Sustainable Community Development in Rural Communities

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Office of Sustainable Communities
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Farm in Washington State
Port Washington, Wisconsin
Edwards, Colorado
EPA’s Office of Sustainable Communities: Working in Rural America

- Provide technical assistance to communities and states
- Governors’ Institute workshops with rural focus: Montana, Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, Iowa, and North Carolina
- Rural guidebooks:
  - *Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities*
  - *Essential Smart Growth Fixes for Rural Planning, Development and Zoning Codes* (upcoming)
- Smart Growth Achievement Awards: Rural development category
- Work with NGOs (NADO, NACo, etc.) and other rural stakeholders
- Partnering with HUD, DOT, USDA, ARC

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Challenges Facing Rural Communities

- Changing economies
  - Decline of traditional economic base, questions of what’s next
- Fewer farms and farmers
  - Although there is a growing interest in farming
- Loss of forest and other natural and working land
- Some communities are growing, some are shrinking
  - Rapid growth at metro edges
  - Shrinking population in some communities
- Limited access to jobs, services, and transportation
- Limited planning capacity

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Smart Growth: A Response to Rural Challenges

- Development that provides:
  - Choices for where to live and how to get around
  - A stronger, more resilient economy
  - A safer, healthier place to live
  - Opportunities to protect the things that you love about the place you live (farmland and open space, natural beauty, sense of community, etc.)

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Skaneateles, New York

Waitsfield, Vermont
So what does smart growth mean for a rural community?

When you’ve seen one rural community... you’ve seen one rural community.

Photo Credit: EPA
How to Grow and Maintain Rural Character: Three Broad Goals

1. **Support the rural landscape** by creating an economic climate that enhances the viability of working lands and conserves natural lands.

2. **Help existing places thrive** by taking care of assets and investments such as downtowns, Main Streets, existing infrastructure, and places that the community values.

3. **Create great new places** by building vibrant, enduring neighborhoods and communities that people, especially young people, don’t want to leave.

Photo Credit (top to bottom, left to right): EPA, NRCS, NRCS

Staunton, Virginia

National Forest in Colorado
Goal #1: Protect valuable farmland.

Goal #2: Enhance the existing downtown.

Goal #3: Build new neighborhoods that are adjacent to town.

Smart growth in a rural community: How could it work in the landscape?
Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities

- Partnership between the U.S. EPA and ICMA – a Smart Growth Network publication
- Lays out a framework for rural communities and small towns seeking to implement smart growth
- Set of tools, case studies, and resources
Partnership for Sustainable Communities

- Began in June 2009: EPA, HUD, DOT
- Rural Work Group: Partnered with USDA to articulate how the Partnership’s activities can better serve Rural America
- The Group’s Report (to be released soon) includes:
  - How the Livability Principles Support Rural Communities
  - HUD, DOT, EPA and USDA Programs Affecting Rural Communities
  - Case Studies of Sustainable Rural Communities
  - Rural Performance Measures
  - Next Steps for the Partnership

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Smart Growth Implementation Assistance

- Technical assistance to states, regions, and communities that want to implement sustainable communities approaches to development, but are facing barriers
- Provides in-depth, long-term (18 months) assistance from national experts, usually including a multi-day workshop and a final report
- Example: Victor and Driggs, Idaho
Smart Growth Implementation Assistance

- **Categories of assistance this year:**
  1. Community resilience to disasters and climate change
  2. Community energy planning
  3. Smart growth in tribal communities
  4. Land use strategies for economic development agencies
  5. *Economic viability of small towns and rural communities*

- **Application process:**
  - Submit a letter of interest (no more than 8 pages for the total application) – **DUE OCTOBER 28, 2011**
  - If selected as a finalist, will be asked to participate in a follow up call

- **For more information and to apply:**
  - Contact Abby Hall: hall.abby@epa.gov, 202-566-2086
  - SGIA Website: http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sgia.htm
Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities

- Quick, targeted smart growth assistance to communities (1-day workshops) using a variety of tools that have demonstrated results and widespread application (10 tools to choose from)
- Provides access to technical experts who can assist with public engagement, direct consultation with decision makers, and a memo outlining next steps
- Example: Cambridge, Maryland
Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities

Ten tools for this round of assistance:

1. Complete streets
2. Creating a green streets strategy
3. Green building toolkit
4. Linking land use to water quality
5. Parking audit
6. Preferred growth areas
7. Smart growth guidelines for sustainable design and development
8. *Smart growth zoning codes for small cities and rural areas*
9. Using smart growth to produce fiscal and economic health
10. Walking audit
Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities

- Planning to work with 50 communities this year – last year, half of the communities were rural communities or small towns

- Application process:
  - Submit a letter of interest (no more than 2 pages for the total application) – **DUE OCTOBER 28, 2011**

- For more information and to apply:
  - Contact Kevin Nelson: nelson.kevin@epa.gov, 202-566-2835
  - Building Blocks Website: http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/buildingblocks.htm
More Building Blocks...

- Assistance through grants with the following organizations:
  - Cascade Land Conservancy
  - Global Green USA
  - Project for Public Spaces
  - Smart Growth America

- Each of these organizations will offer direct technical assistance to communities – apply directly to the organization

- For more information and to apply:
  - Contact Kevin Nelson: nelson.kevin@epa.gov, 202-566-2835
  - Building Blocks Website: http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/buildingblocks.htm
Other EPA Grants: Brownfields Program

• EPA’s Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization has many programs to help prevent, inventory, assess, clean up, and reuse brownfields properties

• Programs include...

• Targeted Brownfields Assessments
  ○ Helps states, tribes, and municipalities minimize the uncertainties of contamination often associated with brownfields

• Technical Assistance to Brownfields Communities
  ○ Communities can receive assistance with grant applications and brownfields issues through third-party providers who provide the assistance
More Brownfields Programs…

- **Assessment Revolving Loan Fund and Cleanup Grants (open now, closes Nov 28)**
  - Addresses sites contaminated by petroleum and hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants

- **Multipurpose Grants (opens Oct/Nov 2011)**
  - Funding to conduct assessment and cleanup activities at a specific site

- **Environmental Workforce Job Training Grants (opens Nov/Dec 2011)**
  - Grants to nonprofit organizations to recruit, train, and employ unemployed and under-employed residents from solid and hazardous waste-impacted communities (opens Nov/Dec 2011)

- **Area-Wide Planning Grants (opens Feb 2012)**
  - Planning assistance to communities to develop area-wide plans for the reuse of brownfields properties
Other EPA Grants: Brownfields Program

For more info:
- EPA Office of Brownfields Website: http://www.epa.gov/brownfields
- EPA R3 Brownfields Website: http://www.epa.gov/rg3hwmd/bf-lr/index.htm
- National Headquarters Brownfields Contact: Stacy Swartwood, swartwood.stacy@epa.gov, 202 566-1391
Considerations for Applications

- Can you demonstrate a commitment to implementing sustainable communities approaches to development in your region/community?
- Can you demonstrate political and public support for the project?
- Can you illustrate how this work will be applicable to other rural communities/small towns?
- Several programs have specific rural/small town categories – make use of these!
For More Information

www.epa.gov/smartgrowth
www.sustainablecommunities.gov
bertaina.stephanie@epa.gov