

SMART GROWTH'S ROLE IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING

BACKGROUND

A central tenet of smart growth planning is the inclusion of affordable housing. Such homes add to the vibrancy and diversity of cities, making them more attractive locales for homebuyers of all incomes, but they also play a role in stabilizing communities by providing adequate workforce housing.

Smart growth finds ways to produce a variety of housing types, for renters and homeowners, in a range of prices, and ideally, ways to preserve this wide spectrum of housing opportunities.

Looked at from the purchaser's perspective, a home is not really affordable if the entire living and working situation is itself not affordable. In other words, affordability rightly understood goes far beyond mortgage payments. Long commutes to work (from outlying areas to central cities) or long commutes to shop (from gentrified, city neighborhoods to suburban malls) add significantly to the cost of living and therefore the true affordability of a property.

The other intersection of smart growth and affordable housing is the matter of quality of life. In this regard, it's not just the housing that must be adjudged affordable but also the nearby schools, entertainment, dining, and recreation. So smart growth planning needs to find a way to retain neighborhoods, public schools, and city-supported venues like parks, pools, and the like.

Many of those considering moving to affordable housing are not looking only to swap one living arrangement for another. They are looking for a way up, for a better life all-around, and cities that plan smartly can help provide this "environment for opportunity."

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SUGGESTIONS

- Before your association enters into the debates and advocacy efforts on smart growth, it is best to survey the full scope of the local players and their positions. These will include the planning and zoning departments of local governments, homebuilders, architects, civic groups, environmental groups, developers, and a good many others.
- Realize that “smart growth” is a concept open to wide interpretation and what one group or interest may consider “smart” another may not. The term “smart growth” has, unfortunately, also been used to front for other interests. In that regard, it is imperative that your association fully understands the motivations and interests of any group with whom you may consider partnering.
- Affordable housing may rightly be considered an important part of any smart growth policy, but not everyone advocating smart growth is equally supportive of affordable housing as well.
- Smart growth, despite the cautions above, can be a platform for uniting a broad array of local players in concerted action to increase the stock of affordable housing, or at the very least create a climate not opposed to it.
- Rather than seek to start a smart growth / affordable housing coalition, lending your association’s support to existing coalitions may be a more efficient course.

LEARN MORE

Affordable Housing and Smart Growth: Making the Connection

A 2001 report, produced by the National Neighborhood Coalition and the Smart Growth Network, identifying “areas of common interest between advocates for smart growth and affordable housing.” This document is 57 pages long, and is in PDF format.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov/dced/pdf/epa_ah_sg.pdf



Land Use Initiative [requires log-in]

Helps state and local REALTOR® associations conduct public policy advocacy on land use issues, including expert analysis of the legal, planning, economic, and environmental issues surrounding legislative and regulatory land use proposals.

National Association of REALTORS®
www.realtor.org/landuseinitiative

SMART GROWTH'S ROLE IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING *(continued)*



On Common Ground Magazine

This magazine presents a wide range of views on Smart Growth issues. It is published twice a year and distributed free of charge. Local and state associations can receive bulk copies or provide an address list to have copies of the magazine delivered directly to individuals, including public officials.

National Association of REALTORS®

www.realtor.org/government_affairs/smart_growth/on_common_ground



Smart Growth

The portal page for NAR's Smart Growth program points to introductory information, survey results, newsletters, and grant opportunities.

National Association of REALTORS®

www.realtor.org/government_affairs/smart_growth



Smart Growth Action Grants

Specifics on applying for these NAR grants intended to help associations and members assume and sustain an active role in bringing smart growth development principles to their communities. Education and coalition building are hallmarks of successful grant applications, which can range up to \$5,000.

National Association of REALTORS®

www.realtor.org/government_affairs/smart_growth/grants

UP CLOSE

LOUISIANA LAND USE TOOLKIT

"The Louisiana Land Use Toolkit is supported and funded by the Louisiana Department of Economic Development (LED) and the Center of Planning of Excellence (CPEX). The Toolkit is a model development code (zoning and subdivision regulations) steeped in smart growth principles. It is written so that local governments in Louisiana can download the Toolkit, tailor it to meet their local conditions, and apply the results to guide future growth in a sustainable manner ... A 'smart growth' development code [is organized] around seven context areas: Natural, Rural, Estate, Suburban, Urban, Center, and Special."

Learn more at:

www.landusetoolkit.com/smartgrowth.html

Smart Growth America

A coalition of national, state, and local organizations working to improve the ways we plan and build the towns, cities, and metro areas we call home. Looks at all aspects of smart growth, including education, transportation, changing demographics, and more.

Smart Growth America

www.smartgrowthamerica.org

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Successful Growth Begins with Five Principles

Smart growth focuses on the existing assets of the community, the long-term implications of various development patterns, and the fiscal impacts of these patterns. The bottom line: some ways of growing are more likely to succeed in the long run. The link below provides five principles to keep in mind.

National Association of REALTORS®

www.realtor.org/government_affairs/smart_growth/principles

Smart Growth Network

In 1996, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency joined with several non-profit and government organizations to form the Smart Growth Network. The Network was formed in response to increasing community concerns about the need for new ways to grow that boost the economy, protect the environment, and enhance community vitality. NAR is a partner in the Smart Growth Network.

Smart Growth Network

www.smartgrowth.org/sgn/default.asp