

Introduction

Things seldom stay the same in our communities. Inevitably, over time, communities experience growth and change. Sometimes we welcome the change, maybe a new business adds convenience to our daily lives, and other times we may regret the change if a favorite open space becomes a new development. Often we don't think about growth in our communities until something changes and we don't like it. While growth and change are inevitable, *how* growth happens is something communities can manage. Communities can *choose* where development happens and how it looks, functions and contributes to the experiences you have in your community. **Smart growth is a choice communities can make.** Smart growth is not new; many communities already practice aspects of smart growth when making development decisions. The hope is to *encourage more smart growth practices in Maine communities* by providing an overview of the principles, with examples of projects that are happening in Maine. *Click on the links to explore the inspiring, creative examples that are leading the way in Maine.* Then consider what your community might do.

Smart Growth Principles

Smart growth is a development pattern that promotes **creating places** that people enjoy for living, working and recreating, **providing opportunities** (economic, housing, transportation), **protecting community assets** (natural and built), and making **efficient** use of resources (land, infrastructure, financial). *Smart Growth Principles* give definition to this development pattern, providing a framework for communities to use to guide growth to maintain and enhance livable, vibrant communities.

Smart Growth Principles*

1. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
 2. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
 3. Direct development towards built-up areas and encourage compact development
 4. Promote a mix of land uses
 5. Create walkable communities, downtowns, and neighborhoods.
 6. Create housing opportunities and choices
 7. Provide transportation choices
- (*adapted from GrowSmart Maine).

Smart Growth Principles in Maine

If you Google "smart growth" you will find that much has been written about smart growth principles, and examples abound, *nationally*. But how do smart growth principles apply in Maine - a rural state characterized by small towns and just a few large cities, where people are used to driving between communities as part of their daily life, where undeveloped land seems abundant, where individual towns manage development, and where growth of any kind is sometimes welcome because jobs and tax revenue are needed? Given these circumstances, what do smart growth principles look like "on the ground" in Maine?



Augusta, Maine, photo Ramona du Houx

Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place

Creating a *sense of place* is what makes communities attractive, vibrant and distinct. Think of the Maine communities you love, chances are a unique sense of place is at the heart of what makes the community attractive. To create a meaningful sense of place it is helpful for a community to develop a vision for growth that reflects its own values and assets, and work towards implementing that vision. Comprehensive plans are a tool for developing a vision, and are the underpinning for local zoning, to guide new development. Comprehensive plans are the foundation for smart growth.

Information and Tools for Citizen Planners

What does it look like in Maine?

Local comprehensive plans are in place in over 200 Maine communities (out of nearly 500 organized municipalities). While comprehensive plans and zoning are not required in Maine, many communities recognize the value of these tools and have a process in place for implementing and updating their plans. Does your community have a Comprehensive Plan, with a vision for future growth? Is it up to date? The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (MDACF) and 11 Regional Planning Commissions, can provide support and resources for developing a comprehensive plan and keeping it up-to date.

- [MDACF Municipal Planning Assistance Program](#)
- [Regional Planning Commissions](#)

Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas

Smart growth recognizes the value of the natural environment in our daily lives, whether it is wildlife habitat, working lands (e.g. farmland), critical environmental areas (e.g. wetlands, watersheds), for recreation, or simply natural beauty. Smart growth strives to find an appropriate balance between preserving the natural environment and accommodating the built environment.

What does it look like in Maine?

Maine’s natural beauty, working lands, and varied environmental areas are important assets in communities across the state. The natural environment is one of Maine’s “calling cards”, integral to our economy, and among the reasons many of us call Maine home. Most communities recognize the importance of natural areas, striving to preserve them where appropriate and when possible. Balancing environmental protection with economic growth is an ongoing task for communities, one where state agencies and non-profit organizations can provide assistance to identify and preserve important natural assets. *Check out how Maine communities are protecting important natural and working lands while accommodating growth.*

- [Beginning with Habitat](#)
- [Gateway One Corridor Action Plan](#)
- [Land for Maine’s Future](#)

- [Maine Farmland Trust - Building Farm Friendly Communities](#)
- [Maine Land Trust Network - Local Land Trusts](#)
- [Maine Association of Conservation Commissions - Home Rules, Home Tools](#)
- [MDACF - Local ordinances](#)

Direct development towards built-up areas and encourage compact development

Concentrating new development in built-up areas conserves natural resources, reduces local infrastructure costs, encourages walking and biking, and can increase economic activity. Compact development is a central feature of “smart growth”, bringing back the old “traditional neighborhood” design. Shifting a community’s development pattern from low-density and commercial-strip development, to compact development, can be transformative.

What does it look like in Maine?

Maine’s Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act (i.e. Growth Management Program) calls for designating “growth areas”, and directing development towards built-up areas and away from “rural” areas. The intent is to encourage compact development. That said, many Maine communities are still characterized by a sprawling land use pattern. Density is not a popular concept, especially in many small towns. This is slowly changing. Communities are realizing compact development can increase economic activity, promote walkability and social connections, take pressure off open space and protect rural character. There are real benefits to compact development. *Take a look at what some communities are doing to shift their land use pattern from sprawl to more compact.*

- [Standish Corner Village](#)
- [Yarmouth Route One Character Code](#)
- [Windham 21st Century Downtown Plan](#)
- [Scarborough Dunstan Crossing; Eastern Village](#)



Yarmouth, Route One Corridor (TPUDC)

Information and Tools for Citizen Planners

Promote a mix of land uses

Imagine opportunities for living, working, shopping, and recreation all within walking distance of each other. Imagine this scenario provided a good tax return for your community. It is actually possible, by encouraging *mixed* land use. Locating residential, office, commercial, recreation and/or civic uses together, or in close proximity to one another, promotes convenience in daily life, stimulates economic activity, allows for walking and biking between uses, and it can offer greater financial return for communities. "[The Smart Math of Mixed-Use Development](#)" presents an analysis for Asheville, North Carolina. "A typical acre of mixed-use (in) downtown Asheville yields \$360,000 more in tax revenue to city government than an acre of strip malls or big box stores." Promoting a mix of land uses creates greater opportunities and choice in daily life and it pays better for communities.

What does it look like in Maine?

After decades of single use zoning, communities are beginning to consider and embrace the mixed-use concept. Maine communities are exploring mixed-use tax benefits, rezoning areas for mixed use, re-using downtown buildings for mixed use development and adopting form-based codes (zoning based on building form) to allow more mixed use opportunities. *Take a look!*

- [Rockland Report – Smart Math Analysis](#)
- [Standish Village Corner](#)
- [Sanford Mill](#)
- [Hathaway Creative Center](#)
- [Dover Foxcroft – Central Hall](#)
- [Skowhegan – Somerset Grist Mill](#)
- [Biddeford – Pepperell Mill Campus](#)



Standish Corner Village – Future Mixed Use Zone
Image by: Terrence J. DeWan & Associates

Create walkable communities, downtowns, and neighborhoods.

Walkable communities are in demand! A recent [2013 National Association of Realtors survey](#) found that over half of the respondents prefer walkable neighborhoods as a place to live. Walkable communities, with places to shop, dine, gather, live and stroll depend on mixed uses and compact development, as mentioned above. Many older communities were based on walking - children walked to school, people walked to the store, the bank, their neighbors' home. Over the past 50 years we have shifted away from a pedestrian focus to an auto-oriented development pattern. More recently, the pendulum is shifting again, back towards walkability.

What does it look like in Maine?

While Maine is a rural state, heavily dependent on the car for getting around, Maine also has a number of walkable communities, downtowns and neighborhoods, demonstrating the attractiveness and benefits of walkability. And "pedestrian friendly" is now a popular idea. "Walkability audits" have been conducted in a number of towns, with citizens taking a close look at pedestrian life in their community and how to improve it. At the same time, downtown (and corridor) revitalization efforts are going on, with communities investing in strategies to increase pedestrian activity. Communities are finding if they make downtown attractive and give people interesting, useful destinations, people will walk! Walkability means more people out and about, which means healthier communities socially, economically, and physically. *Learn what some Maine communities are doing!*

- [Skowhegan](#) [Belfast](#) [Berwick](#) [Gardiner](#) [Norway](#)
- [Brunswick](#) [Eastport](#) [Topsham](#)
- [Maine Downtown Center - Main Street Communities](#)
- [Falmouth: Route One Improvements](#)
- [Rockland Rockport Commercial Corridor Design Study](#)
- [Walkability Audits – Thomaston and Camden; Boothbay Harbor](#)

Create housing opportunities and choices

Smart growth means ensuring that your community has an adequate supply of housing to accommodate people as they move through the different phases of

Information and Tools for Citizen Planners

life. Providing for the continuum of need - workforce, single, family, empty nest, retirees, seniors who want to age-in-place - allows people of all ages and incomes to live (and stay) in a community. No one type of housing provides for the varied needs of changing households. Vibrant communities provide a range of housing opportunities - single family, multi-family, apartments, accessory apartments, live/work, and elderly housing.

What does it look like in Maine?

With the exception of Maine's larger cities, housing choices are often limited in many communities. Towns struggle to provide affordable housing. And housing options that fit into the communities' aesthetic, don't require developing open space, and don't require a car are also a challenge. But there are communities trying to address different housing needs, and resources for those that want to provide options. *Here are some examples/resources.....*

- [Topsham Westbrook Lewiston](#)
- [Affordable Housing 101: Seven Steps to Developing Affordable Housing in Your Town](#)
- [Sustain Southern Maine](#)



River Landing, Topsham - Elderly Housing Developers Collaborative

Provide transportation choices

Smart growth provides people with choices, including transportation choices. If you provide transportation alternatives, people will drive less. Less driving means less traffic congestion, better air quality, safer streets, and often a healthier lifestyle for people. Part of providing transportation choices involves rethinking how we design our streets. Most streets are designed with only cars in mind. *Complete Streets* is a national movement to design and operate streets for *all users*, including pedestrians,

bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Encouraging transportation choices also requires rethinking our development decisions. As discussed earlier, compact, mixed use development supports walking and biking as alternatives to the car; it also helps to support transit, with greater density. Smart growth gives people options for their transportation needs.

What does it look like in Maine?

As a rural state, Maine people depend heavily on their cars and trucks for transportation. That said, transportation options are growing in response to a demand and need for alternatives. Not everyone wants to drive a car; not everyone owns a car or can drive. Bus service, walking, and biking are increasingly viable options for getting around in Maine. And communities are beginning to rethink how their streets are designed; Complete Streets policies are now in place in several communities, and Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) recently adopted a Complete Streets policy. *Explore what's happening with transportation alternatives!*

- [MDOT: Complete Streets; Context Sensitive Solutions Safe Routes to School](#)
- [Thomaston - Context Sensitive Solutions Design](#)
- [Portland; Lewiston-Auburn - Complete Streets](#)
- [Bus Service: Metro, ShuttleBus Zoom, Island Explorer, Brunswick Explorer, Knox County CAC Transit, Somerset Explorer](#)
- [Explore Maine - public transit options in the state](#)
- [Amtrack Downeaster](#)
- [Portland Area North Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#)
- [Bicycle Coalition of Maine Community Toolkit](#)

Smart growth IS happening in Maine! Using smart growth principles Maine communities are creating distinct *places* people want to be a part of, whether to live in or visit. Consider what smart growth ideas might benefit your community! And send us your stories and examples!!

Additional Resources:

- [GrowSmart Maine](#)
- [Friends of Midcoast Maine](#)
- [Creating Traditional, Walkable Neighborhoods: A Handbook for Maine Communities](#)
- [Citizens' Institute on Rural Design](#)
- [Complete Streets - A Guide for Vermont Communities](#)
- [Walkable and Livable Communities Institute](#)
- [Form Based Codes](#)