of their own residents, without regard for the welfare of their entire region. In Florida, the crisis was the threat of development of the Everglades. In Oregon, it was imminent development of the Willamette River Valley. In New Jersey, it was a threat by the courts to end local zoning powers unless localities better met regional needs for housing for low-income households. In Georgia, it was the federal government's threat to withhold highway finances unless Atlanta's air pollution was reduced. But without such crises, few states have shifted enough power over land use planning from localities to regional bodies to make Smart Growth feasible. And even in regions where such a shift has occurred, it is arguable how much of an effect that shift has had upon urban form.

Increasing Residential Density

second critical problem in carrying out Smart Growth princi-es involves an inherent conflict of views within the minds of illions of American homeowners. In 2004, homeowning ouseholds comprised 69% of all American households, ac-rding to the U.S. Gensus Bureau (2004). In most suburbs, ey form a significant majority of all voters. Nearly all such ouseholds strongly desire to maintain the market values of the mes they occupy. In most cases, those homes are their largest ngle asset, and those assets have been rising in value signifi-ntly in the past few years. Thus, from 1999 to 2004, the me-an value of single-family homes sold across the U.S. rose om $133,300 to $184,100, or by 38.1% (National Association Realtors, 2005).

In order to protect the values of their homes from possibly clining, most homeowners (especially in the suburbs) are re-ctant to permit into their existing neighborhoods any entry of ditional housing units that would sell for lower prices than ir own homes. They fear such lower-cost homes would re-ce the desirability (and therefore the prices) of their homes . This normally means they do not want any additional low-st for-sale units built there, or any rental units built in prima-y ownership neighborhoods.[7]

This economic motive for preventing such changes in their ighborhoods is reinforced by the widespread American view t it is undesirable for lower-income households to move near m for social, educational, and security reasons. In addition, ny households fear higher density would mean more traffic ngestion and more crowded schools and other facilities.

These sources of hostility to local changes that might reduce me values are the foundation of NIMBYism. It is the belief that though some changes in society are necessary. Not My Back d please!" This attitude frequently surfaces whenever any in-ases in neighborhood density are proposed in built-up areas.[8]

On the other hand, many suburban homeowners are also op-ed to continued expansion of their metropolitan regions ough more sprawl. They believe sprawl results in costlier tax s to pay for the provision of infrastructures stretching out open spaces. They also oppose more absorption of open that they would like to have readily available to them. This stility towards more sprawl is more general and abstract, wever, than their hostility towards any increases in residen-density near them. Thus, many suburban homeowners are y to support Smart Growth in the abstract, but oppose its cific manifestations when the increases in density it calls for planned near them (Fischel, 2001).

his internally conflicting attitude among homeowners to-ds continued sprawl is a major underlying problem for those ested in promoting Smart Growth policies. Those promot-re often encouraged by the general support of many home-ers in the overall area. But any specific steps towards lementing anti-sprawl increases in density encounter strong lized opposition from those homeowners residing nearby. yland's Governor Parris Glendening, who built his reputa-on supporting Smart Growth and limiting sprawl, was able t his policies passed easily in general. But then their partic-ular applications were basically defeated at local levels by NIMBY resistance, according to detailed stories published in the *Washington Post* (e.g., Graig, 2004; Lewis, 2004; Whoriskey, 2004a, b, c). As a result, suburban growth in Maryland has continued in a sprawling manner, unchecked by the state's Smart Growth policies.

Raising Housing Prices

Yet another problem caused by Smart Growth policies is a tendency to raise housing prices. After all, Smart Growth proposes to locate more housing units on smaller total amounts of land than in the past as part of its making future growth more compact. Smart Growth also seeks to set aside large amounts of open space as unavailable for housing purposes. And Smart Growth wants to prevent "leapfrog" subdivisions where households looking for low cost homes on inexpensive far-out land can "keep driving until they qualify." This removes the least expensive land from availability for housing.

The resulting higher density on land still usable for housing is normally accompanied by higher land prices per gross acre. True, those higher land prices can be offset by smaller lots per dwelling, but there is no certainty that this will be the case. If the proportion of all housing units built shifts markedly towards higher shares of multifamily dwellings, as has happened in Portland, Oregon, then land costs per dwelling may not necessarily rise. But they still could rise even in that case. And if many residents continue to prefer detached single-family homes on their own lots, the land price per dwelling may rise considerably.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine what specific factors cause housing prices to rise, especially in a period when housing prices have been increasing markedly in almost all developed nations around the world. Yet that has been happening since the late 1990s. There have been intense arguments about whether the urban land boundary around Portland has been a major factor causing housing prices there to rise as substantially as they have. Defenders of Smart Growth even argue that home prices there have risen because Smart Growth policies have made Portland a more desirable place to live, thereby attracting more residents, rather than affecting prices by restricting the housing supply. However, there is little doubt that Smart Growth policies have caused housing prices to rise more than they otherwise would have in at least some communities where they have been applied. That is why some analysts have concluded that Smart Growth and affordable housing are inconsistent goals for a single community to pursue simultaneously.[9] Even defenders of Smart Growth admit that it is consistent with the creation of more affordable housing only under unusual circumstances when many strong measures are applied to insure that consistency. For example. Nelson and Wachter (2003) wrote that "Affordable housing policies can be a component of smart growth. Such policies, however, depend on local implementation that runs counter to both local home rule principles and local fiscal incentives" (p. 182). Thus, Smart Growth does not invariably produce higher housing prices, but it has a tendency to do so.

Of course, insofar as Smart Growth does raise the prices of existing housing units, it benefits the owners of those units. Therefore, this quality of Smart Growth can be considered an advantage from the viewpoint of homeowners seeking greater wealth in their home equities. Yet it is a disadvantage to renters and households who do not yet own a home but hope to buy one. In most suburban communities, the beneficiaries outnumber the losers, and the losers are mainly not yet present in the community to oppose Smart Growth policies. So this characteristic is by no means a net disadvantage for proponents of Smart Growth, though few openly state that they favor higher housing prices resulting from Smart Growth policies.

Failing to Reduce Traffic Congestion

A fourth problem generated by some Smart Growth policies is their inherent inability to achieve the results they promise. This defect is especially true concerning policies that promise to reduce traffic congestion by increasing public reliance upon public transit. My own extensive analysis of traffic congestion in *Still Stuck in Traffic* (Downs, 2004b) convinced me that such congestion is likely to get worse throughout the world as societies become wealthier and more populous. Experience in the United States in particular shows that building additional public transit facilities almost never reduces traffic congestion in a region, once that congestion has reached the point of serious slowdowns during major rush hours. For example, although Portland, Oregon, doubled the extent of its light rail system's tracks in the 1990s, and significantly increased ridership on that system, traffic congestion became more intense than before. Why? First, a high percentage of the new light rail riders shifted from buses rather than private vehicles. Second, population growth in the region overcame any slight improvements in traffic congestion caused by the added light rail facilities. Similarly, additions of light rail systems in San Diego, San Jose, Denver, Dallas, and many other American communities have not reduced the intensity of traffic congestion there. In the period from 1980 to 2000, the U.S. added 1.2 additional cars, trucks, or buses to the existing vehicle population for every 1.0 additional man, woman, or child added to the human population. As long as that ratio continues, and our human population keeps growing around 30 million per decade, no policies are likely to reduce traffic congestion in any major U.S. metropolitan areas.

True, some proponents of Smart Growth would counter that this "alarming increase" in vehicle ownership has been caused by public policies that promote car use. Those policies include designing communities to be mainly car dependent, and investing in roadway infrastructure and parking and other means of accommodating the car at the expense of investing in other modes of travel. Therefore, the relative utility of other modes of travel as compared to private cars is exceedingly low. Yet public investments in transit facilities are much greater in relation to their actual usage than public investments in auto-oriented facilities.[10]

Increasing the "Red Tape" of New Development

Shifting new development from an outward-oriented sprawl pattern into a more inward-oriented compact pattern typically increases the amount of "red tape" that developers must go through to complete projects, such as preparing environmental impact, endangered species, and historical preservation studies; getting applications processed by multiple departments in the local government; etc. This occurs because larger cities tend to have much more detailed and onerous permission processes for new projects than those outlying suburbs in which sprawl normally occurs. Moreover, many big cities also have strong construction labor unions that may impose higher wage costs upon projects within their boundaries than for projects in outlying suburban communities, where most housing is built with non-union labor. These conditions increase the resistance of developers to adopting more compact development strategies, other things equal. More compact development also favors large-scale real estate developers, who have deeper pockets than small-scale developers with which to bear the greater delays and higher costs of new in-city projects. That is why developers promoting projects based upon Smart Growth values tend to be largerscale developers. Small-scale developers are more likely to want to stick to building on suburban greenfield sites.

Restricting Profits for Owners of Outlying Land

The compact growth pattern dictated by Smart Growth principles restricts the ability of farmers and other owners of outlying land to take advantage of the higher land prices they could obtain from further sprawl development. By confining a lot of open outlying land to farming or open space, Smart Growth diminishes the capital gains the owners of such land can expect to receive from future development. On the other hand, Smart Growth increases the capital gains that owners of vacant land, or land covered with obsolete structures, within built-up areas are likely to receive from in-fill projects. However, the number of persons owning open land outside built-up areas who *might* profit from further sprawl is normally much larger than the number owning in-fill sites within built-up areas likely to profit from Smart Growth. That is because the amount of undeveloped open land outside built-up areas greatly exceeds the amount of land on usable in-fill or other close-in sites. Therefore, this obstacle tends to generate more voters resistant to Smart Growth strategies than voters supporting them.

In some regions, planners have attempted to offset the loss of potential gains from new development for owners of outlying land by creating transferable development rights (TDRs) for such owners. Under this arrangement, owners of outlying sites agree to limit future development on their land in return for receiving TDRs. The owners can then sell those TDRs to owners of closer-in land as a means of allowing the latter to increase permissible densities on their sites. However, this arrangement has not fully compensated most owners of outlying land for what they believe is the loss of future development profits when Smart Growth blocks development on their sites.

Replacing "Disjointed Incrementalism" with Regional Planning

There is a fundamental conflict between developing a single, overall plan to direct future population growth within a region and permitting such growth to occur through an unplanned, decentralized process of "disjointed incrementalism."[11] Many Americans consider the first approach to be excessively socialistic in nature. They prefer the traditional American method of allowing individual developers, landowners, and local communities to make unrelated choices of where to put fixture growth. The resulting absence of regional planning makes it difficult to carry out Smart Growth policies that depend on such planning, such as limiting outward expansion of new development, preserving outlying open space, and creating new high-density development clusters around fixed-rail transit stations. But others think such an unplanned approach will only exacerbate existing undesirable conditions generated by past sprawl, such as "excessive" absorption of open space by urbanization. This is not a purely ideological argument. Its outcome partly hinges on whether centralized or regional planners can anticipate future trends in population growth, technological change, and the market's locational preferences as well as, or better than, individual entrepreneurs creating particular new subdivisions without any overall plan. There is no clear evidence regarding which approach is more effective in the long run, partly because a few U.S. regions have tried any regional planning of their growth. However, up to now, the disjointed incrementalism approach to future growth remains the overwhelmingly dominant method used in American metropolitan areas, mainly because there are very few effective regional bodies with the authority to influence where future growth will occur.

How These Obstacles Inhibit Implementation of Smart Growth Policies

The eight obstacles to implementing Smart Growth policies set forth above have quite different impacts upon each of the nine Smart Growth policies described earlier. Each row in this chart represents one of the nine Smart Growth policies frequently advocated in various regions. Each column represents one of the eight obstacles to such policies that arise when trying to implement them. Therefore, each cell represents the probable interaction of one policy and one obstacle. Dark squares indicate that the particular obstacle concerned normally has a significant negative impact on implementation of that particular policy. For example, the first policy, limiting outward extension of growth, is strongly negatively affected by the second obstacle, the need to shift power from local to regional authorities. This occurs because so many local officials and other citizens are opposed to shifting any of their local government authority over land use decisions to any regional or higher-level agency. So they tend to oppose limiting outward extensions of growth because doing so requires such a power shift.

Lighter squares indicate that the obstacle in that column has some negative impact on implementing the policy in that row, but not necessarily a decisively prohibitive impact. Diamonds show that the policy in that row actually reduces the negative impact of that obstacle on the implementation of that policy. Thus, the policy of creating more affordable housing tends to offset the impact of Smart Growth in raising housing prices, though that policy may also arouse hostility among homeowners who want home prices to rise higher.

Circles indicate no significant relationship between the policy in that row and the obstacle in that column. A significant relationship is lacking in 43 of the 72 cells in this matrix. Of course, the relationships described in all 72 cells represent my views—other observers may arrive at different conclusions concerning specific cells. Nevertheless, this matrix provides a clear way of relating each obstacle to each proposed Smart Growth policy.

This chart clearly shows that certain obstacles affect the implementation of far more Smart Growth policies than others. Thus, the obstacle "Shifting power" negatively affects implementation of six out of the nine Smart Growth policies. All six of those policies require some movement of power from local governments to more regional agencies. At the other extreme, the obstacle "Increasing red tape" only inhibits implementation of two Smart Growth policies, and then only partly. The obstacle "Raising housing prices" negatively affects four Smart Growth policies because they tend to raise housing prices. But the same obstacle also positively helps in the implementation of two other policies ("Creating more affordable housing" and "Reducing obstacles to developer entitlement") because they tend to reduce housing prices.

This chart also clearly shows that some Smart Growth policies are likely to encounter much more difficulty getting implemented than others. The policy of "Limiting outward extension of new developments" is likely to be hindered by five out of the eight obstacles, three of which will impose serious negative impacts. Conversely, the policy "Adopting more diverse regulations on aesthetics, street layouts, and design" is far more likely to be implemented because it helps reduce two obstacles and is not hindered by any others.

However, this matrix does not provide clear guidance about the degree of difficulty each Smart Growth policy is likely to encounter when advocates try to implement it. Why not? Because it does not quantify the interplay of different obstacles in relation to each specific policy. To provide more definite guidance of that type, a second chart is also presented. In Table 1, the rows again represent the nine Smart Growth policies described earlier, while the columns present a calculation of the resistance or support each policy is likely to encounter. The second column indicates which groups in society are likely to oppose each policy, while the third shows which groups are likely to support each one. The fourth column compares the strength of opposition and support among these groups, and the fifth arrives at a conclusion concerning how favorable the prospects for implementing each policy are likely to be. Again, the cells in this matrix represent only my best judgment, based upon my past experience and the literature on Smart Growth. Other ob-

Table 1. Likelihood of implementing Smart Growth policies.

Smart growth policy	Arouses opposition among these	Garners support among these	Opposition vs. support	Likelihood of implementation
1. Limiting outward extension of new developments	Owners of land in outlying areas now blocked from development; real estate developers	Owners of close-in in-fill parcels now emphasized for higher-density development	Losers likely to vastly outnumber winners, and may feel their losses more strongly than winners feel their gains	Very unlikely
2. Raising densities in both new-growth and existing neighborhoods	Homeowners living near where higher density is proposed in both new and existing neighborhoods	Environmentalists; owners of in-fill sites where high density is proposed	Local NIMBYs intensely oppose any higher densities near them, pressuring local officials to block higher densities	Very unlikely
3. Providing for more mixed land uses and pedestrian-friendly environments	Only a few residents who dislike mixed-use environments; also retail chain operating firms	New Urbanism supporters; public transit supporters; many existing residents	Opposition likely to be weak except for unwillingness of retail chain operators to run small neighborhood outlets	Likely
4. Loading public costs of new development onto residents of growth areas	Renters wanting to restrain housing costs; households seeking to buy first homes	Residents of most existing neighborhoods; local government officials	Supporters of passing most public costs onto new residents will almost always outnumber those who pay because they live in new areas	Very likely
5. Emphasizing public transit to reduce the use of private vehicles	Road builders who lose funds shifted to transit; trucking firms and auto companies	Supporters of more public transit facilities; builders of transit-oriented developments	Urban planners who favor transit tend to dominate MPOs; users of private vehicles do not feel harmed if others shift to transit	Somewhat likely
6. Revitalizing older existing neighborhoods	Developers of outlying sites competing with older neighborhoods for funds	Big-city labor union workers; big-city local officials; owners of in-fill sites and sites in older areas	Key factor is size of financing available to revitalize older areas; if it is great, resistance to revitalization will be low	Somewhat likely
7. Creating more affordable housing	Homeowners fearing lower-cost housing will reduce values of their homes; local officials responding to them	Renters and low-income households needing housing assistance; low-income housing advocates	Resistance to any large amount of relatively low-cost housing is likely to be great because of homeowner attitudes	Unlikely
8. Reducing obstacles to developer entitlement	Environmentalists; homeowners seeking to keep local prices rising; historic preservationists; big-city labor unions	Home builders and real estate developers; landowners of sites on which developers want to create new projects	Not clear which group will have the greatest political power, though changing existing rules is difficult	Unclear
9. Adopting more diverse regulations on aesthetics, street layouts, and design	Historic preservationists	New Urbanists; real estate developers; home builders; urban planners	The cost of broadening existing regulations is very low and supporters are strong	Very likely

servers may reach quite different conclusions. But this matrix should help anyone interested in this subject arrive at systematic conclusions about the likelihood any one policy will be adopted under "normal" circumstances.

This admittedly rough analysis shows the following results:

- Two Smart Growth policies—"Limiting outward extension of new developments" and "Raising densities in both new-growth and existing neighborhoods"—are *Very unlikely* to be implemented. Both require shifting considerable authority from local to regional bodies and would generate strong opposition from heavily affected groups.

- Implementation of "Creating more affordable housing" is considered *Unlikely* because it would arouse opposition from local homeowners trying to prevent the values of their own homes from being weakened by the appearance of lower-cost housing nearby.
- Two other Smart Growth policies—"Loading public costs of new development onto residents of growth areas" and "Adopting more diverse regulations on street layouts, aesthetics, and design"—are *Very likely* to be implemented. The first benefits existing residents, who vastly outnumber potential newcomers. The second has no significant negative costs.
- Implementation of three other Smart Growth policies is considered either *Likely* or *Somewhat likely*. "Providing or mixed land uses and pedestrian friendly environments," "Emphasizing public transit to reduce the use of private vehicles," and "Revitalizing older existing neighborhoods." However, the last is likely only when adequate public funds are available, and the second is not likely to change commuting behavior very much.
- Whether "Reducing obstacles to developer entitlement" will be readily implemented or not is *Unclear*.

This analysis indicates that prospects for a metropolitan area adopting an entire broad Smart Growth strategy are very low. The political resistance likely to be generated by shifting the requisite authority from local to regional bodies, by raising densities in most neighborhoods, and by blocking outward extension of future growth is too great to be easily overcome. Thus, the central idea of Smart Growth—constraining future development into more compact, higher-density patterns—is not very likely to be adopted by many regions.

On the other hand, changes in certain development rules within local governments designed to broaden housing styles, permit more mixed uses, create more pedestrian ways, and push most of the public costs of new development onto residents of new-growth areas are far more likely to be implemented. These policies can be carried out without having local governments use any of their existing land use powers.

The Crucial Role of State Governments

An overall Smart Growth strategy that encompasses most of the specific policies discussed above cannot really be carried out in any U.S. metropolitan area without the active advocacy and strong support of the state government concerned. Only the state government has the Constitutional power to shift authority over certain types of land use planning from local governments to regional or statewide agencies with the scope to carry out many Smart Growth policies. Only the state government can help pressure metropolitan areas to agree upon a single urban growth boundary for the entire region, and then prohibit further development outside that boundary within reasonable commuting distance of the region. Without such a prohibition, developers will quickly leapfrog new subdivisions beyond the urban growth boundary into nearby counties outside the metropolitan area's legal limits. That will soon undermine the whole idea of confining future growth into a more compact area.

The state government's powers are also necessary for many other aspects of Smart Growth policies. Raising densities in both existing and new-growth areas on a consistent basis throughout a metropolitan area requires powers that go beyond those of individual local governments, which cannot alter what neighboring governments do. So does locating affordable housing throughout many parts of a region, rather than concentrating it within older central cities, as has often occurred in the past. Any attempts to shift more ground movement to public transit requires a regional plan for where new transit facilities should be located. That is in theory within the jurisdiction of the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization, but the state government's planning and condemnation powers will also be critical.

Past experience shows that state government is likely to become actively involved in implementing Smart Growth policies only if the state's governor assumes a powerful leadership role. The governor is best situated to coordinate the efforts of myriad state agencies related to growth, and to provide them with the incentives to make Smart Growth a reality. Even then, gubernatorial leadership may not be enough to overcome all the obstacles to implementing Smart Growth, as has been shown in Maryland. Yet without such leadership, chances of getting any specific region within a state to adopt an overall Smart Growth strategy are dim indeed.

This analysis also shows that getting effective Smart Growth policies adopted in a multistate metropolitan area will be extraordinarily difficult. Although individual county governments can try such policies, as in the Washington, DC, area, their efforts are likely to be undermined by the failure of all their neighboring counties to do likewise.[12]

Conclusion

Many Americans unhappy with several past results of sprawl development have devised an alternative approach that has come to be known as Smart Growth. The policies incorporated into the Smart Growth vision have a strong intellectual and emotional appeal, compared to more sprawl. But trying to implement those policies requires adopting a whole set of additional policies that are much less appealing to most Americans. Those intermediary policies include changing the powers and scope of long-established governmental traditions, especially local home rule and relatively low-density living patterns. Unless the proponents of Smart Growth realize the necessity of carrying out such intermediary policies and devise ways of getting more political support for doing so. Smart Growth is likely to remain a vision that is much more talked about than carried out in practice.

Acknowledgments

The views in this article are those solely of the author and not of the Brookings Institution, its trustees, or its other staff members.

Notes

1. The literature is by now extensive. For leading examples see Burchell, Listokin, et al. (2000). Downs (2001b, 2003b), Downs et al. (2002), and Urban Land Institute (1998, 1999). For recent state-level examples, see Governor's Sustainable Washington Advisory Panel (2003) and Michigan State University (2004).
2. The National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB) lists the following principles for its version of Smart Growth: (i) Planning for and accommodating anticipated growth in economic activity, population, and housing demand as well as ongoing changes in demographics and lifestyles while protecting the environment, (2) Providing for a wide range of housing types to suit the needs, preferences, and income levels of a community's diverse population, (3) Adoptiug a comprehensive land-use planning process at the local level that clearly identifies land uses, such as residential, commercial, recreational, and industrial as well as land to be set aside as meaningful open space, (4) Adopting balanced and reliable means to finance and pay for the construction and expansion of roads, schools, water and sewer facilities, and other infrastructure required to serve a prosperous community, (5) Using land more efficiently by allowing higher density development and innovative land use policies and encouraging mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly developments with access to open space and mass transit, (6) Revitalizing older suburban and inner-city markets and encouraging infill development, and (7) Planning should be the exclusive province of local units of government (NAHB, Z005).
3. The Sustainable Communities Network, funded in part by the Environmental Protection Agency, defines Smart Growth as consisting of the following principles: (1) Create range of housing opportunities and choices, (2) Create walkable neighborhoods, (3) Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration, (4) Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place, (5) Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective, (6) Mix land uses, (7) Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas, (8) Provide a variety of transportation choices, (9) Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities, and (10) Take advantage of compact building design (Smart Growth Network, n.d.).
4. In contrast, many "growth management" efforts indeed engage citizens actively. See Porter (1997).
5. Portland has not developed an effective program for creating affordable housing for its low-income citizens, though it has carried out to some degree most of the other principles described earlier.
6. I am indebted to my friend and colleague Robert Burchell of Rutgers University for pointing out this aspect to me.
7. This argument has been made most persuasively by Fischel (2001).
8. For an in-depth analysis of NIMBYism, see Advisory Commission on Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing (1991).
9. For several discussions of this subject, see Downs (2004a), in particular Nelson et al. (2004), Fischel (2004), Voith and Crawford (2004), and Schill (2004). See also a review of the issues by Downs (2003a) and potential approaches by Goldberg (2003).
10. Public transit receives a share of total government spending on transportation far in excess of the proportion of all trips that are made on public transit nationwide. See Downs (2004b, pp. 141–147).
11. Insofar as I know, the term *disjointed incrementalism* was invented by Charles E. Lindhlom (Lindblom & Braybrooke, 1963) of Yale University.
12. For attempts to encourage leadership by states in these and related areas, see Downs (1973, 2000) and Pendall (2000).

References

Advisory Commission on Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing. (1991).*"Not In my backyard": Removing barriers to affordable housing.* Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

American Planning Association. (2001). *Policy guide on smart growth.* Chicago: Author.

American Planning Association. (2002). *Growing smart user manual for the growing smart legislative guidebook: Model statutes for planning and the management of change 2002 edition.* Chicago: Author.

Beaumont, C. (Ed.). (1999). *Challenging sprawl: Organizational responses to a national problem.* Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Benfield, K., Raimi, M. D., & Chen, D. D. T. (1999). *Once there were greenfields: How urban sprawl is undermining America's environment, economy, and social fabric.* Washington, DC: Natural Resources Defense Council and Snrface Transportation Policy Project.

Burchell, R. W., Listokin, D., & Galley, C. C. (2000). Smart growth: More than a ghost of urban policy past, less than a bold new horizon. *Housing Policy Debate, 11,* 821-879.

Burchell, R., Lowenstein, C , Dolphin, W. R., Galley, C. C., Downs, A., Seskin, S., Still, K. G., & Moore, T. (2002). *Costs of sprawl 2000* (Transit Cooperative Research Program Report 74). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Craig, T. (2004, July 22). Maryland panel backs study of Route 32 widening; vote to by-pass "smart growth" angers activists. *Washington Post,* p. B04.

Downs, A. (1973). *Opening up the suburbs: An urban strategy for America.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Downs, A. (1994). *New visions for metropolitan America.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press and the Lincoln Institute for Land Policy.

Downs, A. (2000). *Dealing effectively with fast growth* (Brookings Institution Policy Brief No. 67). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Downs, A. (2001a). An approach to analyzing the impacts of "smart growth" upon economic development. *Economic Development Review, 17*(4)9–17.

Downs, A. (2001b). What does "smart growth" really mean? *Planning,* 20–25.

Downs, A. (2003a, May 29). *Growth management, smart growth, and affordable housing* (Keynote speech made at the Symposium on the Relationship Between Affordable Housing and Growth Management, Washington, DC). Available on-line at www.AnthonyDowns.com

Downs, A. (2003b, April 30). *The impacts of smart growth upon the economy* (Speech presented at a Land Use Institute of the New Jersey Institute for Continuing Legal Education, New Brunswick, NJ). Available on-line at www.AnthonyDowns.com

Downs, A. (Ed.). (2004a). *Growth management and affordable housing: Do they conflict?* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Downs, A. (2004b). *Still stuck in traffic: Coping with peak-hour traffic congestion.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Downs, A., Burchell, R., Galley, C., & Listokin, D. (2002). The activities and benefits of smart growth. *Wharton Real Estate Review, VI*(1), 86–93.

Fischel, W. (2001). *The homevoter hypothesis: How home values influence local government taxation, school finance, and land-use policies.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Schill, W. (2004). Comment on Nelson et al. In A. Downs (Ed.), *Growth management and affordable housing: Do they conflict?* (pp. 158–167). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Goldberg, D. (2003, Summer). Smart growth techniques pave the way for affordable housing. *On Common Ground,* 18–23.

Governor's Sustainable Washington Advisory Panel. (2003). *A new path forward: Action plan for a sustainable Washington: Achieving longterm economic, social, and environmental vitality.* Olympia: Washington State Government. Available on-line at http://www.ofm.wa.gov/sustainability/panel.htm

Lewis R. K. (2004, August 21). Sprawl is here to stay as long as suburbs represent the American dream. *Washington Post,* p. F05.

Lindblom, C. E., & Braybrooke, D. (1963). *A Strategy of decision: Policy evaluation as a social process.* Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Meck, S. (Ed.). (2002). *Growing smart legislative guidebook: Model statutes for planning and the management of change.* Chicago: American Planning Association.

Michigan State University. (2004). *Overcoming impediments to smart growth: Finding ways for land development professionals to help achieve sustainability.* East Lansing: Michigan Travel, Tourism, and Recreation Resource Center at Michigan State University and Planning & Zoning Center, Inc.

National Association of Home Builders. (1999). *Smart growth policy statement: Building better places to live, work, and play.* Washington, DC: Author.

National Association of Home Builders. (2005). *Smart growth.* Retrieved March 24, 2005, from http://www.nahb.org/generic.aspx?genericContentID=3519

National Association of Industrial and Office Parks. (1999). *Growing to greatness: Creating America's quality workplaces.* Herndon, VA: Author.

National Association of Realtors. (2005, January). *Existing home sales.* Available on-line at http://www.realtor.org/Research.nsf/Pages/EHSdata

Nelson, A., Pendall, R., Dawkins, C., & Knaap, G. (2004). The link between growth management and housing affordability: The academic evidence. In A. Downs (Ed.), *Growth management and affordable housing: Do they conflict?* (pp. 117–158). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Nelson, A., & Wachter, S. (2003). Growth management and affordable housing policy. *Journal of Affordable Housing and Community Development Law, 12*(1), 173–187.

Orfield, M. (1997). *Metropolitics: A regional agenda for community and sustainability.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Pendall, R. (2000). Local land use regulation and the chain of exclusion. *Journal of the American Planning Association, 66,*125–142.

Porter, D. (1997). *Managing growth in America's communities.* Washington, DC: Island Press.

Schill, M. (2004). Comment on Voith and Crawford. In A. Downs (Ed.), *Growth management and affordable housing: Do they conflict?* (pp. 102–105). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Smart Growth Network, (n. d.). *Smart growth principles.* Available online at http://www.smartgrowth.org/library/prinlist.asp

Urban Land Institute. (1998). *Smart growth: Economy, community, environment.* Washington, DC: Author.

Urban Land Institute. (1999). *Smart growth: Myth and fact.* Washington, DC: Author.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2004). *Current population survey/housing vacancy survey, annual statistics 2004.* Available on-line at http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/hvs/annualo4/ann0412.html

Voith, R., & Crawford, D. (2004). Smart growth and affordable housing. In A. Downs (Ed.), *Growth management and affordable housing: Do they conflict?* (pp. 82–101). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Whoriskey, P. (2004a, August 8). Space for employers, not for homes; Residents driven farther out as D.C. suburbs lure business and limit housing. *Washington Post,* p. A01.

Whoriskey, P. (2004b, August 10). Planners' brains vs. public's brawn: Neighbors' hostility to dense projects impairs Md. land preservation. *Washington Post,* p. A01.

Whoriskey, P. (2004c, August 9). Washington's road to outward growth; Far-off homes are cheap, but drive carries costs: Time, traffic and pollution. *Washington Post,* p. A01.

ANTHONY DOWNS is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, where he has been since 1977. Author or editor of 24 books, his latest are *Still Stuck in Traffic* and *Growth Management and Affordable Housing: Do They Conflict?* (both from Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

From *Journal of the American Planning Association,* Vol. 71, Number 4, Autumn 2005, pp. 367–380.