

## The nature of smart growth

Frank Bentayou

The smart growth movement, which urges a land-use approach focused on reversing urban sprawl, stepped up to the national stage in the 1990s.

Though it attracts a diverse constituency, including builders and developers, environmentalists, urban activists and planners, the movement has found common ground in a few guiding principles.

Of course, not all under the big tent of smart growth equally commit to some of these principles. Profit motivates developers; planners and social and environmental activists often don't see eye to eye with them.

The Smart Growth Network, a nonprofit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency supports, says the movement results from a demographic shift coinciding with the aging of baby boomers, a changing "environmental ethic," economic concerns and "more nuanced views of growth."

To be considered a smart growth project, the Network says development should:

- Create a range of housing choices— single-family, multifamily, higher-and lower-density, and high-and moderate-cost dwellings.
- Encourage walkable neighborhoods where vehicular traffic doesn't threaten pedestrians.
- Ensure that people who live and work in a community define their own needs and endorse ways to address them.
- Foster distinctive, attractive places in keeping with community character and with a strong sense of place.

- Mix land uses among commercial, recreational, institutional and residential (multi- and single-family) so residents don't need to drive miles to jobs and other destinations. Such mixed uses inject neighborhoods with interest, variety and street life.
- Preserve open space, including farmland and natural and threatened areas. One of the dire consequences of urban sprawl is that far-flung residential development and strip shopping centers eat up thousands of acres of farm and undeveloped land each year.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices, including pedestrian, bicycle, vehicular and cleaner, less energy-gobbling mass transit.
- Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities, rather than undeveloped areas. Building where roads and utilities already are saves energy and resources and helps ensure that neighborhoods stay vital.
- Use more land-efficient building design by encouraging greater density and more vertical, rather than expensive, land-wasteful horizontal design. Inviting common areas can provide for social gatherings, recreation and contemplation to help build community among neighbors.

