



## **SMART GROWTH**

by

**Smart Growth Immersion Team 2022**

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### **Introduction**

Smart Growth is typically seen as an overall approach to development which encourages a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing, and transportation options. However, the foundation of Smart Growth is more than meets the eye. While what is considered “smart” differs depending on the place, the area, the time, and the situation, the basic principle of Smart Growth is the desire to “protect our health and natural environment and make our communities more attractive, economically stronger, and more socially diverse.” (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

The EPA has put forth a list of the ten fundamental strategies of Smart Growth that have been developed and agreed upon through several decades:

- Mix land uses.
- Take advantage of compact building design.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- Create walkable neighborhoods.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Smart development supports a high quality of life which makes a region desirable and economically competitive. Our team has determined that Smart Growth happens when regions strive to improve livability in an equitable and sustainable way so that those within the community are better able to reach their potential. An essential component in achieving that goal is robust community engagement.

## Findings

Regional planning can affect individuals, organizations, and localities as they intersect and interact. Our conversations with regional planners have informed us that a common challenge is the lack of understanding within communities about what Smart Growth means and how it can benefit a region over time. Better communication and sharing of resources encourage collaboration, which “improves public support for smart growth and often leads to innovative strategies that fit the unique needs of a particular community.” (Smart Growth Online) Knowing the resources available within a region is important for individuals and organizations alike.

For example, individuals need to know more about planning initiatives that might affect them, who to contact with one's input on needs and possible changes, and where to get general information about any of the smart growth issues that they want to find out more about. Organizations and businesses may need to know which county/city departments can help provide resources, who to contact for various licenses, how local transportation options may affect a group's clientele, or guidance on how to incorporate sustainable practices in a commercial setting. Localities need to collaborate as well; while most people in each local government are familiar with their counterparts across a region, they may not know of all the departments or people with whom they could engage.

## Call to Action

Our team strives to facilitate such collaboration by creating a digital resource guide which lists sources of information on five topics that we have identified as key components of Smart Growth. These elements are what those in the Richmond region may find the most pertinent in their daily lives.

- Environmental Sustainability
- Housing
- Education
- Economic Development
- Transportation

It is our hope that this guide will benefit others by providing information which can promote awareness of change and opportunity within the Richmond region and therefore encourage collaboration, involvement, and engagement among those within.

We also hope to inform those involved in Leadership Metro Richmond about the foundational principles of Smart Growth so that they can be more aware of them as they go forth with their own work. Smart Growth may be an overused term, but the idea is at once both complex and full of common sense. Incorporating its elements concerning sustainability and equity in projects large and small helps strengthen communities, especially when “(encouraging) community and stakeholder collaboration.” (U.S. EPA)

PlanRVA is the regional planning commission where representatives from each of the region's nine localities (Ashland, Charles City, Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover,

Henrico, New Kent, Powhatan and Richmond) come together to collaborate and work to solve problems.

We are pleased to announce that our resource guide will be housed on the PlanRVA website and will be maintained and expanded by this group going forward. It will serve as a welcoming “front door” for those who seek information about the region.

We ask that members of LMR, especially the Class of 2022, inform us of other resources and organizations that should be included so that our community guide reflects a wider range of knowledge and expertise.

“Leaders should know and can spread awareness of issues that other individuals should know.” (Myra Goodman) Sharing information, resources, and talents helps everyone. It is an exciting privilege to be involved in advancing progress within our community.