# Getting The Most Out Of The EPA Building Blocks Technical Assistance Program

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**US EPA Technical Assistance for Sustainable Communities Building Blocks**

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# Getting The Most Out Of The EPA Building Blocks Technical Assistance Program:  Key Issues

**#1.  How Does Tool  Information Get Conveyed By Assistance Provider?**

**#2.  What Do Communities Need To Do To Ensure A Successful Process And Results?**

**#3.  How Can Communities Set Priorities For Action And Create An Effective Implementation Strategy?**

# RURAL SMART GROWTH TOOL BASICS:  BACKGROUND

**POWERFUL ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS RESHAPING RURAL AND SMALL TOWN AMERICA**

**CHALLENGES FACING RURAL/SMALL TOWNS**
- **Suburban-style growth at metro edges**
- **Infrastructure constraints**
- **Few housing choices**
- **Loss of forest and other natural and working land**
- **Lack of transportation options**
- **Protecting community character**
- **Limited planning capacity**
- **Opposition to regulations**
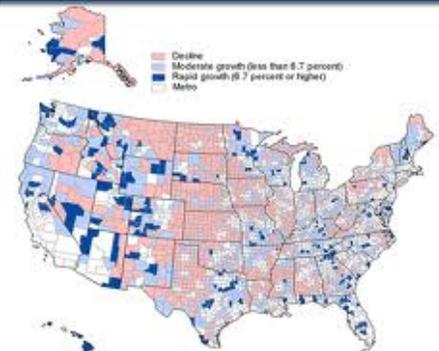
# Defining Rural/Small Town Smart Growth

**DEVELOPMENT THAT PROVIDES**

- **Choices for where to live and how to get around**
- **A stronger, more resilient economy**
- **A healthier place to live**
- **Opportunities to protect the things people love about the place where they live (e.g., open space, natural beauty, historic character)**
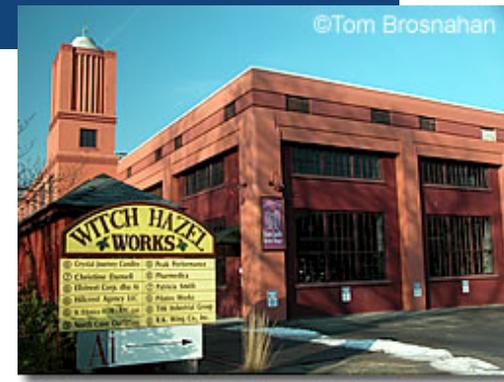
# TOP TEN (Plus One) PRIORITY FIXES

1. **AVOID UNSUSTAINABLE DENSITIES ON PERIPHERY OF TOWNS**
2. **USE CLUSTER OPTION CAREFULLY**
3. **REIN IN RURAL PUDS**
4. **DESIGNATE TOWN GROWTH AREAS**
5. **DEVELOP SMART ANNEXATION POLICIES**
6. **USE FISCAL IMPACT ANALYSIS**
7. **APPLY TOWN DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS IN GROWTH AREAS**
8. **PROTECT SENSITIVE NATURAL AREAS**
9. **REGULATE RURAL COMMERCIAL**
10. **CONSIDER PDR/TDR PROGRAMS**
11. **RIGHT-SIZE RURAL ROADS**

# QUESTION #1: How Does Information Get Conveyed By Assistance Provider?





- Initial review of current plans, codes, policies

- Conference calls with staff to discuss:
  - Growth factors/development patterns
  - Politics of growth
  - Staff and other resources
  - Development review process

- Outreach by LG staff prior to workshop…must be timely + key players (Media, elected officials, public)

# How Does Information Get Conveyed By Assistance Provider?

- **Working group formed**
  - **Time commitment**
  - **Broad-base of stakeholders (LG officials, developers, landowners, citizen groups, etc.)**
  - **10-15 people is ideal size**

- **Presentation materials development**
  - **Core standard presentation based on forthcoming EPA priority smart growth fixes document**
  - **Tailor to local key issues based on staff input and further refined by working group**

# PRIORITY FIXES SELECTED BY ESSEX

1. **DESIGNATE TOWN GROWTH AREAS AND PROMOTE QUALITY DEVELOPMENT**
2. **PROTECT SENSITIVE NATURAL AREAS**
3. **OFFER HOUSING CHOICES (new)**
4. **ENERGY CONSERVATION (new)**

# Key Steps To Successful Assistance

**WORKSHOP AGENDA**

**Day 1:  Evening public meeting**

**Day 2:  Workshop**

●*9:00 to 9:15 a.m.*        Introductions/Working Group

●*9:15 to 10:15 a.m.*        What Is A Rural Smart Growth and What Are Key Priority Fixes To Local Plans and Codes

●*10:15 to 12:00 noon*     What Are Key Smart Growth Issues In Essex?  What has community accomplished to date? Potential fixes?

# Key Steps To Successful Assistance

**Day 2:**

● *12:00 to 1:30 p.m.*     Lunch With Elected Officials and Community Leaders (not in morning session)—What  Are Your Key Smart Growth Topics?  What Are Main Hurdles to Smart Growth?

●*2:30 to 3:30 p.m.*     Addressing Essex's Key Smart Growth Issues —continue discussion of potential fixes

● *3:30 to 4:30 p.m.*     Implementation Strategies

● *4:30 to 5:00 p.m.*     Wrap Up and Next Steps

●*5:00 p.m.*     *Adjourn*

# DESIGNATE TOWN GROWTH AREAS…
# AND PROMOTE QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

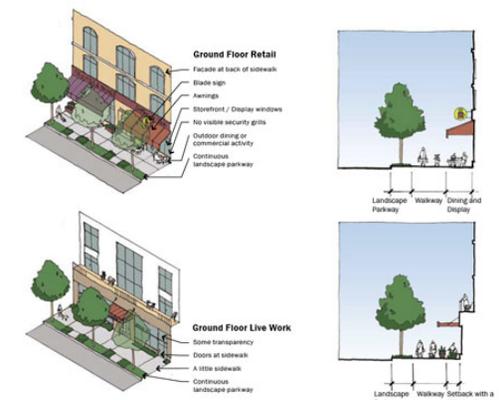**Challenge**:  Small town planning is often reactive:

- Developers often dictate growth location;
- No incentives for preferred development types or areas.
- No tools to assure quality development

**Possible Responses**:

- Designate preferred growth areas based on fiscal impacts, impacts on natural areas, etc.
- Revamp development regulations to promote mixed-use development.
- Enact architectural/site design stds.





Figure 3-2 Sidewalk treatment varies with ground floor treatment.

Ground Floor Retail
Facade at back of sidewalk
Blade sign
Awning
Storefront / Display windows
No visible security grills
Outdoor dining or commercial activity
Continuous landscape parkway

Landscape Parkway  Walkway  Dining and Display

Ground Floor Live Work
Some transparency
Doors at sidewalk
A little sidewalk
Continuous landscape parkway

Landscape Parkway  Walkway  Setback with a little landscape

# DESIGNATE TOWN GROWTH AREAS…
# AND PROMOTE QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

## Benefits

- Greater predictability for landowners and developers
- Cost-effective infrastructure provision
- Realize preferred development types
- Maintain community character

## Implementation steps

- Identify and map preferred growth areas
- Tailor development standards to level playing field for preferred development types such as mixed use
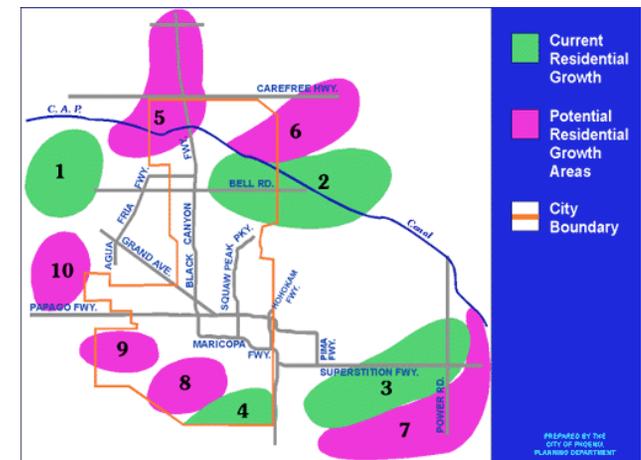
# DESIGNATE TOWN GROWTH AREAS…
# AND PROMOTE QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

## Implementation steps

- **Adopt clear, simple design standards to assure development quality and compatibility**

## Practice pointers

- **Delegate design review to staff**

- **Keep design standards simple**





**ROOF FORM**

THIS

NOT THIS

1. Use of similar roof forms enhances compatibility of infill duplex within established neighborhood.

2. Use of contrasting roof forms on infill home is incompatible with the character of the historic home it adjoins.

# Implementation Discussion and Tips

**INSTITUTIONAL**

■ **Include all local government departments in drafting smart growth comprehensive plans—utilities, public works, emergency services.**

■ **Coordinate with other local governments and regional planning agencies.**

**PROCESS**

■ **Don't focus exclusively on new regulations (although important)—look at removing barriers to smart growth and sustainable development and creating incentives where possible.**

# Implementation discussion and tips

**REGULATIONS**

- **Level playing field for <u>preferred</u> development patterns vs. sprawl. Do not make it more complicated from a regulatory standpoint or more costly.**

- **Coordinate town regulations with surrounding counties and nearby towns. Work towards goal of uniform or supportive development regulations to avoid jurisdiction shopping.**

- **Gear regulations and review processes to available staff resources—keep things simple!!**

# Question #2: What Communities Need To Do To Ensure Success

- Engage decision makers, especially elected officials, early on
- Do homework on key issues to narrow focus of workshop
- Establish balanced working group committed to full day
- Begin setting priorities for action/amendments at workshop (See next slide for "how-to."
- Work on follow-up agenda and strategy at workshop —who does what

# Question #3: Prioritizing Amendments/ Recommendations

- **Study/review current plans, policies, recent regulations for guidance**

- **Ask elected officials—round robin discussion at workshop luncheon**

- **Gear regulations and review processes to available staff resources—keep things simple!!**

- **Assign responsibility for lead person/agency for each priority recommendation.**