Placemaking in Rural Regions & The New Paradigm of Economic Development

John Robert Smith

Westbrook, ME
October 18, 2017
• **The Hon. John Robert Smith**
  - Chairman, Transportation for America
  - Senior Policy Advisor, Smart Growth America
  - Chairman, Transportation for America Advisory Board

• Served 16 years as the Mayor of Meridian, MS

• Served as a Chairman of Amtrak’s Board of Directors from 1998 - 2003; chairman the board the last two years.
Who is Smart Growth America?

Smart Growth America is a national non-profit organization dedicated to researching, advocating for, and leading coalitions to bring smart growth practices to more communities nationwide.

• SGA Leadership Institute
• Local Leaders Council

Transportation for America
GOVERNORS’ INSTITUTE
National Complete Streets Coalition
LOCUS
What is smart growth?

A neighborhood with transportation and housing choices near jobs, shops and schools

...and it’s not new!

Belfast, Maine
The ways we plan our cities

PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT

Image source: https://travelbob.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/pompeii-20.jpg
Traditional town plan

- Mixed-use
- Compact
- Buildings of several stories
- Blocks with multiple building types
- Street grid
Historic Downtown Westbrook

Source: http://greenerpasture.com/Places/Details/809
Historic Homes in Westbrook

Historic Cotton Mill, Westbrook

Source: http://chace.athm.org/images/Watermarked/0000-1527-18.jpg
“Euclidean” zoning

- Fragmented land use
- Drive-only
... and the automobile ... 
(and the interstate highway program, and new federal programs for homebuilding, and new rules for capital depreciation ... )
Prime retail location
(late 20th century)

“Walmart Supercenter, an archetypal big box store, in Madison Heights, Virginia.”
(from Wikipedia entry for “Big-box store”)
Prime office location
(late 20th century)

From: http://dilemma-x.net/2012/11/10/research-triangle-park-unveils-new-master-plan/
Poor, rural areas will be most affected by Walmart closing 154 stores

Related story: What happens to a tiny town when Walmart disappears?
Suddenly, things are changing

THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC FUNDAMENTALS HAVE SHIFTED
Demographic Change
Boomers are a different kind of Senior Citizen
“Adulthood II”

Boomers not ready for the rocking chair

– Today’s retiree can live past 90

– “These additional 31 years of expected life have not been just tacked on at the end . . . Today’s 65-year-olds are starting new careers or continuing old ones, traveling around the world, and eloping with new loves, in a stage of life we are calling ‘Adulthood II.’”

- cultural anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson, quoted in ULI report
Boomers and housing

Boomers are downsizing
Millennials are different

Millennials are different: Your children and grandchildren

Preferences: Transportation
Preferences: Housing

47% 12% 40%
Preferences: Housing

Erwin, Tennessee

Conway, Arkansas

Bardstown, Kentucky

Jonesborough, Tennessee

Rifle, Colorado

Bardstown, KY: C. Bedford Crenshaw,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=14633816
Jonesborough, TN: User brent_nashville on flickr
Rifle, CO: User jasperdo on flickr
Millennials now largest share of the work force
They follow lifestyle, not jobs.

Millennials choose where to live before finding a job.

Of all college-educated 25- to 34-year-olds, **64%** looked for a job **after** they chose the city where they wanted to live.

(U.S. Census)
They want urban living

Suburbs Try to Prevent an Exodus as Young Adults Move to Cities and Stay

By JOSEPH BERGER  APRIL 16, 2014

It is a well-trod trail: Suburban youngsters enter their early 20s, leave their parents’ comfortable Tudors or colonials for the pizazz of the city, dawdle a few years until they find mates and begin having children and then, seeking more space and good public schools, move back to the suburbs and into their own Tudors or colonials.

But that pattern is changing, or at least shifting. A recent report on the suburb-dotted New York counties of Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk, based on United States census data, found that those young people seem to be lingering longer in New York City, sometimes forsaking suburban life
They want experiences more than things.
Economic growth

20th century vs. 21st century

• Manufacturing economy vs. Knowledge economy

• Chasing smokestacks vs. Chasing talent
The 21st Century Economy

Manufacturing is changing

- Smaller part of our economy
- Its nature has changed
The 21st Century Economy

• Creativity, knowledge, innovation
• Importance of networking, interaction
• Demand for skilled workers

“A region’s most important source of competitive advantage is its workforce. . . . it’s the pool of talent that attract firms, particularly in the knowledge economy.”

“Talent is replacing the tax incentive as the No. 1 economic-development tool in America.”

Mark Wilson, president and CEO
Florida Chamber of Commerce
Quoted in Palm Beach Post
June 9, 2016
Core Values
Why American Companies are Moving Downtown

Download the report at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/core-values
DO BUSINESS IN
Downtown Conway

Downtown Conway is home to more than 2,500 jobs and 300 businesses, and the area continues to grow. As the center of our community, downtown Conway offers perks such as gigabit Internet service through the Data District, networking opportunities, and easy access to amenities perfect for attracting employees and entertaining clients.

If you think downtown Conway is just a place for business, think again. With a variety of after-hours and weekend activities available, you're sure to find something entertaining.
What is Broadband?

Fast and consistent high-speed internet access that is faster than traditional dial-up
Bad Broadband Equals Low Population Growth

An original Broadband Communities study shows a startling, 10-fold difference in population growth between broadband haves and have-nots.

By Steven S. Ross / Broadband Communities
Broadband Availability by Urban and Rural 2015

Promote Connectivity

- Promote Local Options
- Increases Economic Opportunity
- Draw Vibrant Town Centers
- Improves Public Health
Communities are now in a ferocious competition over place (whether they know it or not)
Meridian, MS
It’s all about location
Your Identity is Key

In any public project you need to know:

• Who you were in the past
• Who you are now
• And who you aspire to be
“Meridian, with its depots, store-houses, arsenal, hospitals, offices, hotels, and cantonments no longer exists.”

General Sherman
February, 1864
Who You Were in the Past
Meridian’s Union Station
Who You Are Now
Who You Aspire to Be
Union Station at Completion

- Annually, Union Station hosts 250 events and 300,000 people
Union Station Development Results

- Private development of $165 million in surrounding area
- New life for historic structures
Restored City Hall
World Class Performances
Mississippi Arts and Entertainment Center
Yes, we can read.
A few of us can even write.

From Pulitzer Prize winners to revolutionaries who initiated momentous cultural change... oh, yes, Mississippians can write.
No other state in the country can claim as many honored, awarded and revered writers as Mississippi.

Yea, Mississippi. Where words transcend.
Y’All May Think We Talk Funny, But The World Takes Our Music Seriously.

Slow, Southern, Drawl. A touch of country twang. Some people think we sound funny. Except when we’re singing.

From the father of country music ... to the king of rock ’n’ roll ... to the birthplace of the blues. For decades, Mississippians have been scoring the soundtracks of peoples lives.

From the Deep South to the top of the charts, Mississippians are music to the world’s ears.

MISSISSIPPI...Believe It!
It Is Critical to Engage Future Generations
Thank you.

John Robert Smith

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