Smart School Siting Tool:
A new tool for engaging community stakeholders in smart school siting decisions

New Partners for Smart Growth Conference
Portland, Oregon
February 11, 2016

Today's Presenters

Regina Langton
Senior Policy Analyst
U.S. EPA
Office of Sustainable Communities
(202) 566-2178
langton.regina@epa.gov

Bill Michaud, ENV SP
Senior Technical Advisor
SRA International, A CSRA Company
(860) 738-7501
bill.michaud@csra.com

Rebecca Stuecker, AIA, LEED AP
Architect
Dull Olson Weeks – IBI Group Architects
(503) 226-6950
rebecca.stuecker@IBIGroup.com

Katherine Moore, AICP
Sustainable Growth Program Director
Georgia Conservancy
(404) 876-2900 X106
kmoore@gaconservancy.org

Nick Salmon
President
Collaborative Learning Network, LLC
406.529.5192
nicksalmon@collaborativelearningnetwork.com

Background
Guidelines and Training
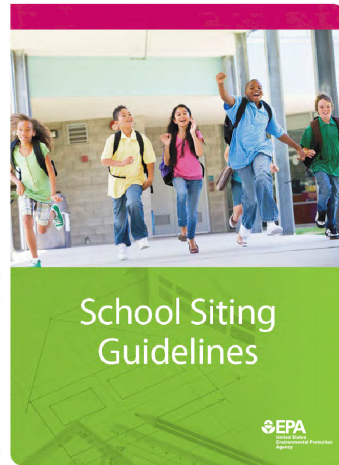
School Siting Guidelines

- Meaningful community involvement
- Health, safety and environmental evaluation
- Opportunities to promote environmental justice
- Renovation, upgrade, adaptation and expansion
- Possible sites in overburdened communities
- Multi-modal, active transportation options
- Schools as community hubs
- Comprehensive assessment of costs

Training Modules

- 1-hour and 3-hour professional training modules
- Parent/community modules
- georgiaconservancy.org/schoolsiting

Overview
Smart School Siting Tool

Available at:
http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-school-siting-tool

School Siting Timeline

Prepare | Identify need | Evaluate options | Select site

Assessment & Planning Workbook

Resource to help communities prepare for siting decisions by assessing coordination between school siting and other planning processes

Site Comparison Workbook

Resource to help communities compare and evaluate school siting alternatives, including renovation, expansion, and new construction

User Guide

- Background on smart school siting
- Overview of the Smart School Siting Tool
- How to use the Workbooks
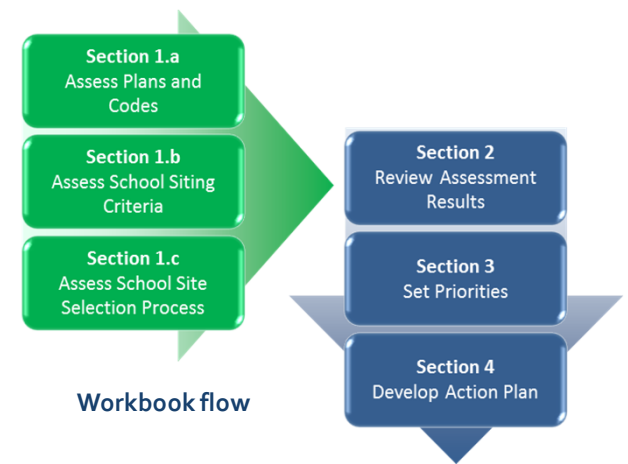- Glossary and resources

Assessment & Planning Workbook
Overview

Design:

- User-friendly downloadable Excel file
- Three assessment sections with ~200 closed ("select one") questions, with space for comments
- Summary, priority-setting, and action planning worksheets

Workbook flow

Section 1.a Assess Plans and Codes		
Section 1.b Assess School Siting Criteria	→	Section 2 Review Assessment Results
Section 1.c Assess School Site Selection Process		Section 3 Set Priorities
		Section 4 Develop Action Plan

Answer choices

Yes	To some extent	Unclear	No	Not Applicable	Answer Later
C	C	C	C	C	C

Assessment areas:

- Coordination between school and community plans and codes
- Alignment of school siting criteria and community planning priorities
- Coordination between school siting and community planning *processes*

Site Comparison Workbook
Overview

Design:

- User-friendly downloadable Excel file
- Site summary sheet, 5 worksheets with 25 multiple choice questions, and two cost calculators
- High-level and detailed summary sheets

Workbook navigation aid

Typical question format

Site comparison factors:

- Proximity to students and population centers
- Location in the community
- Beneficial site characteristics
- Connectivity with the neighborhood
- Bike and pedestrian accessibility
- One-time capital and recurring annual costs

Putting it into Action...
Smart School Siting Workshops

Planning & Assessment Workshop

Workbook-facilitated...

- Collaborative assessment
- Facilitated prioritization exercise
- Action planning
- Monitoring agreements

Site Comparison Workshop

Workbook-facilitated...

- Open-ended priority-setting exercise
- Collaborative site assessment
- Facilitated comparative site evaluation

Demonstration
Site Comparison Workshop

1) Example Scenario

2) Business as Usual School Siting

3) Smart School Siting Tool-Facilitated Process
- Open-ended priority-setting exercise
- Collaborative site assessment
- Facilitated comparative site evaluation

Demonstration
Example Scenario

The Need:

The existing elementary school has exceeded its useful life

- It is outdated and does not provide a healthy learning environment
- The site is too small for ballfields and other recreational areas

The Alternatives:

The school board's siting committee has identified two options
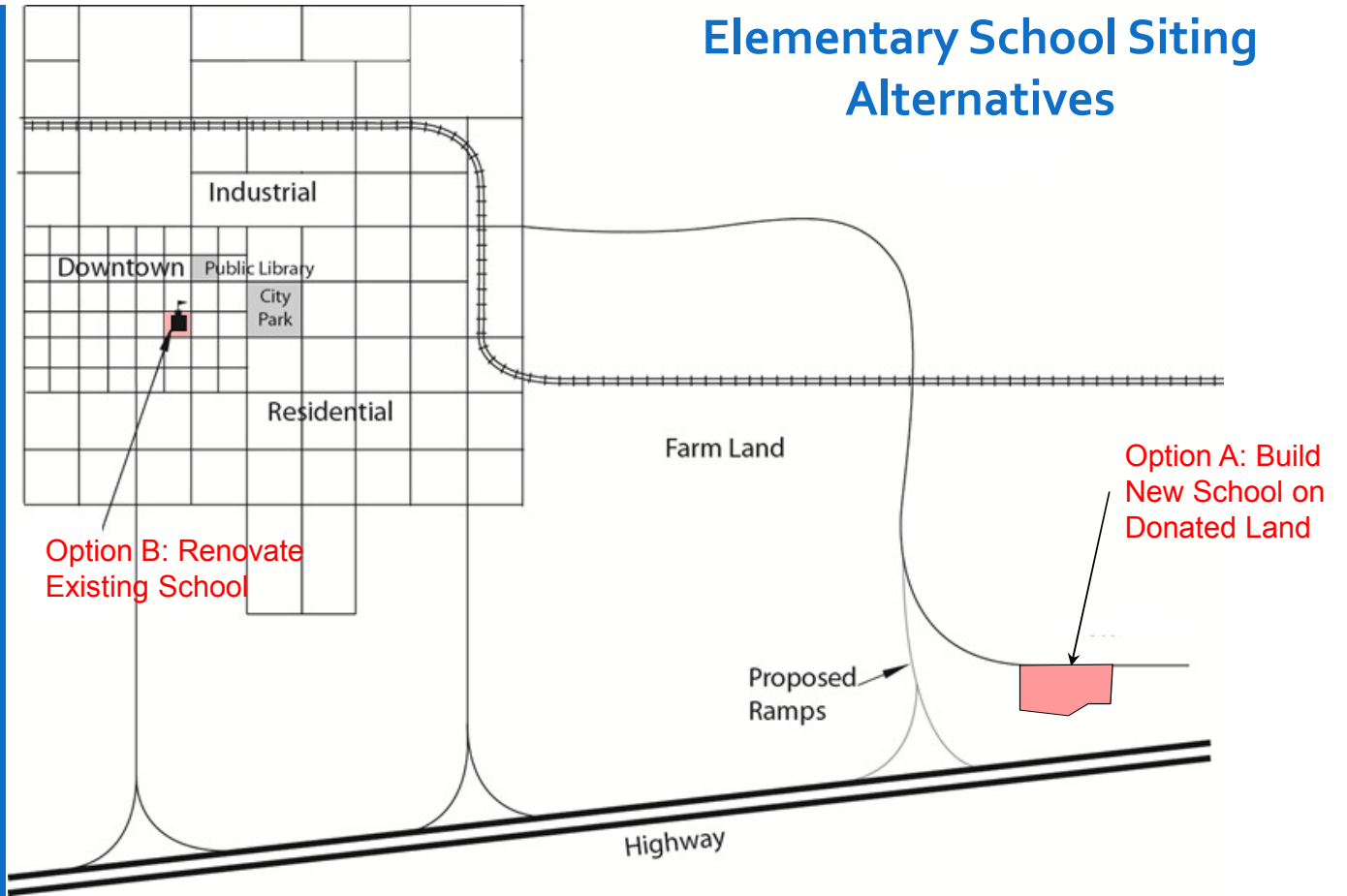
Option A: Build a new school on donated land

- A developer has offered to donate 30 acres of existing farm land to the community with approval of a new housing development

Option B: Renovate the existing school

- Demolish the interior and abate hazards; rebuild as a high performing school
- Identify alternatives to balance on-site recreation and other needs (e.g., parking)

Site Comparison Demonstration
Example Scenario

Elementary School Siting Alternatives

Industrial

Downtown   Public Library

City Park

Residential

Farm Land

Option B: Renovate Existing School

Option A: Build New School on Donated Land

Proposed Ramps

Highway

Site Comparison Demonstration
Example Scenario

High-Level Summary of Alternatives

	Option A: Build New School	Option B: Renovate Existing School
General description	Build new school on 30 acres to be donated by developer	Renovate existing school; identify alternatives for on-site recreation
Cost Estimate	$30M (includes site preparation, new construction of building and grounds)	$35M (includes building renovation, other site construction costs, temporary facilities for students)
Pros	• Plenty of room for ballfields, parking, etc. • No land acquisition costs • Nice setting • Will serve the new development	• Preserve the "old school" in the downtown • No land acquisition costs • Close to kids
Cons	• Hard to get there • Close to the highway	• Complicated construction, could be disruptive for downtown • Not enough room for ballfields • Temporary classrooms

Site Comparison Demonstration
Business as Usual Siting Decision

(Group Discussion)

Which option would you prefer...

- As a parent?
- As a student?
- As a member of the school board?
- As an elected government official?
- As a taxpayer?

Why?

What more would you like to know?

How should the decision be made?

How do you think the decision will be made?

Site Comparison Demonstration
Smart School Siting Process

Reset...

- What are the most important things to consider in this decision?
- What information do we need to gather?
- Who should be involved in this decision?
- How are we going to weigh the pros and cons?
- How are we going to account for differences in opinion?

Smart School Siting approach:

- Engage a representative group of stakeholders
- Establish priorities up front
- Use the Smart School Siting Tool to organize information
- Weigh alternatives using objective information and stakeholder-defined priorities

Site Comparison Demonstration
Setting Priorities
(Group Exercise and Discussion)

What factors should we consider?

- Proximity to students and existing population
- Consistency with community development plans
- Beneficial site characteristics, e.g.,
  - Contribution to the quality of neighborhood
  - Shared use opportunities
- Bikability and walkability
- Air quality
- Cost
  - Borne by the school district
  - Other costs (roads, water and sewer, transportation, etc.)
- What else?

What factors are most important?

Site Comparison Demonstration
Comparing Options
(Group Exercise and Discussion)

Using the Smart School Siting Tool to…

- Gather information
- Organize information
- Compare siting alternatives
- Generate and add to the discussion

Completing the Tool (interactive demo)

Comparing the options

- What differences does the Smart School Siting Tool highlight?
- What other information should we consider?
- What does the priority-setting exercise tell us?

Conclusion

The process is designed to...

- Rely on information readily available to communities
- Expand considerations to a broader set of impacts and interests
- Encourage collaborative fact finding, assessment, and decision-making
- Organize information to support meaningful dialogue
- Support inclusive, well-informed, forward-looking decisions

Feedback

- Does the tool consider the factors most relevant to your community? What is missing?
- What do you think are the greatest challenges that your community would have when using this approach?
- When would this approach be most useful to your community?
- What would motivate your communities to consider this approach? What would stand in the way?
- What would help you get the word out?

To Use the Tool and for More Information

The Smart School Siting Tool is available at:

http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-school-siting-tool

For more information, please contact:

Regina Langton
Senior Policy Analyst
EPA Office of Sustainable Communities
1300 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington DC 20460
(202) 566-2178
langton.regina@epa.gov