

Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities



**Achieving Economic Vitality
through Smarter Growth
in Rural Communities and Small Towns**

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Farm in Washington State



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About EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities



- EPA's mission is to protect human health and the environment.
- OSC focuses on the environmental and public health impacts of the built environment because where and how we build affects our land, air, and water.
- We work on:
 - *Changing the conversation:* Education and outreach
 - *Helping the willing:* Tools and technical assistance
 - *Changing the rules:* Research and policy analysis



What Is a smart growth community?



A Sustainable Community is an urban, suburban or rural community that has more housing and transportation choices, is closer to jobs, shops or schools, is more energy independent and helps protect clean air and water.

- Balances economic and natural assets to meet the diverse needs of residents now and in the future
- Uses resources efficiently
- High quality of life attracts residents and businesses



What Does it Look Like?

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- Compact, walkable neighborhoods
- Transportation options within neighborhood and to the region
- Range of housing types
- Mix of uses — housing, offices, stores, schools, parks, etc.



Benefits of Sustainable Communities



- Economic benefits: Creating competitive jobs
- Environmental benefits: Protecting our air, land, and water
- Health benefits: Helping people lead healthier lives



Economic Benefits

The Challenge:

- High unemployment rates
- Mortgage and foreclosure crisis
- Changes in the US economy (post-industrial / agriculture)
- Expensive infrastructure to serve suburban fringe development
- Transportation costs



The Opportunity:

- New businesses on America's Main Streets
- Better transportation options to connect workers with job opportunities
- Revitalizing neighborhoods and communities
- Reduced household / energy / transportation costs
- Utilizing infrastructure already in place

Saves Local Governments Money



Compared to the status quo, smart growth:

- Costs less to build and maintain;
- Provides services at a lower cost;
- Reduces maintenance costs by directing spending to existing infrastructure;
- Reduces tax burden by maximizing return on public Investment;
- Preserves existing communities;
- Reduces household transportation costs;
- Reduces health costs.

Saves local governments money



- In general, higher density and mixed use returns far more per acre than lower density and single use
- Specifics depend on local tax regimes

- Sarasota, FL
 - Pop 370,000 in county, 50,000 in city
 - Downtown mixed-use yields 3-100x more property tax per acre than big-box retail

- Asheville, NC
 - Population 70,000
 - Wal-mart returns \$50k/acre in property+sales tax
 - Downtown yields \$330k/acre in property tax alone



Promotes Economic Growth



- Attracts private investment
- Attracts employers and workers
- Supports small businesses
- Improves access to jobs
- Increases property values
- Provides greater stability in times of economic uncertainty and rising energy costs
- Responsive to demographic shifts



How are Development Patterns Shaped?



- Many influences
- Government policies and investments
 - Local
 - Regional
 - State
 - Federal
- Developers
- Private landowners
- Economic, demographic, and cultural trends
 - Gas prices
 - Aging baby boomers
 - Increasing interest in walkability and proximity to destinations



Local Government



- The Primary Land Use Decision Maker and Communities can choose to grow in particular ways
- Where are public and private investments made, including: local, state, federal
- Private investments often follow catalytic public investments
- Communities can make these investments achieve multiple goals



The State Role



- Every state is different
- State statutes determine which planning tools are available to localities
- States structure taxes and provide credits for certain activities
- States create environmental and other regulations
- States distribute some federal funds
- Some states take a more direct role in setting land use priorities or planning standards

The Federal Role



- Local governments make decisions about development patterns, but the federal government can influence land use through policy & spending
- Allocates funding to states, regions, and communities for housing, transportation, other infrastructure, environmental protection
- Sets policy priorities that are reflected in programs, regulations, and investments
- Try as it might, (history tells us) Federal gov't priorities are not always community priorities and programs are often not flexible

What is a Rural Community?



- It depends on who you ask!
- 49 million Americans live in rural communities
- 75 percent of the total land area in the U.S. is rural



Virginia



Berlin, Maryland

Types of Rural Communities



- Gateway communities
- Resource-dependent communities
- Edge communities
- Traditional Main Street communities
- Second home and retirement communities



Carbondale, Colorado



Larimer County, Colorado



Dallas County, Iowa



Lewes, Delaware



Seneca Falls, New York

Historical Rural America



- Small towns in rural areas served the agriculture economy
- Were mixed use, compact, and walkable by necessity; had regional transportation connections (RR or river transport)
- Physical form varied by region



Marshall Town, Iowa



What's Changing in Rural America Today



Seneca Rocks, West Virginia: Seneca Motor Company Building (top);
U.S. Forest Service Seneca Rocks Discovery Center (bottom)



- Economy, culture, transportation has changed
- Some rural communities are growing rapidly, others are declining
- Clearly a need for economic diversity and a need for expanded choice for where to live, how to get around, where to work

Challenges Facing Rural Communities



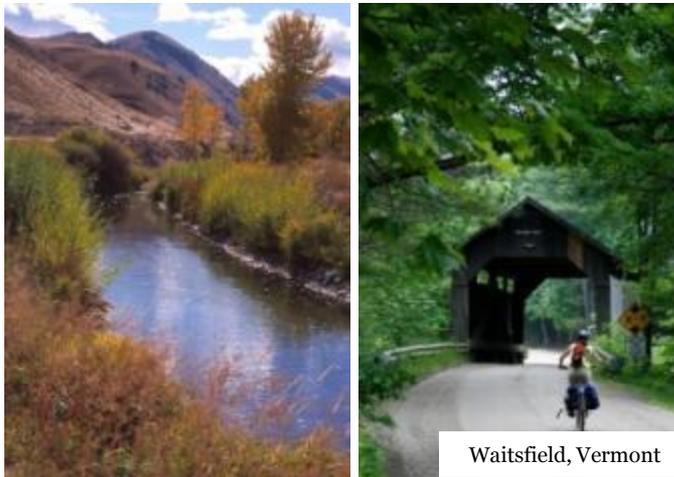
- Fewer farms and farmers
 - Although there is a growing interest in farming
- Loss of forest and other natural and working land
- Some communities are growing, some are shrinking
 - Rapid growth at metro edges
 - Shrinking population in some communities
- Limited access to jobs, services, and transportation
- Limited planning capacity



Smart Growth: A Response to Rural Challenges



Skaneateles, New York



Waitsfield, Vermont

- **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.)

So what does smart growth mean for a rural community?



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



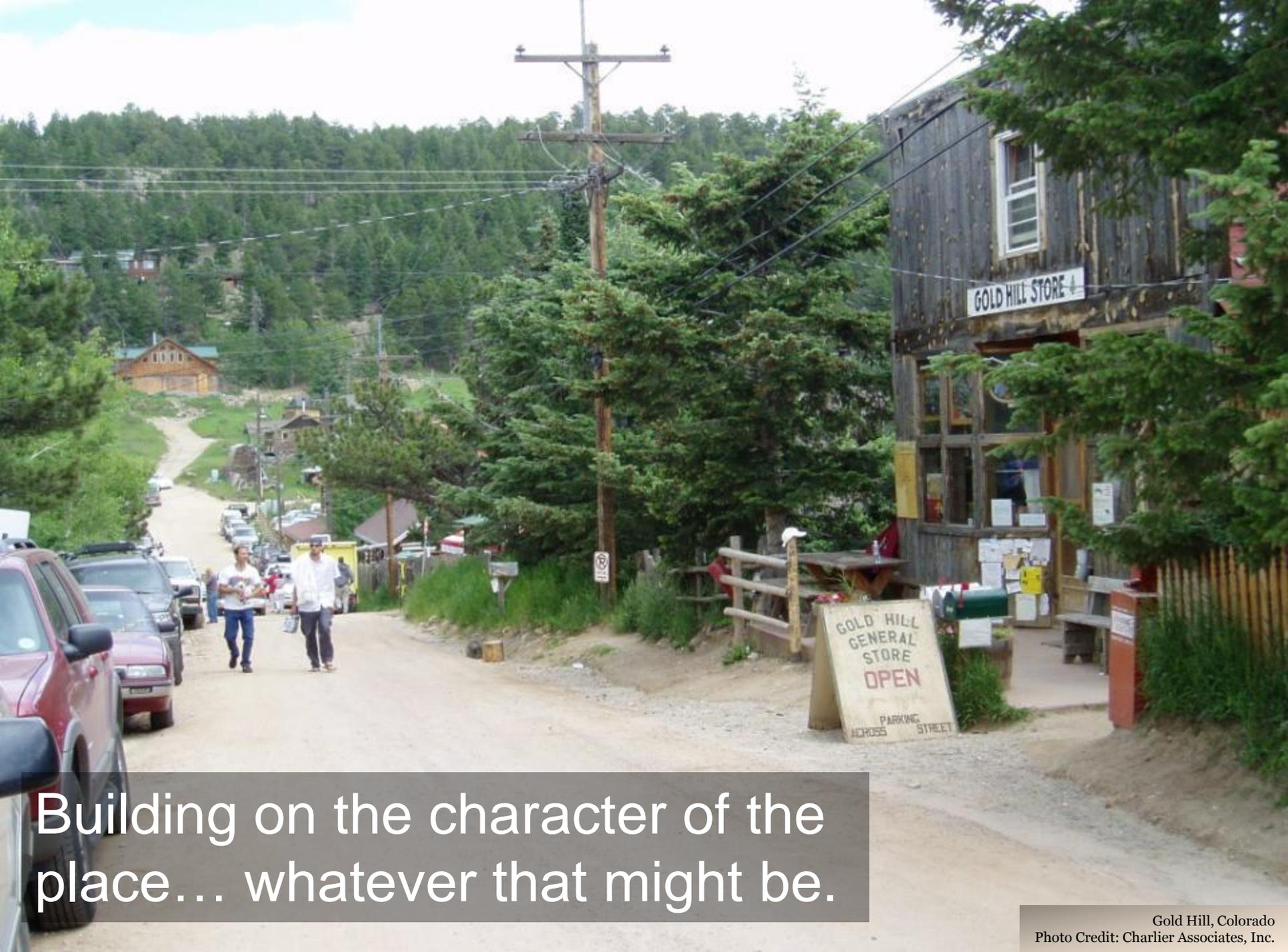
Vienna, Maryland



Smart growth means
choices for where to live...



...and how to get around.



Building on the character of the place... whatever that might be.



And preserving what's
great about the community.



Smart growth also means developing a strong economy through economic development strategies that take advantage of a community's best assets.



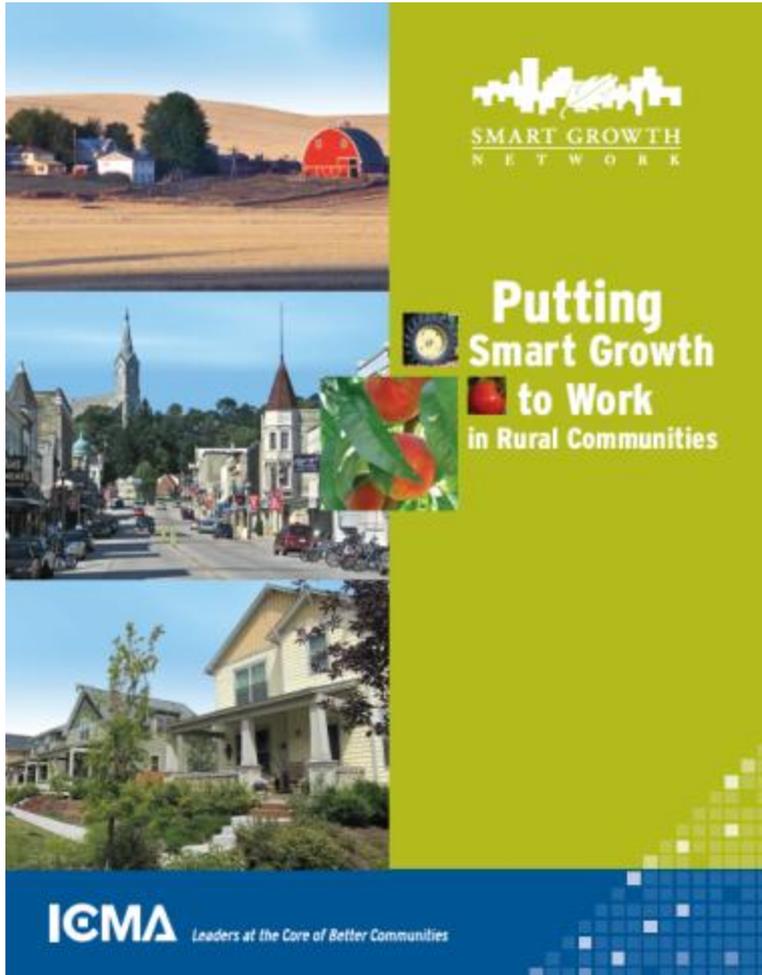
Overall it means retaining and creating great communities – places where people want to live, where they have choices, and where they have opportunities for economic growth and wealth creation.



Smart growth looks different depending on where you are, but in every case it means building on a community's strengths.

A New Publication:

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

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.



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?

1. Support the Rural Landscape



- Creating an economic climate that enhances the viability of working lands and conserves natural lands is the first step
- Strategies, tools and policies that support this goal include:
 - Right to Farm policies
 - Agricultural zoning
 - Renewable energy development



Country Store in Vermont



Peach Farm in Delaware



Wind Turbines in Iowa

Strategies, Tools, and Policies



GOAL 1: SUPPORT THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

Strategy	Tools & Policies	
1.a. Ensure the viability of the resource economy in the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use value taxation• Tax credits for conservation• Right to farm policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renewable energy development• Value-added farm and forest products processing• Ecosystem services markets
1.b. Cultivate economic development strategies that rely on traditional rural landscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Purchase of development rights• Conservation easements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fee simple acquisition• Agritourism and ecotourism
1.c. Promote rural products in urban areas and support other urban-rural links	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct marketing to consumers• Government purchase of local products	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Buy local” campaigns
1.d. Link rural land preservation strategies to great neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transfer of development rights• Priority funding areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agricultural, ranching, or forestry zoning• Rural home clustering

Supporting the Rural Landscape: Direct Marketing of Rural Products



- Communities can help support the rural economy by promoting rural products in urban areas, like this Farmers' Market in Ithaca, NY.
- Other strategies include:
 - Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
 - Agritourism
 - Value-added farm and forest products processing

2. Help Existing Places Thrive



El Dorado, Arkansas



Starkville, Mississippi

- Communities can help their downtowns, Main Streets, and other existing places to thrive through:
 - Fix-it first policies
 - Rehabilitating existing structures, like schools
 - Incentives to encourage infill and brownfield redevelopment
 - Updated zoning ordinances and development codes that support compact, walkable development

Strategies, Tools, and Policies



GOAL 2: HELP EXISTING PLACES THRIVE

Strategy	Tools & Policies	
2.a. Invest public and private funds in existing places	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fix-it-first• Historic Preservation and the Main Street Approach• Parks and natural resource areas as destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Streets and streetscape improvements• Targeted new development
2.b. Encourage private sector investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infill development incentives• Overcoming barriers to infill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redevelopment readiness certification• Split-rate tax
2.c. Build on past community investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adaptive reuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School rehabilitation
2.d. Foster economic development in existing downtowns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local business survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business recognition program

Helping Existing Places Thrive: Streetscape Improvements



Before



After



• **Future Scenario**

Victor, Idaho



Finding Your Competitive Advantage: Belfast, ME

- Belfast was once a major shipbuilding hub
- Assets include deep water, access to suppliers, proximity to nearby cities, labor force
- Now developing the Front Street Shipyard
- High-end boatbuilding & repair will boost economy, tourism, and opportunities for small businesses downtown
 - Connecting shipyard to downtown for easy pedestrian access



Supportive Federal Investments: Howard, SD

- With decline in agriculture, county decided to focus on renewable energy
- Rural Learning Center: conference and workforce training center
- Turned down free site on outskirts to locate on Main Street
- Over \$4 M in USDA loans and grants
- Project contributes to new economic future while reinforcing existing assets



3. Create Great New Places



- When building new neighborhoods, they should be vibrant, enduring places where people want to live.
- Strategies, tools, and policies that can help create great new places include:
 - Community visioning and policy alignment
 - Designating growth areas and areas for preservation
 - Recognizing developers that build great places



Keene, New Hampshire

Strategies, Tools, and Policies



GOAL 3: CREATE GREAT NEW PLACES

Strategy	Tools & Policies	
3.a. Update strategic and policy documents to accommodate new growth through compact and contiguous development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visioning• Places worth preserving• Designated growth areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infrastructure grid and transportation options• Distinctive local character
3.b. Reform policies to make it easy for developers to build compact, walkable, mixed-use places	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy alignment• Walkability• Parks and open space• Traditional neighborhood development• Form-Based Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Context-sensitive design• Green street design• Low-impact development
3.c. Recognize and reward developers that build great places using smart growth and green building approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smart growth recognition programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green building

Creating Great New Places: Comprehensive Planning in Vienna, Maryland

- New places – build places where people, especially young people, want to live.
 - Compact, walkable, mixed-use
 - Historic connection
 - Form is part of the rural paradigm of places
 - Places where young people can stay (or return) and older residents can age in place
- Vienna, Maryland created a community vision plan and got their codes in order to attract this type of development.



A Model Chesapeake Community
Vienna Community Vision Plan

November 2002

The Conservation Fund

The Bottom Line for Rural Communities to Consider



- Assess current conditions (best assets, key challenges)
- Engage in a collaborative visioning process
- Develop and implement policies to achieve that vision



Berlin, Maryland



Sonoma County, California



Cumberland, Maryland

Partnership for Sustainable Communities

- Began in June 2009: EPA, HUD, DOT
- Also partnering with USDA to think through how the Partnership's activities can best serve rural America
- Two reports:
 - **Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities** -- How the Partnership principles support rural communities , sample case studies, and rural performance measures
 - **Federal Resources for Sustainable Rural Communities** – a summary of EPA, HUD, DOT, and USDA programs that rural communities can use (*coming this summer*)

Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities

Partnership for Sustainable Communities



In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture



Fall 2011

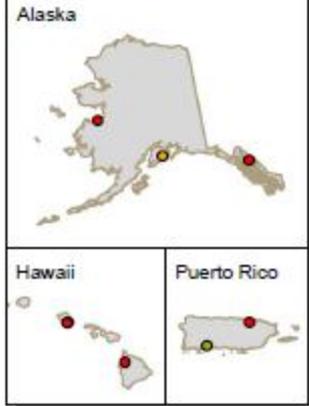
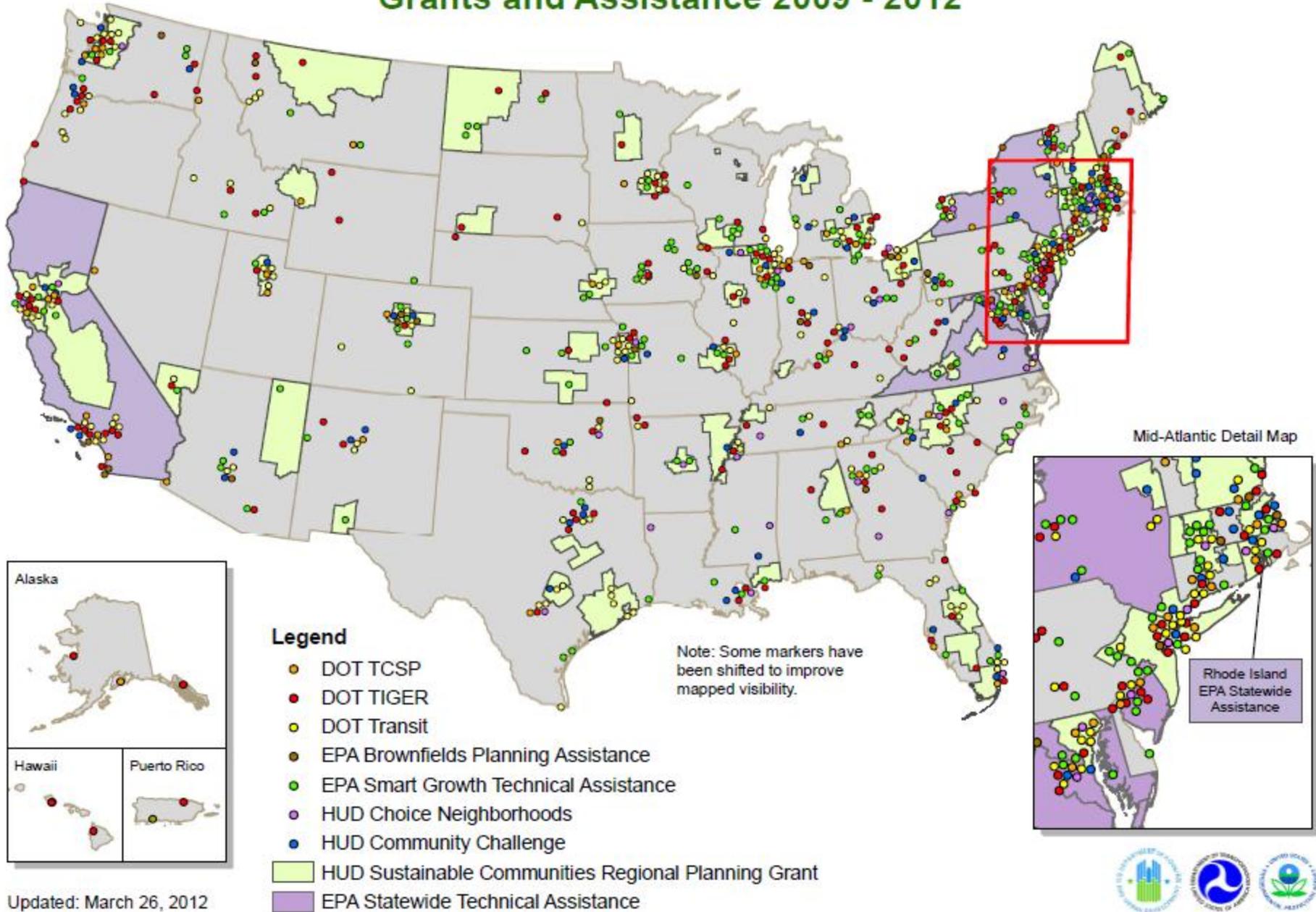


The Livability Principles in the Rural Context



- **Enhance economic competitiveness.**
 - Leverage unique natural & land-based resources to raise rural standard of living.
- **Support existing communities.**
 - Direct investment to towns, villages and historic Main Streets and preserve the surrounding landscape.
- **Provide more transportation choices.**
 - Take advantage of towns' compact, mixed-use designs and locations along major corridors to renew intra- and inter-community transportation options.
- **Promote equitable, affordable housing.**
 - Revitalize & diversify aging housing stock to attract and retain residents at all stages of life.
- **Value communities and neighborhoods.**
 - Conserve and build upon unique and historic features like downtowns, Main Streets, barns, and iconic rural landscapes.
- **Coordinate policies and leverage investment.**
 - Federal investments are extremely influential, and must support community goals and be coordinated across agencies. Support communities' efforts to plan/codify goals.

HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities Grants and Assistance 2009 - 2012



Partnership Investments in Rural Communities

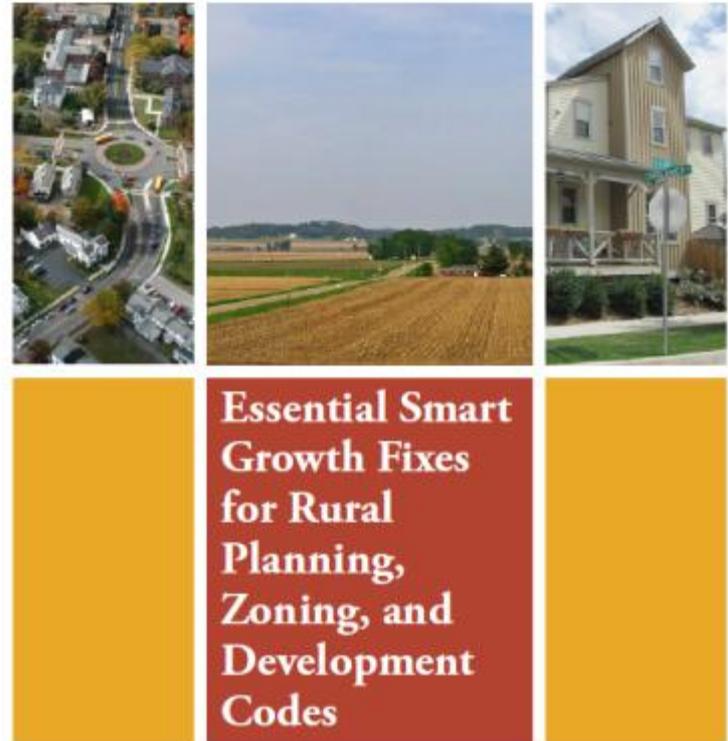


- **HUD Regional Planning Grants**
 - \$25.6 million split evenly between regions with populations of less than 500,000 and rural places with fewer than 200,000
- **DOT TIGER II Grants**
 - Capital grants: >\$140 million to rural projects
 - ✦ Examples: Moscow (ID) Intermodal Transit Center, MRC Railroad Reconstruction (SD)
 - Planning grants: >\$6 million to rural projects
 - ✦ Examples: Downtown Dahlonega (GA) Complete Streets, Owasco River (NY) Multi-modal Trail
- **EPA Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grants**
 - 5 grants (out of 23) to rural communities with populations <20,000
- **EPA Sustainable Communities Building Blocks Assistance**
 - 15 projects (out of 31) to rural communities
- **USDA Great Regions (and other) Grants**

Essential Smart Growth Fixes



- Outlines ten essential fixes to help rural communities amend their codes, ordinances, and development requirements
- Includes tools for:
 - right-sizing rural roads
 - using cluster development
 - implementing wastewater infrastructure practices
 - protecting agricultural and sensitive areas
 - others



Upcoming Training Opportunities



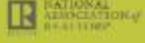
- USDA's Stronger Economies Together (SET) Program – creating an optional Smart Growth module
- Training module for local officials on how to implement smart growth approaches in a rural context
- Save the Date: New Partners for Smart Growth Conference February 7-9, 2013 in Kansas City



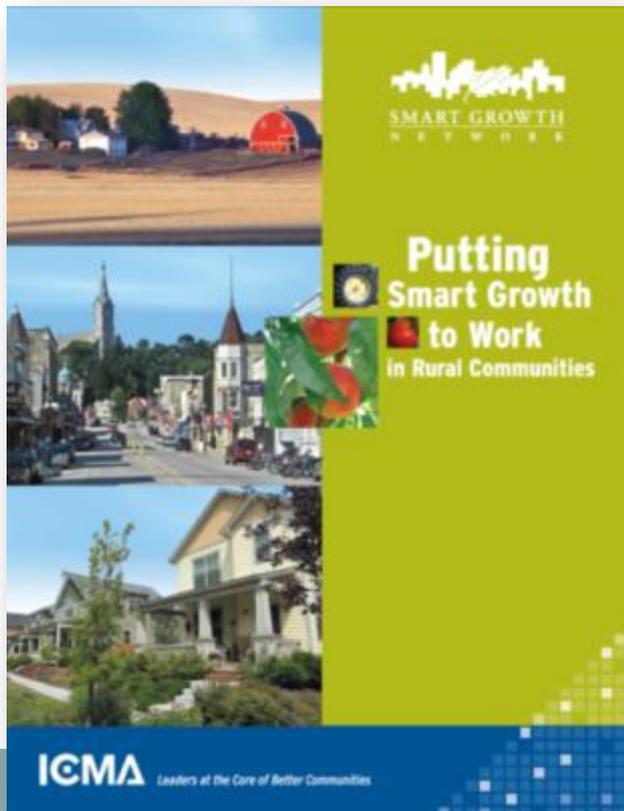
**12th Annual
New Partners for Smart Growth:**
Building Safe, Healthy and Livable Communities

February 7-9, 2013
Kansas City Convention Center • Kansas City, MO

*Presented by the Local Government Commission.
Look for more details about the 2013 event in the coming months: NewPartners.org*

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Full Report Available at:
www.epa.gov/smartgrowth

**Info on the Partnership for
Sustainable Communities:**
www.sustainablecommunities.gov