

Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities



**HOW TO ACHIEVE ECONOMIC VITALITY AND
A SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT IN
RURAL COMMUNITIES AND SMALL TOWNS**



What is a Rural Community?



- It depends on who you ask!
- 49 million Americans live in rural communities
- 75 percent of the total land area in the U.S. is rural



Types of Rural Communities



- Gateway communities
- Resource-dependent communities
- Edge communities
- Traditional Main Street communities
- Second home and retirement communities



Historical Rural America



- Small towns in rural areas served the agriculture economy
- Were mixed use, compact, and walkable by necessity; had regional transportation connections (RR or river transport)
- Physical form varied by region



What's Changing in Rural America Today



- Economy, culture, transportation has changed
- Some rural communities are growing rapidly, others are declining
- Clearly a need for economic diversity and a need for expanded choice for where to live, how to get around, where to work

Challenges Facing Rural Communities



- Fewer farms and farmers
- Loss of forest and other natural and working land
- Rapid growth at metro edges
- Shrinking population in some communities
- Limited access to jobs, services, and transportation
- Limited planning capacity



Smart Growth: A Response to Rural Challenges



- **Development that provides:**
 - Choices for where to live and how to get around
 - A stronger, more resilient economy
 - A safer, healthier place to live
 - Opportunities to protect the things that you love about the place you live (farmland and open space, natural beauty, sense of community, etc.)

So what does smart growth mean for a rural community?



**When you've seen one rural community...
you've seen one rural community.**





SHELTER
INSURANCE
AUTO-HOME-BUSINESS
Gregg Thimes

STOP
RIGHT TURN
YIELDING



Photo Credit: Clark Anderson



Photo Credit: Clark Anderson



GOLD HILL STORE

GOLD HILL
GENERAL
STORE
OPEN
PARKING
ACROSS
STREET



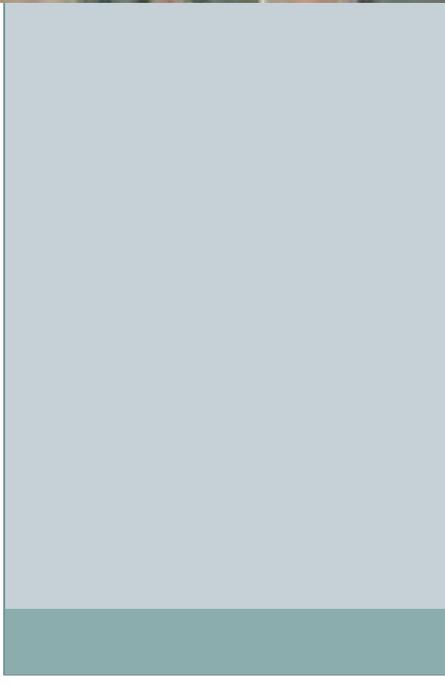
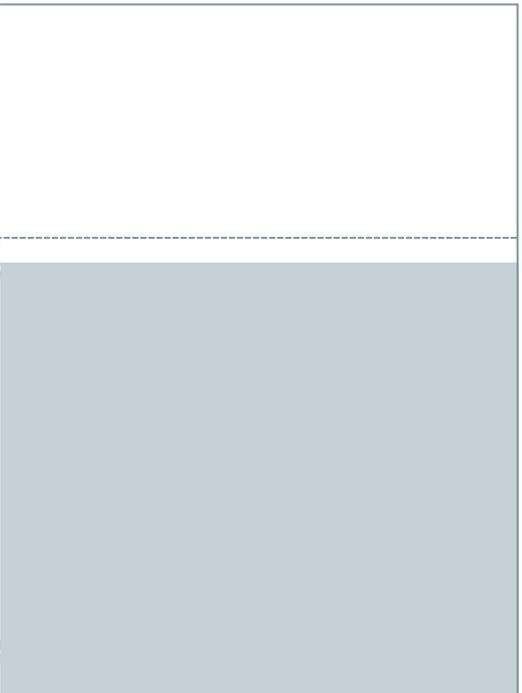


Photo Credit: Worcester County



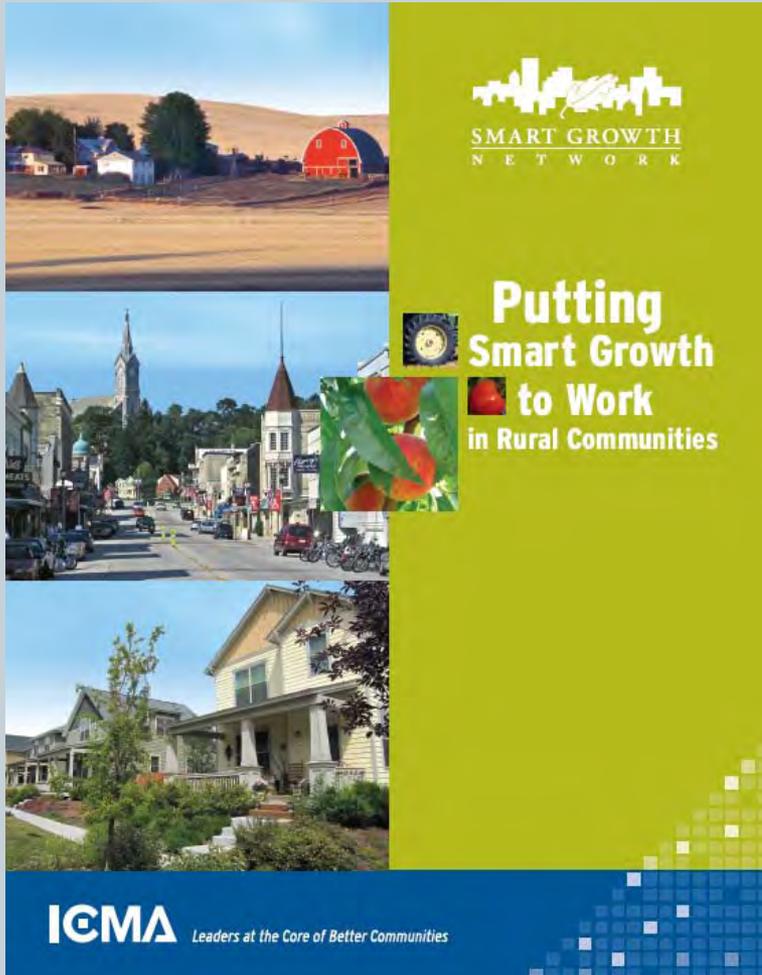
Photo Credit: National Trust for Historic Preservation





A New Publication:

Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities



- Partnership between the U.S. EPA and ICMA – a Smart Growth Network publication
- Lays out a framework for rural communities and small towns seeking to implement smart growth
- Set of tools, case studies, and resources

How to Grow and Maintain Rural Character: Three Broad Goals

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



1. Support the Rural Landscape



- Creating an economic climate that enhances the viability of working lands and conserves natural lands is the first step
- Strategies, tools and policies that support this goal include:
 - Right to Farm policies
 - Agricultural zoning
 - Renewable energy development



Strategies, Tools, and Policies



GOAL 1: SUPPORT THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

Strategy	Tools & Policies	
1.a. Ensure the viability of the resource economy in the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use value taxation• Tax credits for conservation• Right to farm policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renewable energy development• Value-added farm and forest products processing• Ecosystem services markets
1.b. Cultivate economic development strategies that rely on traditional rural landscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Purchase of development rights• Conservation easements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fee simple acquisition• Agritourism and ecotourism
1.c. Promote rural products in urban areas and support other urban-rural links	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct marketing to consumers• Government purchase of local products	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Buy local” campaigns
1.d. Link rural land preservation strategies to great neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transfer of development rights• Priority funding areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agricultural, ranching, or forestry zoning• Rural home clustering

Supporting the Rural Landscape: Direct Marketing of Rural Products



- Communities can help support the rural economy by promoting rural products in urban areas, like this Farmers' Market in Ithaca, NY.
- Other strategies include:
 - Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
 - Agritourism
 - Value-added farm and forest products processing

Supporting the Rural Landscape: TDR and Priority Funding Areas



- **Transfer of development rights policies and priority funding areas can direct growth to desired locations while protecting important working and natural lands, like in Montgomery County, Maryland (pictured here).**

Supporting the Rural Landscape: Investing in the Farm Economy



- **Yolo County, California is a largely agricultural county on the edge of a major metro area, important for local and state agricultural economy.**
- **Pursued farmland preservation through:**
 - Marketing of locally grown and organic produce (“Capay Valley Grown”)
 - Right to farm ordinance
 - Land trust involvement in conservation efforts



2. Help Existing Places Thrive



- **Communities can help their downtowns, Main Streets, and other existing places to thrive through:**
 - Fix-it first policies
 - Rehabilitating existing structures, like schools
 - Incentives to encourage infill and brownfield redevelopment
 - Updated zoning ordinances and development codes that support compact, walkable development

Strategies, Tools, and Policies



GOAL 2: HELP EXISTING PLACES THRIVE

Strategy	Tools & Policies	
2.a. Invest public and private funds in existing places	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fix-it-first• Historic Preservation and the Main Street Approach• Parks and natural resource areas as destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Streets and streetscape improvements• Targeted new development
2.b. Encourage private sector investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infill development incentives• Overcoming barriers to infill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redevelopment readiness certification• Split-rate tax
2.c. Build on past community investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adaptive reuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School rehabilitation
2.d. Foster economic development in existing downtowns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local business survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business recognition program

Helping Existing Places Thrive: Historic Preservation



- **Renovating existing buildings, like the James Dean House in Rosemont, New Jersey, can help preserve a community's historic assets.**

Helping Existing Places Thrive: Streetscape Improvements



Before



After



- Streetscape improvements on Main Streets like in Victor, Idaho (pictured here) can help lower traffic speeds and provide parking to support local businesses.

3. Create Great New Places



- When building new neighborhoods, they should be vibrant, enduring places where people want to live.
- Strategies, tools, and policies that can help create great new places include:
 - Community visioning and policy alignment
 - Designating growth areas and areas for preservation
 - Recognizing developers that build great places



Strategies, Tools, and Policies



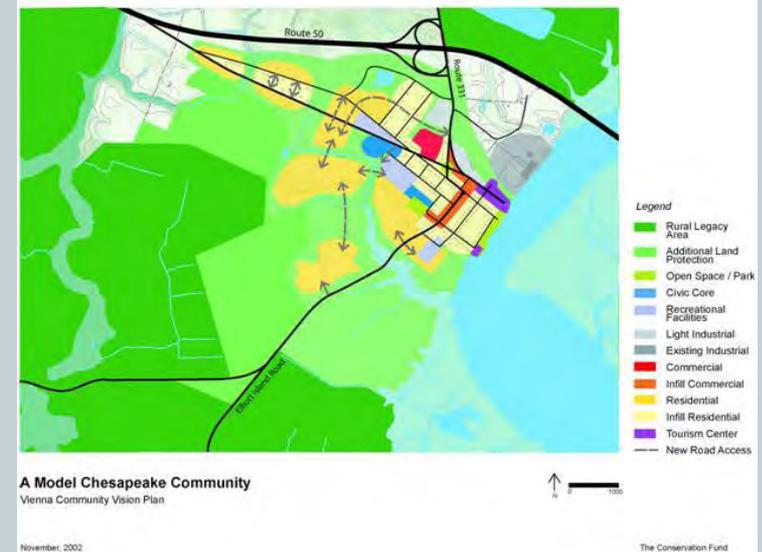
GOAL 3: CREATE GREAT NEW PLACES

Strategy	Tools & Policies	
3.a. Update strategic and policy documents to accommodate new growth through compact and contiguous development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visioning• Places worth preserving• Designated growth areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infrastructure grid and transportation options• Distinctive local character
3.b. Reform policies to make it easy for developers to build compact, walkable, mixed-use places	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy alignment• Walkability• Parks and open space• Traditional neighborhood development• Form-Based Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Context-sensitive design• Green street design• Low-impact development
3.c. Recognize and reward developers that build great places using smart growth and green building approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smart growth recognition programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green building

Creating Great New Places: Comprehensive Planning in Vienna, Maryland



- New places – build places where people, especially young people, want to live.
 - Compact, walkable, mixed-use
 - Historic connection
 - Form is part of the rural paradigm of places
- Vienna, Maryland created a community vision plan and got their codes in order to attract this type of development.



Creating Great New Places: Fostering Transportation Options



- Bozeman, Montana has created a fixed-route bus system (Streamline) to serve students, faculty, commuters, enhancing the viability of downtown.
- Provides a great example of a fixed-route bus system that has thrived, even with small population.



Smart growth in a rural community: How could it work in the landscape?

The Bottom Line... for Rural Communities to Consider



- Assess current conditions (best assets, key challenges)
- Engage in a collaborative visioning process
- Develop and implement policies to achieve that vision



EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities: Working in Rural America



- EPA Office of Sustainable Communities is active in many rural communities (~20% of applications for assistance come from rural communities)
- Governors' Institute workshops include rural focus – Montana, Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, Iowa, and North Carolina
- Rural related guidebooks:
 - Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities”
 - “Essential Smart Growth Fixes for Rural Planning, Development and Zoning Codes” (not yet released)
- Rural focus moving forward:
 - Rural development category: 2010 Smart Growth Achievement Awards
 - Strong interest from USDA Rural Development for collaboration on smart growth strategies for strong rural communities



Sustainable Communities Partnership



- Working with HUD, DOT, and USDA to think through how the Partnership's activities could better serve Rural America
- Tasks
 - White Paper
 - Program Analysis
 - Case Studies
 - Stakeholder Contacts
 - Performance Measures
 - Rural Tour?
 - Pilot Project?



For Discussion: The Economic Development Frame



- Economic development is the driving framework for many rural communities...
 - How can we articulate our message in terms of the economic benefits smart growth approaches can provide?
 - And how can we make the case that communities should consider land use as an integral part of their economic development strategies?



A Few More Case Studies



Smart Growth After Disaster: Waverly, Iowa



- Waverly, Iowa (population ~10,000) is in the process of recovering from floods from 2008 and revising their comprehensive plan
- Asked for assistance with the following policy analysis:
 - Conduct an audit of Waverly's comp plan and development regulations to identify opportunities to integrate smart growth concepts
 - Establish green infrastructure strategies city-wide
 - Increase housing options and infill strategies in Waverly to accommodate the demand for housing as a result of the floods as well as new growth
- Held a public workshop on smart planning in May 2010 – stakeholder meetings, design charrette, and open house



FEMA



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Photo Credits: City of Waverly

Waverly, Iowa – Final Products



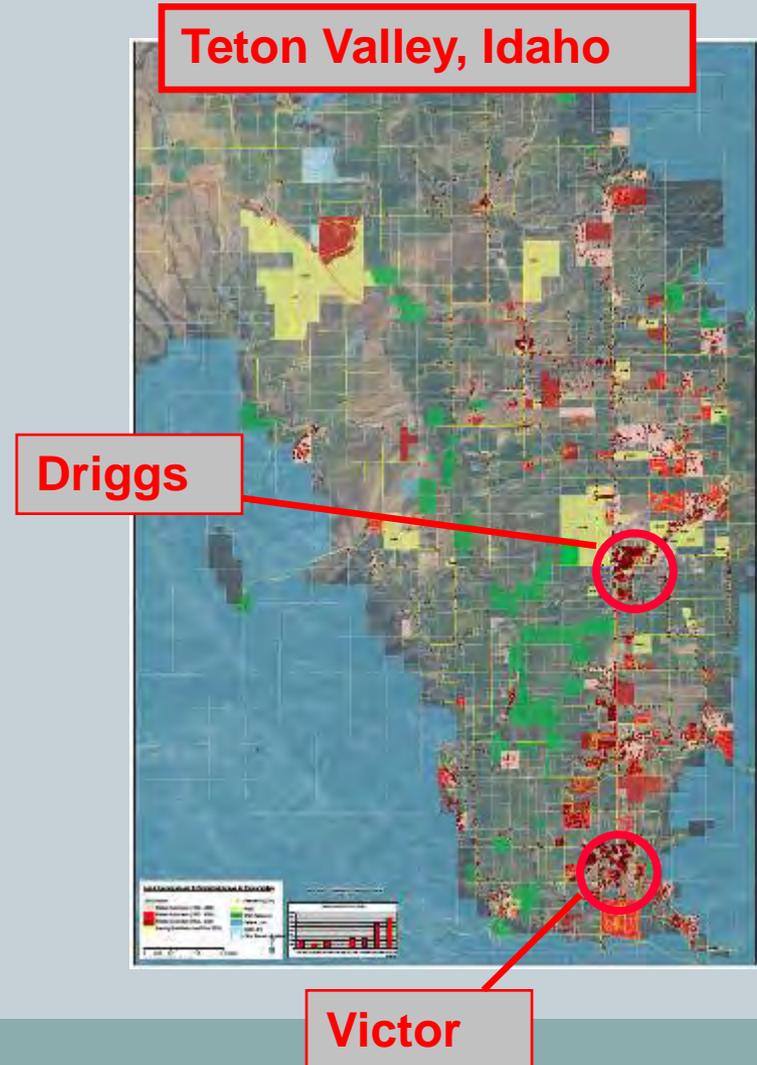
- Policy Memo on Green Infrastructure and Housing Options
- Final Design Concepts
- Learning about federal investments and how they can help implement local vision



Planning for the Future: Victor and Driggs, Idaho



- Rapidly growing cities in Teton Valley, Idaho (pop. ~1300 each)
- Accommodate growth in the cities:
 - Articulate the vision: community wants a thriving, revitalized downtown and development that respects the land
 - Revise policies and codes to allow for compact, mixed-use development
 - Strategic public investment



Victor, Idaho



- What is your vision for the future?
- Communities across the country have concluded the vision is important
 - Guides public policy
 - Public investment
 - Provides a stable investment climate for the private sector
 - An image for the future



Victor, Idaho



- Design guidelines for traditional neighborhood development and small lot zoning;
- Strategies for increasing connectivity and pedestrian friendly streets;
- Concepts for turning Hwy 33 into a boulevard.
- Beginnings of a downtown vision;



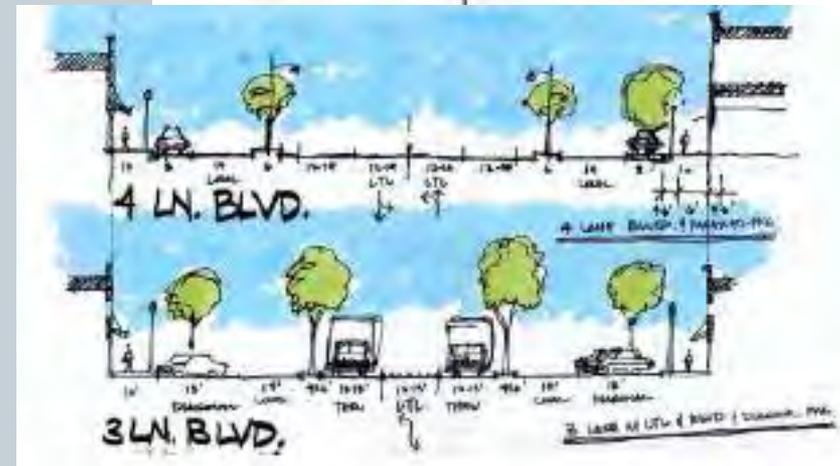
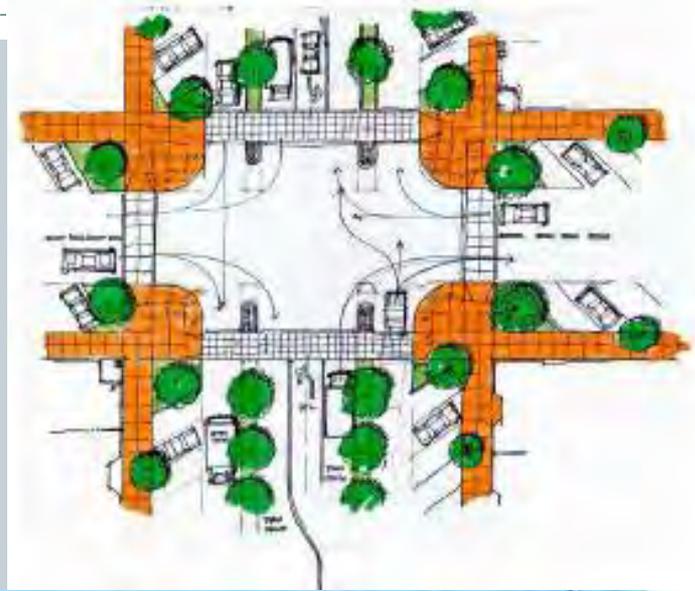
Victor, Idaho: Supporting smart growth outcomes with transportation investments

- State highways in downtowns create challenges:
 - Traffic
 - Noise
 - Pedestrian safety
 - Economic development



One solution... that's being pursued in Victor

- Public investments in road infrastructure can support community goals AND traffic flow goals.
- Boulevards: Victor is using paint as an interim step.
- Partnership can help make this type of solution the status quo, not the exception



Main Street Victor



For More Information

EPA: http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sg_rural.htm

ICMA: <http://www.icma.org/ruralsmartgrowth>

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