

# Alabama Coastal Smart Growth Outreach Project Final Report



(Sustainable City Visualisation Tool website: [www.sicvt.co.uk/](http://www.sicvt.co.uk/))

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this extension project was to provide information about smart growth and sustainable development to community and regional leaders in four Alabama Gulf Coast counties (Clarke, Escambia, Monroe, and Washington). The main focus of our outreach efforts for this project was to discuss (1) the definitions and common misconceptions of smart growth, (2) the principles of smart growth and growth management, and (3) tools and techniques for smart growth and growth management with regional and county decision-makers. The project involved four key methods: an informational brochure, PowerPoint presentation workshops, a survey of the outcomes of the workshops, and discussions with community members. Based on the survey data, we completed an outcome assessment and found a need for more information on smart growth in the Alabama Gulf Coast region; that the community leaders surveyed were particularly interested in zoning interventions such as density bonuses and place-making issues, a database of community leaders in the Gulf Coast is needed, and development of an “Alabama coastal community smart growth guidebook” would help educate more people in the Gulf Coast about growth management issues.

## Extension Project Overview

The coastal region of Alabama has seen tremendous development pressure in recent years. To insure future development is carried-out in an environmentally sustainable manner, there is a need for regional, county, and local leaders to learn about contemporary smart growth techniques that are relevant to coastal regions. Our outreach project identified four Alabama counties (Clarke, Escambia, Monroe, and Washington) in the Alabama coastal region, which were the focus of our smart growth outreach efforts. As shown in Table 1, all of these counties are rural in their population densities. With this in mind, we proposed taking a regional to county approach to sharing information on smart growth principles and sustainable development practices in the Northern Gulf of Mexico region of Alabama. We proposed to provide a series of PowerPoint workshops that are coordinated with a resource brochure to be presented to regional organizations and to local community leaders.

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Table 1 Population Densities of Clarke, Escambia, Monroe, and Washington Counties

County	Total Population	Land Area (square miles)	Persons per square mile, 2000
Clarke	27,248	1,238.38	22.5
Escambia	37,849	947.38	40.6
Monroe	23,342	1,025.85	23.7
Washington	17,651	1,080.66	16.7
State of Alabama	4,599,030	50,744.00	87.6

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Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

This report is our outcome assessment of the entire extension project (brochure, PowerPoint workshops, survey, and discussions with community members). Data for the assessment is based on a survey with the people who participated in the workshops and our experiences with interacting with the workshop participants.

### Smart Growth in Coastal Areas

In the last few decades many people have become concerned with development patterns that are primarily dominated by exponential outward expansion of development and abandonment of infrastructure in already built-up areas. This pattern of development is often referred to as sprawl. These development patterns can be particularly problematic in coastal areas because of demographic shifts toward those areas, economic shifts, and sensitive environmental conditions. Compounding these issues, growth management and smart growth techniques that have been

practiced in other parts of the country have rarely been practiced in gulf coast areas such as in Alabama. Whereas other places in the country have a large knowledge base of growth management and smart growth techniques on which to base policies to manage that growth, many of these techniques have not become standard practice in Alabama. The main purpose of this project is to open up a conversation and educate decision-makers about contemporary growth management and smart growth techniques that are relevant to the Alabama coastal region.

### Smart Growth Outreach Project

While many communities in the U.S. have developed innovative methods to control growth, many decision-makers remain unaware of these methods. The main goal of our outreach project was to educate regional and county decision-makers on (1) the definitions and common misconceptions of smart growth, (2) the principles of smart growth and growth management, and (3) tools and techniques for smart growth and growth management. In order to make our outreach project more relevant to county and regional decision-makers in the coastal region, we sought to use examples of places where smart growth and growth management have been achieved along the coast.

Our presentation began by defining growth management (the use of a wide range of techniques in combination to determine the amount, type, and rate of growth and to channel that growth into designate areas), and smart growth (which stresses compact development patterns, farmland preservation, and state incentives to manage the character of development, design, and relationships of land uses). The key distinction between smart growth and growth management is that the former is less concerned with managing the rate of growth and timing of development, while the latter is less concerned with the character of development.

Next, our presentation covered different viewpoints on the purposes of growth management and smart growth. First, that growth is inevitable and is due to natural and economic factors over which local governments have no control. Second, that growth equals progress for economic and community well-being. Third, that advocates of growth management seek to stop all population growth. Forth, that growth is a variable that can be influenced in order to maintain a community's quality of life.

In order to inform county and government leaders about the key concepts of growth management and smart growth, we discussed these concepts in detail, as follows:

### Key principles of growth management

- New development should be supported by adequate public facilities
- Urban development should be matched by urban services
- Public investment affects the pace of development
- Land use regulation should address the character, use, and timing of development

### Key principles of smart growth

- Mixed land uses
- Compact building design
- Housing choices
- Walkable neighborhoods
- Attractive communities that create a sense of place
- Environmental preservation
- Town centers and redevelopment
- Transportation choices
- Clear, fair, and efficient development processes
- Collaboration in development decisions

In the last part of our presentation, we covered growth management and smart growth techniques. The first technique that we discussed was urban service areas and urban growth boundaries. This involves establishing a delineated area within which urban development is encouraged, and outside of which urban development is discouraged. The refusal to extend utilities to areas outside the growth boundary for a certain period of time is a technique that some jurisdictions use to enact the growth boundary or service area.

The second technique that we presented was incentive zoning. Zoning incentives, such as increasing floor area, height, setbacks, or lot coverage can be exchanged for certain amenities such as streetscape improvements, floodplain protection, open space protection, and the preservation of habitat. Many of the regional and county decision-makers that we spoke with were particularly interested in this technique.

The third growth management technique that we presented was capital improvement programming (CIP). A CIP can be used to time major infrastructure expansions, such as roads and sewers. This can be an effective method for growth management that establishes a schedule for when the necessary utilities are present in an area for development. This technique can also be used for hazard mitigation by including things such as engineering techniques and evacuation routes in the CIP.

The fourth technique that we discussed was adequate public facilities ordinances (APFO). An

APFO is a requirement that establishes a level of service for certain facilities, and new development will not be approved in an area until those facilities meet the requisite level of service. In coastal areas, flood management and natural hazard management can be included in APFOs.

Finally, our presentation discussed how growth management in coastal areas must consider the special environmental, economic, and community issues of the region. While the ten principals of smart growth can be generally applied to many situations, the unique challenges and opportunities of coastal areas requires a reformulating of ideas related to growth management. Further, while many coastal areas in the south have enacted innovative growth management policies and programs to manage growth and protect economic opportunities and the environment, a comprehensive, regional and holistic approach is needed in order to sustain coastal communities for the next century of planning challenges.

We also developed a brochure outlining the main points of our presentation, which was given to all of the attendees at our meetings. Following the presentations, we held discussion sessions to answer questions about smart growth and growth management techniques.

#### Outcome Assessment

Everything went according to plan in this research project except for the number of people we were actually able to meet. Geographically, the participants who attended the workshops covered the entire study area in the four counties (Clarke, Escambia, Monroe, and Washington). (See Figure 1.) However, in the final tally, we conducted 10 community meetings, were only able to generate 9 completed surveys, and meet with 16 individuals. We had an extraordinary hard time locating, contacting, and scheduling with local government officials in this region of Alabama. We state this fact at the start of our analysis to provide a realistic context of the survey results as well as provide a precursor for our recommendations.

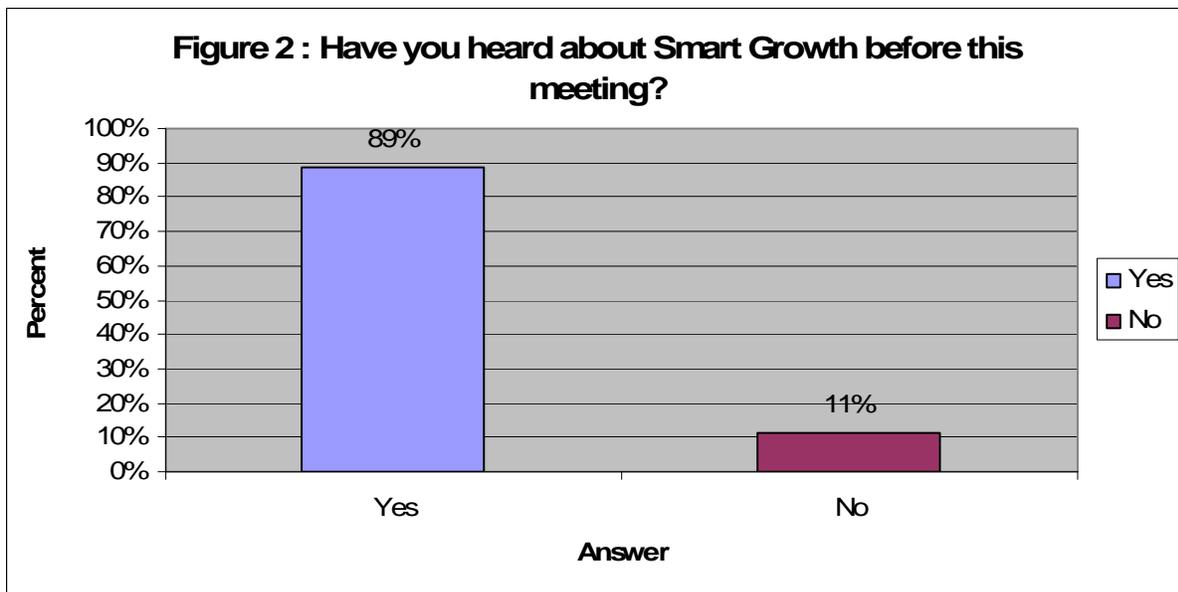
Figure 1: Alabama County Map

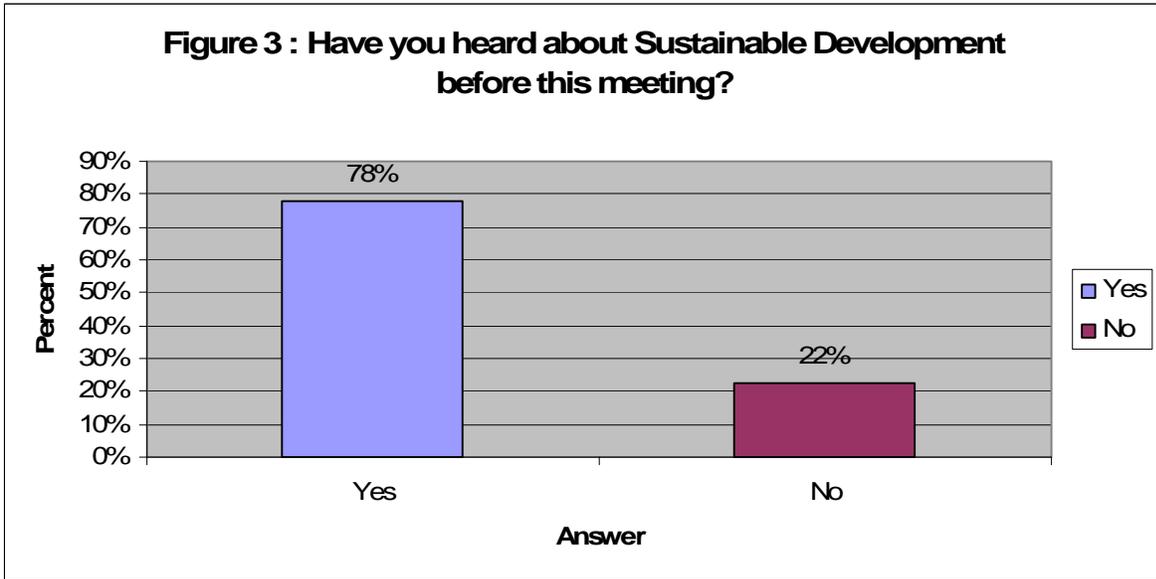


The workshops entailed a sequential three part process; provide a PowerPoint presentation about smart growth/ sustainable development principles, complement the presentation with an informational brochure, and concluded the meeting with a brief survey to assess the outcome of the presentation. Identification of possible workshop participants started-off with the State of Alabama list of government contacts which included county, town government seats and state senators in the regions. A total of 10 workshops were conducted. This is slightly lower than the 14 workshops projected in the original grant proposal. Many of the local government seats did not have a website or e-mail address and did not have a full time employee responsible for basic correspondence. Fortunately, the participants who attended the workshops completely covered the geographic study area.

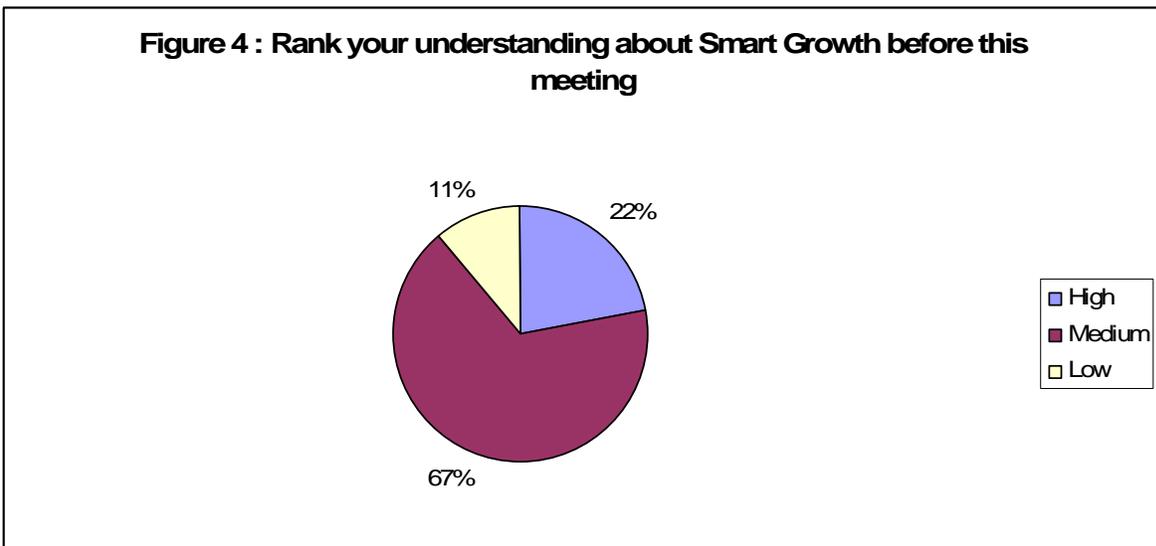
A post-presentation survey was implemented at the completion of the PowerPoint presentation that gauged three things from the participants: (1) how much awareness did local officials have about smart growth and sustainable development principles before the workshop; (2) what did they learn from the presented materials; and (3) what are the best ways to get smart growth / sustainable development information and opportunities out to them in the future.

We purposefully split-out “smart growth” and “sustainable development” terms on the front-end of the survey to see if local officials were more aware of one concept over the other. As shown in Figures 2 through 4, such differentiation did exist with local residents being more resonant with “smart growth” principles. 89% of the people surveyed had heard about smart growth (Figure 2) while 78% of them heard about sustainable development (Figure 3).

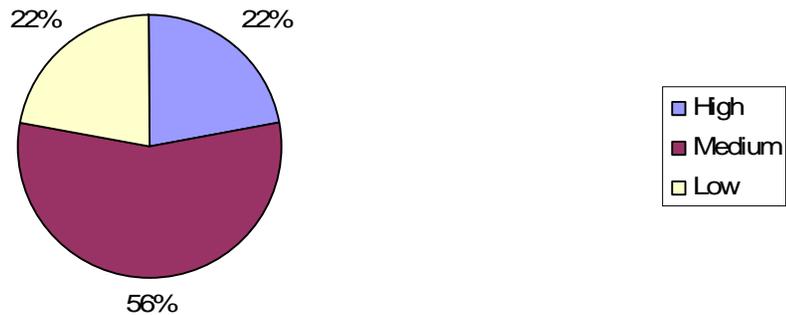




The same differentiated relationship, albeit slightly less, existed in terms of local residents “understanding” of smart growth vs. sustainable development. 89% of the respondents had a “high” to “medium” understanding about smart growth while 78% had the same level of understanding about sustainable development.

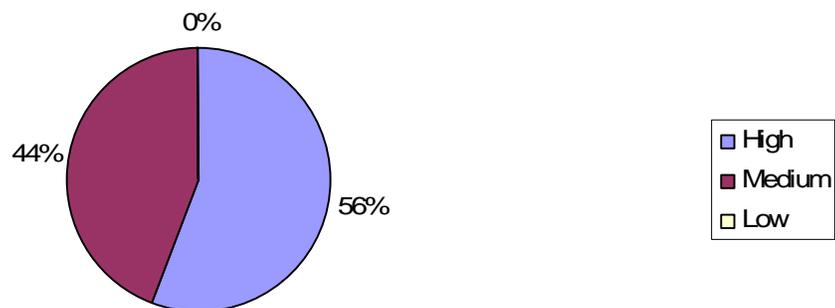


**Figure 5 : Rank your understanding about Sustainable Development before this meeting**



Everyone that participated in the workshops saw smart growth / sustainable development principles as being “highly relevant” (56%) or “relevant” (44%) in their communities. (See Figure 6.)

**Figure 6 : Rank the relevance of Smart Growth/Sustainable Development principles in your community?**



As seen in the comments below, the most common shared concept learned during the workshop was land use initiatives (e.g. zoning incentives and density bonuses).

Contact info to pursue additional details if desired.

Zoning and incentive zoning.

Additional help and assistance is available for growth.

About zoning incentives.

Although I have heard about smart growth, it was refreshing to go over the 10 principles and techniques for review. The brochure is informative!

Learned that smart growth is a concept that can be used in our area.

Density bonuses.

The different incentives regarding smart growth and growth management principles. Urban Service Areas, neat concept to preserve recreational and agricultural areas.

Importance of proper planning and reasonable development.

In connecting smart growth / sustainable development principles to their communities, local residents comments clustered around developing pedestrian friendly community places. (See comments below.)

Unable to answer currently.

Biking and hiking trails. More public spaces, downtown development.

Comprehensive planning.

Our communities are becoming increasingly aware of smart growth practices and (are) interested in putting these practices into action.

Compact building design, walkable communities that are attractive and (provide) a sense of place is very important. Vibrant downtown.

Walkable neighborhoods, better transportation choices, environmental preservation.

Unknown.

The different incentives regarding smart growth and growth management principles. Urban service areas neat concept to preserve recreational and agricultural areas.

Survey responses were fairly mixed on how best to get smart growth / sustainable development information out to them in the future (see listed comments below). The top identified option was small meetings (n=5) followed by e-mail (n=4). Tied for third (n=3 per topic), respondents identified mailed brochure, regional meetings, and attend informational meeting that is connected to an annual meeting.

Mailed brochure.

Small community meeting; regional meeting.

E-mail message.

Small community meeting.

Mailed brochure; e-mail message; regional meeting; attend informational meeting that is connected to an annual meeting you regularly attend.

Mailed brochure; e-mail message; regional meeting; attend informational meeting that is connected to an annual meeting you regularly attend.

E-mail message; attend informational meeting that is connected to an annual meeting you regularly attend.

E-mail message; regional meeting.

(Note: respondents were allowed to identify more than one option).

### Smart Growth/Sustainable Development South Alabama Outreach Workshop Recommendations

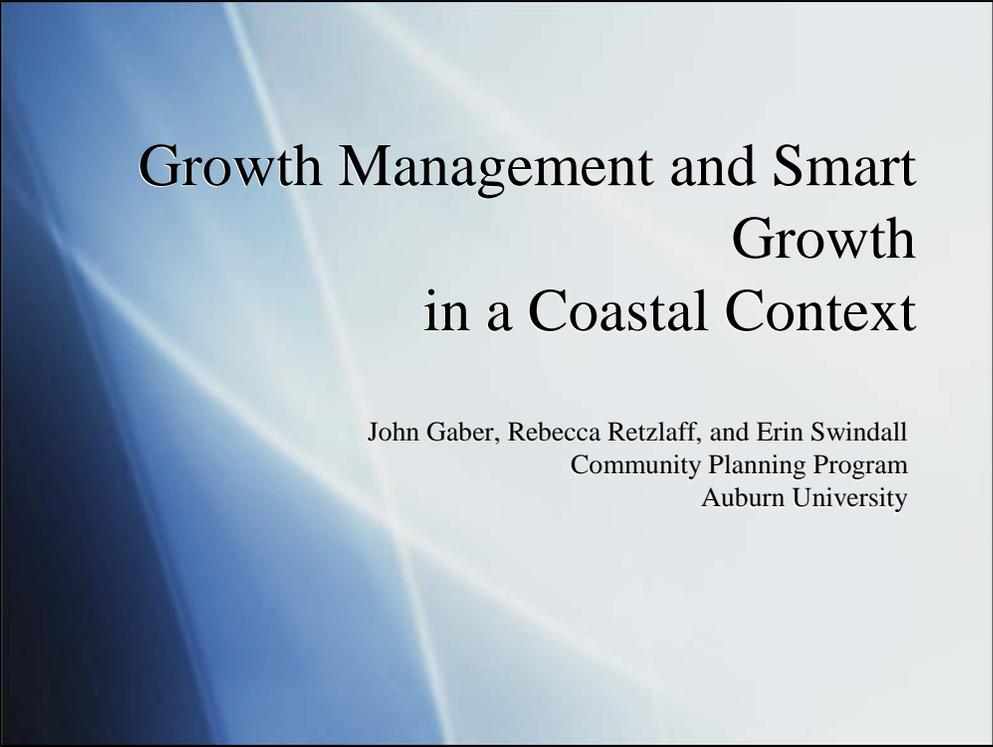
According to the survey results conducted in this study, smart growth / sustainable development principles are understood by 100% of the surveyed local officials to be very relevant in their communities. To expand on this understanding and hopefully get more folks in the region to put more smart growth / sustainable development principles into practice, we recommend four course of actions.

- 1) Package the workshops closer to smart growth themes. As seen in the survey results, there is a slight drop-off in awareness and understanding about sustainable development in comparison to smart growth principles. Sustainable development principles are extremely closely aligned (albeit still distinct with a focus on the type and rate of growth)

so little will be lost in terms of local breadth of understanding in terms of environmentally sensitive developments.

- 2) Craft future workshops that pay some extra attention to specific land use interventions (e.g. zoning incentives) and pedestrian oriented place-making projects. Survey responses showed a clear orientation toward positive quality of life and environmentally friendly developments than specific environmental mitigation measures (e.g. storm water management practices).
- 3) Develop a multi-point smart growth community extension process. The most significant problem we experienced in this study was the difficulty in finding, contacting, and meeting with folks in the Alabama North Gulf region (Clarke Escambia, Monroe, and Washington County). Single point traditional community extension strategies (meeting with members in the community) may not necessarily be cost-effective given the size of the study area, low density of the population, and low accessibility. Although small community meetings are preferred by survey respondents in this study, they need to be partnered with other community information dissemination strategies to improve the cost-effectiveness of resources (time and money) of community extension efforts. We suggest the following strategy for Alabama. Contacts established in this study can and should be used as an informational data base through which new contacts can be developed and added. The development of the Alabama North Gulf regional data base can be complemented with smart growth workshops that dovetails (before or after) annual or quarterly meetings local officials regularly attend. Notices of upcoming smart growth works can be carried-out via e-mail and regular mail documents. These notices can be packaged with additional information on new smart growth developments, resources, and opportunities in the state and the Gulf Coast region.
- 4) Develop an “Alabama coastal community smart growth guidebook,” which details all of the growth management techniques that have been and could be used in the gulf coast region. This document could be used as a reference book for communities that are interested in managing growth, and would be comprehensive enough to give basic guidance on growth management, as well as provide information about where to go to for additional help and resources. The guidebook would also provide information on Alabama enabling legislation that is relevant to smart growth. Because of the difficulty in accessing community leaders, the guidebook would help people who do not regularly travel to regional meetings. The guidebook would be considerably longer and more in-depth than the brochure used in this extension project, and would reach more people than an in-person extension project could.

## Appendix A: PowerPoint Presentation



# Growth Management and Smart Growth in a Coastal Context

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## Outline

- Growth Management Principles
- Smart Growth Principles
- Growth Management and Smart Growth Techniques

## Growth Management

- “Growth management” – the use of a wide range of techniques in combination to determine the amount, type, and rate of growth and to channel that growth into designated areas
- Growth management principles are often tied to land use regulation

## Different Viewpoints on the Purposes of Growth Management

1. Growth is inevitable
  - Growth is due to natural and economic factors over which local government has no control
2. Growth equals progress
  - Population growth is essential to community progress
  - Economic progress is the primary measure of community well-being

## Growth management-different views on purposes

### 3. Stop all population growth

- Population growth implies an automatic decline in the quality of life
- Increased growth implies higher per capita costs of government
- Growth can and should be regulated through governmental policy

### 4. Growth is a variable to be influenced in pursuit of quality of life

## The Growth Management Movement in the U.S.

- Key concepts:
  - New development should be supported by adequate public facilities
  - Urban development should be matched by urban services
  - Recognition that public investment affects pace of development

# Land Use Regulation and Growth Management

- Current land use regulation addresses
  - Timing of land use change (including adequacy of supporting facilities)
  - Location of growth
  - Character of Growth (including performance)

## Smart growth movement in U.S.

- Began in mid 1990s
- Stresses compact development patterns, farmland preservation, and state incentives
- Less concerned with managing rate of growth and more concerned with character of development, relationships of land uses, and design

## Ten Principles Of Smart Growth (and coastal smart growth)

- Mixed land uses
- Compact building design
- Housing choices
- Walkable neighborhoods
- Attractive communities; sense of place
- Environmental preservation and amenity
- Centers and redevelopment
- Transportation choices
- Clear, fair, and efficient process
- Collaboration in development decisions

## Mixed Use

- Provide retail or personal services near housing
- Incorporate parks, schools, and other public facilities.
- Consider the needs of ports, harbors, and recreation
- Encourage working waterfronts and water-dependent uses



## Compact Buildings

- Grow vertically rather than horizontally to preserve greenspace and reduce service costs
- Use land to maximize waterfront activities
- Design waterfront to balance the benefits of density with other needs (environmental, Economic, social)



# Housing Choice

- Provide quality housing for people of all income levels
- Accommodate seasonal populations and service-industry workers



## Walkable Neighborhoods

- Mix land uses, build compactly, and provide safe and inviting pedestrian corridors
- Develop waterfront linkages
- Adopt site planning for low-impact development and landscaping along the waterfront



## Attractive; Sense of Place

- Set standards for development that respond to community values about quality design
- Protect and enhance coastal character



# Environmental Amenity



- Consider both amenity and fiscal benefits
- Protect natural coastal features and processes
- Understand and plan for coastal processes and changes over time (rising sea levels, storms, erosion)

## Centers and Redevelopment

- Use resources that existing neighborhoods offer
- Encourage revitalization of working/living waterfronts



# Transportation Choices

- Coordinate land use and transportation investment
- Increase high-quality transit service
- Connect pedestrian, bike, transit, and road facilities
- Consider water-oriented transportation options



# Collaboration

- Private sector provides most of the development
- Stakeholder collaboration in development
- Local definition of needs and programs
- Assure public access to waterfront areas



## Growth management and smart growth techniques

- Urban Service Areas or Urban Growth Areas
- Incentive zoning; density bonus
- Capital improvement program
- Transfer of development rights
- Capital improvement program; impact fees
- Adequate public facilities requirements

## Urban growth area and urban service area

- An urban growth area (UGA) is an area delineated in a comprehensive plan within which urban development is encouraged and outside of which urban development is discouraged
- An urban service area is an area in which urban services will be provided and outside of which such services will not be extended

## Incentive zoning

- Incentive zoning—increase in floor area ratio or waivers for height, setback, yard, and lot coverage or parking for for provisions of public amenity:
  - Protection of floodplain
  - Streetscape improvements
  - Affordable housing, day care centers
  - Preservation of habitat

## Density bonus

- Increase in density in exchange for provision of public amenity or benefit, particularly affordable housing
- A subcategory of incentive zoning

## Capital improvement program

- A multiyear (5-6 years) schedule of capital projects adopted by a local government
- Used in growth management programs to time major infrastructure expansions
- Requirement for the use of impact fees
- Steps in CIP preparation
  - Local government establishes priorities
  - Multiyear revenue forecast is developed
  - Municipal departments, other groups, identify capital projects
  - Projects are reviewed and prioritized
  - CIP is adopted—first year is capital budget
  - Projects are carried out

## Adequate public facilities requirements

- Program requires establishing level of service for certain facilities
- Development approved if capacity is available, postponed if capacity is not available
- Developer can pay for cost of additional capacity or provide capacity

## Conclusion

- Growth management in coastal areas must consider the special environmental, economic, and community issues. While the ten principals of smart growth can be generally applied to many situations, the unique challenges and opportunities of coastal areas requires a reformulating of ideas related to growth management. Further, while many coastal areas in the south have enacted innovative growth management policies and programs to manage growth and protect economic opportunities and the environment, a comprehensive, regional and holistic approach is needed in order to sustain coastal communities for the next century of planning challenges.

## Appendix B: Brochure

