



Local governments working together for a better metropolitan region

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Manassas Park

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June 28, 2004

Dear Regional Leader:

I am pleased to share with you an exciting new product from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG).

In 2002, the COG Board of Directors approved a multi-media project, "Smart Growth Begins at the Local Level" to educate elected officials, civic groups, the development community, and citizens about land use and transportation challenges currently facing the region. The enclosed CD – "Smart Growth Begins at the Local Level" – is a product of COG's Metropolitan Development Policy Committee (MDPC) and the Metropolitan Development Citizens Advisory committee (MDCAC). The video showcases examples of best practices from throughout metropolitan Washington.

This project is an important component of the COG Board's recently-approved three-year policy focus on growth-related issues in metropolitan Washington. Both the MDPC and MDCAC envision "Smart Growth Begins at the Local Level" as an important tool to assist in making wise land use decisions in our rapidly growing region. The enclosed "Implementation Kit" offers suggestions on how the video may be used to inform decision-makers throughout the Washington region.

Should you have any questions or wish to obtain more information on "Smart Growth Begins at the Local Level", you may contact me either by phone (202) 962-3293 or e-mail pdesjardin@mwkog.org.

Sincerely,

Paul DesJardin
Chief of Housing and Planning



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Citizens Advisory Committee (MDCAC) Members List**
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The Purpose of “Smart Growth Begins at the Local Level”

This multimedia CD-ROM and website was developed to inform and educate elected officials, civic groups, the development community and citizens about the land use and transportation challenges currently facing the region. The accepted principles of “Smart Growth” are candidly introduced and discussed in the context of the varied and distinct communities across the region. The CD-ROM highlights the responsibilities and successes of local government policies while acknowledging the common concerns which elected officials and citizens encounter (e.g., neighborhood opposition, traffic, loss of open space, increased density, etc.). The CD and accompanying website contains numerous examples of local best management or best development practices that exemplify the ideas of ‘choices, connections and collaboration.’ In addition, the discussion will focus on developing partnerships that engage all stakeholders, aim to minimize conflicts and result in the highest quality growth. A web link on the CD will lead the reader to more detailed information on an updated web page.

“Smart Growth Begins at the Local Level” is a practical tool to bring the dialogue directly to our local communities and a valuable resource for maintaining our region’s high quality of life while addressing concerns of growth, congestion, air and water quality.

The CD-ROM and project kit will be distributed to local and regional stakeholder organizations such as:

- Boards of Supervisors
- City / County Councils
- Planning Commissions
- Citizen groups to be identified by local government staff and/or elected officials
 - ◊ Neighborhood Associations
 - ◊ Advocacy Groups
 - ◊ Civic Groups
- National Capital Area Chapter of the American Planning Association (NCAC-APA)
- Urban Land Institute (ULI) “Smart Growth Alliance”
- The Greater Washington Board of Trade
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- Coalition for Smarter Growth
- A Greater Washington
- Local Libraries
- Local University Libraries
- Other stakeholder organizations to be identified



Specific Ways to Use this CD-ROM and Project Kit / Ideas for using this project in your community:

- Local Government Council / Board meetings
- Planning Commission meetings
- For broadcast on local cable access hosted by local officials (i.e. council members, planning officials)
- To prompt discussion at citizen group meetings facing development decisions
- Homeowners Association newsletter articles
- Local newspaper editorials

Potential Discussion Questions

- How can elements of Smart Growth principles be integrated into our community?
- What Smart Growth principles are the most important for our particular community?
- Will proposed development projects and policies enhance Smart Growth elements already present in our community?
- How could these principles be applied to a recently proposed project, _____ (insert neighborhood / local example here)?
- Also see the Frequently Asked Questions section for more discussion questions.



The “Planning Dialogue Series”

During calendar year 2000, the Metropolitan Development Policy Committee (MDPC) of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) approved an initiative for a regional/local “Planning Dialogue Series.” The purpose of the dialogue series was to encourage information sharing among area local officials and to provide a better understanding of the regional context and impact of local planning policies and actions. Each COG member local government participated in the dialogue series through oral presentations and written responses to ten “framing questions” which were intended to lead to a better understanding of local development trends, zoning, and land use policies. COG staff compiled and summarized each jurisdiction's written responses to the framing questions, and the Metropolitan Development Citizen's Advisory Committee (MDCAC) developed a draft analysis and commentary on the dialogue series. What emerged from the discussions was a consensus that there was a need to better educate and inform citizens and local elected officials about “Smart Growth”.

Development of “Smart Growth Begins at the Local Level”

During the summer of 2001, a working group comprised of members of the MDPC and the Metropolitan Development Citizens Advisory Committee (MDCAC) met to discuss how to best package and distribute the results of the “Planning Dialogue” series. Based upon their review of similar efforts in other major metropolitan areas, the group recommended development of a multi-media (video and Website) product to be used as a tool to showcase local best practices.

In the Fall of 2001, the Work Group presented their proposal on the project to the MDPC and in January, 2002, the MDPC recommended that the project proceed. In May 2002, the COG Board approved Resolution R21-02 which authorized staff to seek funding for the project and, during the Fall, staff obtained a \$50,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). During 2002, the Work Group and COG staff worked to develop the video script, and initial Website concept and links. In July, 2003 the MDPC and COG Board approved the final video script and filming began in the Summer of 2003.

“Smart Growth Begins at the Local Level” and COG’s Growth and Development Policy Focus

At the core of the video project is a goal stated in COG’s 1999 Strategic Plan, *New Directions: Shaping Opportunities*, in which the COG Board concluded:

“...to address the trends we see in our region – fast paced growth, increased traffic congestion, an economy more and more focused on new technology, on-going challenges in addressing human needs, and the challenge of protecting our environment in the face of growth.... We know that achieving our mission – enhancing our quality of life and competitive advantages of the Washington metropolitan region – requires innovative approaches, risk-taking, a willingness to take on controversial issues, and improved ways of communicating what we know.”

In February 2004, the COG Board approved a three-year effort to address growth and development issues in the Washington metropolitan region. The foundation for this policy focus will be COG’s adopted Strategic Plan and the goal and strategies centered on growth issues:

Goal: Promote balanced, sustainable growth and livable communities.

Strategies: Identify and disseminate best management principles, practices, and policies for sustainable growth and livable communities; facilitate dialogue among competing stakeholders using focus groups, issues forums, and other techniques; and establish regional consensus on principles of sustainable growth and livable communities.

COG recognizes that balanced growth in the Washington region requires innovative solutions with support of its regional stakeholders. With this in mind, the video project was created to provide an alternative to current thinking as it relates to growth and development in metropolitan Washington.



2000

Metropolitan Development Policy Committee (MDPC) approves a “Planning Dialogue Series” of presentations by local officials and planning directors. The “Dialogue Series” focuses on local and regional planning policies and decisions. Each local government presentation is guided by ten framing questions (e.g. planning and zoning authority, state enabling legislation, transportation and land use linkages, etc.)

2001

January

Outline of the final report of the Regional/Local Planning Dialogue Series presented to MDPC

July

The Metropolitan Development Citizens Advisory Committee (MDCAC) presented an “Analysis and Commentary” as part of the Regional/Local Planning Dialogue Series to MDPC

August

MDPC and MDCAC work group formed to discuss the next steps in packaging the final report of the Regional/Local Planning Dialogue Series. The work group suggests the development of a “Smart Growth” educational multi-media project.

October

MDPC approves initial recommendations from MDCAC on completion of the Regional/Dialogue report and MDCAC Smart Growth educational and outreach project.

MDPC Chairman Fisette presented the MDPC/MDCAC proposal to the COG Board Committee on Finance

2002

January

MDPC approves work scope for the “Smart Growth Begins at the Local Level” multi-media project.

May 8

COG Board of Directors approves Resolution 21 – 02 authorizing staff to seek funding for a “Smart Growth” project.

October

COG receives \$50,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

2003

January 8

Presentation to MDPC of draft video script for “Smart Growth Begins at the Local Level” and website concept.

July 9

MDPC and COG Board approve final draft script for the video during their respective meetings.

July - October

Filming of video

November 12

MDPC reviews initial version of the Smart Growth video.



2004

January 14	MDPC reviews revised version of the Smart Growth video.
March 10	MDPC reviews and approves final video MDPC reviews draft of Implementation Kit and plan COG Board views final video and draft Implementation Kit and Plan
March – April	Final Edits
April 14	COG Board final approval of video and Implementation Kit and Plan



- ◆ **Create A Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices**

- ◆ **Create Walkable Neighborhoods**

- ◆ **Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration**

- ◆ **Foster Distinctive, Attractive Places with a Strong Sense of Place**

- ◆ **Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective**

- ◆ **Mix Land Uses**

- ◆ **Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas**

- ◆ **Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices**

- ◆ **Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities**

- ◆ **Take Advantage of Compact Building Design**





Why should I care about Smart Growth? Does it really matter?

- ◆ Smart Growth is a way to manage growth and development in a way that is fiscally responsible, environmentally conscious, while promoting a stronger link between transportation and land use.

Does Smart Growth mean no growth?

- ◆ Smart Growth is one solution to accommodate the growing number of people coming to our region. Here in Metropolitan Washington, Smart Growth means finding smart solutions to the challenges of future development in our region. We must ensure that new development and transportation facilities are wisely tied together, and promote growth that revitalizes existing communities or creates well-planned ones.

Isn't Smart Growth expensive?

- ◆ A conventional suburban development pattern is expensive for local and state governments, as well as for taxpayers. Compact development designed around existing transportation infrastructure and utilities is more cost-effective and reduces development pressures in other parts of the region.

Doesn't Smart Growth limit my choice in where to live?

- ◆ Choices are expanded with Smart Growth. Communities must have a range of housing opportunities and choices in order to provide quality housing for people at all income levels. A mix of single and multi-family homes serves a varied population.

Is there a single regional land use plan?

- ◆ No, land use plans are created at the local level and regulated by the states. The Washington region contains the District of Columbia, the State of Maryland, and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

I live in a fast-growing outer suburban area. Does Smart Growth only apply to cities?

- ◆ No, Smart Growth is not one size fits all. The ten Smart Growth principles can be applied in ways that reflect rural, suburban or urban locations. For instance, rural areas may choose to focus on preserving open space, and fostering distinctive, attractive places with a strong sense of place. Jurisdictions with Metro, MARC or VRE may choose to take advantage of compact building design and a mix of land uses around these rail stations.

Is there any limit to how much growth will be directed to existing communities, and who gets to decide?

- ◆ Smart Growth is a policy tool that is guided by zoning and local comprehensive plans. It can be used to help manage existing development and guide how we grow in the future. Developers, planners, local officials, and citizens need to collaborate, so all of their hopes and concerns are heard – and the development project becomes a shared vision. Only when all interested parties work together from the beginning of the process will a project satisfy the whole community.

Does Smart Growth mean that I can't drive my car?

- ◆ Smart Growth advocates promoting a variety of transportation choices. It seeks to provide communities with transportation options, in addition to driving, to get to jobs, schools, shopping and leisure activities.

Where has Smart Growth worked?

- ◆ Smart Growth projects have been successful in a variety of locations in urban, suburban, and rural areas. For a comprehensive list of Smart Growth examples, please see EPA's Smart Growth Policy Database at <http://cfpub.epa.gov/sgpdb/sgdb.cfm>.

What can I do to encourage Smart Growth?

- ◆ Citizens can support Smart Growth projects and initiatives within their communities. Citizens need to be participants in the planning review process and be a part of the solution.



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Vice Chair: Hon. Vincent Orange (District of Columbia)
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***MDPC/MDCAC - Smart Growth video working group member**

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Web Links:

American Planning Association
www.planning.org/sgreader/

Brookings Institution Center on Urban & Metropolitan Policy,
www.brook.edu/es/urban/urban.htm

Coalition for Smarter Growth
www.smartergrowth.net

Environmental Protection Agency: Encouraging Smart Growth
www.epa.gov/livability/

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
www.mwcog.org

Mid-American Regional Council
www.qualityplaces.marc.org

National Center for Smart Growth Research & Education, University of Maryland
www.smartgrowth.umd.edu

Natural Resources Defense Council
www.nrdc.org

Smart Growth America
www.smartgrowthamerica.com

Smart Growth Network
www.smartgrowth.org

Urban Land Institute
www.uli.org

Videos:

“Creating Quality Places: Successful Communities by Design,” *Mid-America Regional Council*

“Smart Growth,” *Smart Growth Network*

“The Smart Growth Tool Kit,” *Urban Land Institute*

“Transforming Landscapes & Lives,” *Maryland Office of Smart Growth*