

SMART GROWTH TOOLKIT:

A Guide to REALTOR® Involvement in Community Development

Engage Your Community, Build Coalitions,
Advocate for Smart Growth Development

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PREFACE

REALTORS® sell more than just homes, they sell communities. In their continual drive to support a community's growth and development, REALTORS® draw on their expertise and are backed by their longstanding reputation for working with public, private and nonprofit organizations to improve the built environment to advance the public good. Their efforts can pay dividends for years to come for all who live and work in these communities.

The tactics and activities for improving communities outlined in this Smart Growth Toolkit will help you create or improve systems, programs, and policies that affect land use and transportation plans that lay the groundwork for quality, sustainable growth that will benefit your community well into the future.

The Getting Started section provides a list of smart growth-related resources NAR makes available to state and local REALTOR® associations to inform and support their participation in activities that guide community growth.

Our goal is to provide you with activity ideas and resources that have achieved success elsewhere and help you to activate those initiatives that are right for your community. You can also reach out directly to NAR staff for additional help or guidance to support your efforts.

lastly, be sure to read the four profiles of REALTORS® who serve their communities by guiding land-use decisions from their positions in elected and appointed office.





INTRODUCTION:

What is Smart Growth

Many of the things we care about are affected by development decisions. From the length of our daily commute to the price of a new home to the safety of our neighborhoods — what, where, and how we build has a major impact on our lives and the viability of our communities.

This Smart Growth Toolkit provides strategies, resources, grant information, and examples of REALTORS®' success in shaping land use and transportation in their community through activities undertaken as associations and as individuals serving on planning boards. Taken together, these elements can guide you in making smart growth development a reality in your community.

The concept of smart growth emerged in the 1990s, when the negative impacts of the predominant post-World War II development pattern became too much to ignore. That single-use pattern of development promoted the automobile as a necessary means of travel between the separated zones of residential, commercial, office, industrial and, recreation land use. This resulted in substantial air and water pollution; time wasted in travel; high household costs associated with the need to own a car for every licensed driver; and high costs for the public sector, which spent substantial sums on developing and maintaining roads, utilities, and other public services in a low-density built environment.

Smart growth seeks to reverse that development pattern by shining a light on costs associated with it, and promoting the public and private benefits of a more compact, mixed-use development pattern.

Today, the concept of the '15-minute city' is gaining traction. As a city that would allow residents to access most of what they need within a 15-minute walk, this construct bears many similarities to smart growth, while the term itself provides a clearer vision of the resulting built environment.

Smart Growth's Benefits

Development decisions affect the lives of residents for generations to come. Across the country, communities of all sizes are using creative strategies to develop in ways that preserve natural lands and critical environmental areas, protect water and air quality, and reuse already-developed land. These strategies bring the needs of daily life closer together and make possible a variety of modes of transport to get between them. Here are four broad brushstrokes of what this looks like [Source: U.S. EPA].

- Designing neighborhoods that have residences near shops, offices, schools, houses of worship, parks, and other amenities, communities give residents and visitors the option of walking, bicycling, taking public transportation, or driving as they go about their business.
- Providing a range of housing types makes it possible for people of all ages and abilities to stay in their neighborhoods as they move through all stages of life.
- The smart growth approach guides these communities to create vibrant places to live, work, and play in which the residents feel invested in the success by participating in the process.
- The resulting high quality of life makes these communities economically competitive, creates business opportunities, and strengthens the local tax base. The diversity of economic activity makes for a more stable economic environment.

Smart growth gives us great communities with more choices and personal freedom, good return on public and private investment, greater opportunity across the community, and a thriving natural environment.

The 10 Smart Growth Principles

The “recipe” for creating communities with the range of benefits discussed above has been distilled into the Ten Smart Growth Principles. The more of the principles that are reflected in a community’s design and function, the greater the return on investment, the greater and more robust and stable the benefits will be. The 10 Smart Growth Principles foster design that provides choices for residents, workers, visitors, in where to live, how to get around, and how to interact with the people around them.

1 | Create a range of housing opportunities and choices

Providing quality housing at all income levels is integral to any smart growth strategy. Housing constitutes a significant share of new construction and development, and housing availability will determine a household’s access to transportation, services, education, and consumption of energy and other natural resources. With a smart growth approach to housing, communities can mitigate the environmental costs of auto-dependency, use infrastructure resources more efficiently, and build support for mass transit and concentrated centers of commerce and other activities.

2 | Create walkable neighborhoods

The ability to walk between places to live, work, learn, worship and play is a key component of smart growth. When goods (such as housing, offices, and retail) and services (such as transportation, schools, libraries) are located within an easy and safe walk, pedestrian activity expands transportation options. To foster walkability, communities must mix land uses and build compactly, as well as ensure safe and inviting pedestrian corridors.

3 | Take advantage of compact building design

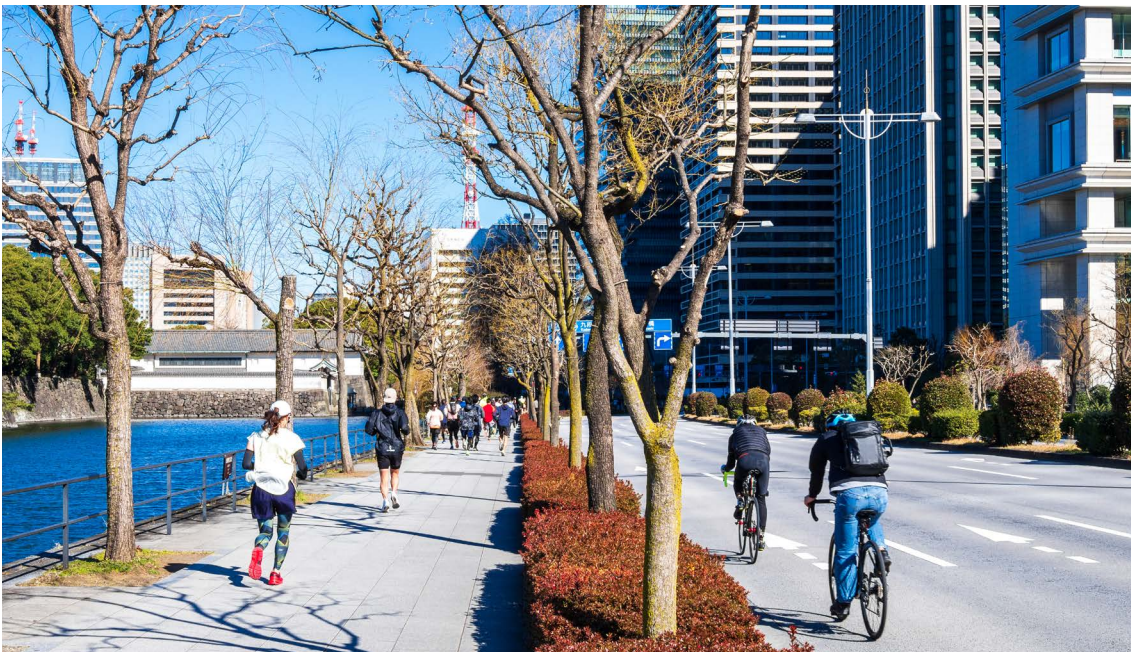
Smart growth promotes compact building design as an alternative to conventional land-consumptive development. This results in communities that preserve more open space, and individual buildings that make more efficient use of land and infrastructure. Encouraging buildings to grow vertically rather than horizontally, and incorporating structured rather than surface parking, can reduce the footprint of new construction, and preserve environmentally valuable greenspace.

4 | Foster distinctive communities with a sense of place

Smart growth seeks to create an appealing environment that supports a cohesive community fabric. It encourages communities to craft a vision and set standards for development that mirror residents' values of architectural distinctiveness. It encourages the construction and preservation of buildings that are assets to a community over time, for their own sake, as well as for the services provided within.

5 | Preserve open space, farmland and critical environments

“Open space” refers to natural areas that provide important community space, habitat for plants and animals, and recreational opportunities, as well as farm and ranch land, places of natural beauty, and critical environmental areas (e.g. wetlands). Preservation of these spaces bolsters local economies, conserves environmental elements, and, increasingly, are valuable to some communities for the ability to absorb substantial amounts of rain brought about by climate change.



Credit: oben901 (Adobe Stock)

6 | Mixed land uses

Smart growth requires mixed land uses. By putting residential, commercial and recreational uses in close proximity, walking, biking and transit become viable transport options. This allows for a more diverse and sizable population and commercial base. It can also enhance community life as streets, public spaces and retail become more pedestrian-oriented.

7 | Direct development toward existing communities

Smart growth directs development towards existing communities already served by infrastructure, seeking to capitalize on existing resources, and conserve open space and irreplaceable natural resources on the urban fringe. Development in existing neighborhoods can be more cost-effective, and conveys benefits such as a stronger tax base and closer proximity of jobs and services.

8 | Provide a variety of transportation choices

Providing more transportation choices is a key aim of smart growth. As traffic congestion worsens across the country, thoughtful approaches to transportation planning, such as increasing the availability of high-quality transit service and ensuring connectivity between pedestrian, bike, transit, and road facilities, can help alleviate the hassles that come with private automobile use. These non-auto forms of transport will also become increasingly valuable as the U.S. population ages.

9 | Make development decisions predictable and fair

A community's success in implementing smart growth is dependent on the concept being embraced by the private sector, which reasonably expects to earn a profit. Fortunately, it is within the power of government to help make smart growth more profitable for private investors and developers, as the value and desirability of a development are affected by government regulation and investment in infrastructure. Governments that make the right decisions will support fair, predictable and cost-effective smart growth.

10 | Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration

The needs of every community are best defined by the people who live and work there. Communities have different priorities and will emphasize some smart growth principles over others, depending on whether the primary motivation is economic, environmental, or social well-being.

GETTING STARTED:

NAR support of Smart Growth Development

The National Association of REALTORS®' Board of Directors authorized the creation of a Smart Growth Program in 1999. Over the last two decades, NAR's polling has shown that desire is high to live in a community where a person can walk to most things they need. But, it seems, supply of appropriate housing has not met that demand. Thus, the creation of communities that embody the Smart Growth Principles is both warranted and timely.

NAR's support of smart growth development is provided through resources to state and local REALTOR® associations to support their engagement in community growth efforts. These resources include:

- 1. Smart Growth Grants:** These grants help fund activities from the educational to the aspirational. An association could use one to bring a national expert to participate in a program addressing specific growth issues; or to support public growth management efforts by hosting public input sessions when new zoning or comprehensive plans are being considered. The grants can also be used to sponsor Better Block projects, in which a street segment is temporarily transformed to show how various adjustments can improve the quality of life or a Walk Audit to determine how to make your community more walkable.



Credit: deberarr (Adobe Stock)

2. **Placemaking Grants:** These grants support REALTOR® efforts to enhance a community by creating public gathering places such as community gardens, playgrounds, or dog parks.
3. **Housing Opportunity Grants:** These grants support efforts that aim to stimulate housing that is affordable and is developed in a variety of types, sizes and locations.
4. **Growth Polling Program:** NAR covers the full cost of a professional poll conducted to determine a community's attitudes toward growth issues such as amount, type and price of housing available; transportation issues; ease of accessibility to destinations such as retail, office, schools and parks; and methods of meeting the cost of growth.
5. **Land Use Initiative:** Assists state and local REALTOR® Associations in their public policy advocacy of land-use issues. NAR provides provide an analysis of proposed legislative and regulatory land-use measures – comprehensive plans, amendments, legislation, ordinances or regulations – that impact the transfer of real property. All analyses of proposed measures analyzed since 1999 are available via the Land Use Initiative Database (log-in required).
6. **Community Planning Classes for REALTORS®:** These classes focus on two specific aspects of development and growth: 1) the fundamentals of planning and zoning and, 2) the principles of smart growth, the benefits of smart growth, and the drivers of demand for smart growth.
7. **On Common Ground magazine** This periodical, released each May and November, contains articles on cutting-edge growth, land-use and transportation issues, as well as the strategies that communities around the country are using to address the associated challenges.
8. The **Growth Management Fact Book** provides information and analyses concerning modern growth management strategies on topics such as urban growth boundaries, housing moratoria, adequate public facilities and cluster zoning. This publication reflects NAR's belief that REALTORS® must be able to engage with citizens, legislators and government officials effectively on regulatory issues of importance to the real estate industry.
9. **Hot Topic Alerts:** These mini white papers cover important trending state and local real estate issues. Each paper contains historical context on the issue, a concise summary of current research and other helpful information. Hot Topic Alerts also highlight advocacy efforts of state and local REALTOR® Associations. The complete collection can be found [here](#).
 - a. [Complete Streets](#)
 - b. [Land Banks](#)
 - c. [Inclusionary Zoning](#)
 - d. [Accessory Dwelling Units](#)

SMART GROWTH IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES:

Bringing smart growth development to your community

This section highlights five focus areas of growth: housing creation, community revitalization, community planning, transportation and, placemaking with several strategies for each focus area and two success stories for each strategy.

Credit: rh2010 (Adobe Stock)



Housing creation:

Ensuring housing for all

Strategy: Missing Middle Housing

'Missing Middle Housing' is a phrase coined by Dan Polerek, co-founder of Opticos Design. It refers to a type of housing that has been largely lost in modern housing production. Missing Middle Housing is typified by duplexes, triplexes, and garden apartments, often designed to be visually cohesive with single family housing. Because of each unit's smaller stature, the price point for renting or purchasing such units is less than a single-family home, thus providing a housing type that would otherwise be missing in the neighborhood.

Embracing Missing Middle Housing is a great way to address the housing needs of a changing population. Over the last few years, a number of cities, Minneapolis, MN and Seattle, WA among them, have removed zoning restrictions that allowed only single-family structures in order to permit construction of Missing Middle Housing types in the same neighborhoods. Not only do such units provide price points often favored by those just getting started in life, but also by seniors who may desire to downsize their living space as well as their housing costs.

As local REALTOR® associations look for ways to add housing stock at a more accessible price point for teachers, firefighters, seniors, and young people establishing their first households, having such options available means that those who serve the community can also live in the community; and those who care for their grandchildren while parents are at work, can live nearby.

Additionally, as the more compact nature of this kind of housing increases density, it becomes possible for the community to support more local businesses, ultimately creating a more robust tax base and providing a greater range of destinations for all.

SEE ALSO:

- missingmiddlehousing.org
- cnu.org/our-projects/missing-middle-housing
- arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Housing/Housing-Arlington/Tools/Missing-Middle

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Use a Smart Growth Grant to bring in an expert to provide insights on strategies to increase the Missing Middle Housing in your community.
- Use a grant to support a study to determine which areas of the community show the most promise to support Missing Middle Housing.
- Use the Growth Polling program to measure community sentiment regarding Missing Middle Housing and other infill-housing strategies.

NAR RESOURCES:

- Growth Management Fact Book



Credit: Corbis/VCG (Getty Images)

Success Stories:

Greater Greenville REALTORS® Promote “Missing Middle” Housing

In the rapidly growing city of Greenville, S.C., as in many others nationwide, the demand for housing is increasing, yet the supply is shrinking – a trend exacerbated by a framework of outdated policies that limit housing diversity. With help from a [Housing Opportunity Grant](#), the REALTORS® of Greater Greenville (GGAR) teamed up with the city and several community organizations to host a housing forum for a capacity-crowd of 200 stakeholders. Over the course of a few hours, it demonstrated the housing breakthrough that could be achieved by updating the antiquated zoning policies.

The event’s keynote speaker was from Opticos Design, a firm renowned for its work on the concept of “missing middle” housing: multi-unit or clustered housing that is affordable by nature, and compatible in scale with conventional single-family homes. Other experts discussed shifting demographics and the newly created Greenville Housing Trust Fund, and the local Homebuilders Association described barriers to development that its members were experiencing.

The forum generated results and momentum: the Greenville City Council responded by reducing all permitting fees by 50% on housing projects under \$169,000; and GGAR and its partners have their sights on a range of next steps that will make it easier to provide the housing the city needs.

For the full story, see: [Greater Greenville REALTORS® Promote “Missing Middle” Housing](#)

Consumer Advocacy Outreach Program helps Seattle King County REALTORS® Share Advocacy Success

After years of stagnant condominium construction in the Seattle region, a coalition led by the Washington Association of REALTORS® was finally able to convince the state legislature to ease the peculiar restrictions that favored construction of apartments, rather than condos. As this helped stimulate the creation of badly needed “missing middle” housing and replenish the region’s overall diminished inventory, the Seattle/King County Association of REALTORS® leveraged the positive momentum.

Tapping in to the power of the REALTOR® Party’s [Consumer Advocacy Outreach Program](#), the local association launched a campaign to spread the word about the REALTORS®’ role in promoting the new legislation. It reached more than 300,000 area citizens, many of whom are already registered on the [Homeownership Matters](#) site. By associating the REALTORS® with the creation of affordable housing and shining a spotlight on their ability to take on big issues for the common good, the effort helped build a base of public support for when future housing issues arise.

For the full story, see: [Consumer Advocacy Outreach Program helps Seattle King County REALTORS® Share Advocacy Success](#)

Strategy: Adaptive Reuse—Repurposing Malls, Hotels and Offices

Adaptive reuse of buildings is nothing new, but in the great work-from-home shakeout brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, the concept is getting a lot more attention. The pandemic has, for the time being, reduced the amount of office space many businesses require; if this space were repurposed to address the massive nationwide housing shortage, it could turn out to be a win-win.

With adaptive reuse, these two situations – the empty offices and the lack of housing stock – pair nicely in that, with some effort, many structures could be converted from a use that is no longer needed by the community into one that is. Such conversions are not always easy: often, zoning changes are required; retrofitting an office building with two lavatories per floor into one with a half-dozen full bathrooms per floor will pose construction challenges; and the public sector will likely experience a shift in revenue when a building is repurposed to a different use.

But, when it works, the evolution of a building in response to the needs of the community can lead to more balanced land use within the local landscape, which, in turn, creates a greater opportunity for walking, cycling and transit. Adaptive reuse also preserves the character conveyed by many old buildings, preserving the look, feel and the history of a community.

Repurposing public buildings that are functionally obsolete, such as an old schoolhouse, creates the opportunity for a local government to partner with a developer by providing the land and the building, thus driving down the total cost and making the resulting units more affordable.

SEE ALSO:

- planning.org/planning/2021/spring/how-adaptive-reuse-can-help-solve-the-housing-crisis/
- fairfaxcounty.gov/landdevelopment/building-plan-review/adaptive-reuse-program
- preservationmaryland.org/summit-session-case-studies-in-adaptive-reuse/

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Bring in an expert on adaptive reuse to discuss possible hurdles and work-arounds.
- Commission a study of adaptive reuse in your community, including possible zoning and tax implications.
- Convene a forum or work group of interested community organizations to develop a strategy to investigate possible targets for adaptive reuse.

NAR RESOURCES:

- Hot Topic Alert on Adaptive Reuse



Credit: National Association of REALTORS®



Success Stories:

Adaptive Reuse of Commercial Properties into mixed-use/housing

The COVID-19/Delta variant pandemic dealt a heavy blow to the office commercial real estate market. With nearly half a million office-using jobs lost, and an unprecedented number of employees working from home, office occupancy fell by 127 million square feet from the second quarter of 2020 through October 2021. On the other hand, in the same time period, there were 1 million more occupied apartment units.

At the recommendation of the Real Estate Research Advisory Board, NAR Research Group undertook an analysis of how vacant office buildings are being converted into housing. The research began with an analysis of office-to-housing conversions in 27 markets with the largest decline in occupancy since the pandemic. This was followed by a study of the market conditions and factors that led to the success of eight office-to-housing conversions in Maryland, Washington DC, New York, California, and Illinois.

Repurposing Vacant Retail Malls

Vacant malls contribute to urban decay, declining property values, and lower tax revenues. NAR Research Group prepared case studies that showcase how vacant retail malls are being repurposed and the sources of financing for these projects.

Repurposing vacant hotels and motels into multi-family housing

One obvious adaptive reuse of vacant hotels/motels is for multifamily housing. In 2020, the hotel occupancy rate plunged to 37% as the COVID-19 pandemic severely cut leisure and business travel and events. Even as the demand for lodging recovers once normalcy returns, stiff competition from short-term rental providers will continue to challenge the viability of the lodging industry. The acute undersupply of housing suggests a solution.

Recognizing the possible win-win of converting vacant hotels/motels to address the underutilization of hotels/motels and help alleviate the housing shortage, the Commercial Real Estate Research Advisory Board recommended that a report be drafted to collect insights and best practices.

For the full story, see: [Case Studies on Repurposing Vacant Hotels/Motels into Multifamily Housing](#)

For the full story, see: [Analysis and Case Studies on Office-to-Housing Conversions](#)

For the full story, see: [Case Studies in Repurposing Vacant Retail Malls](#)

Strategy: Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)

Like the duplexes and triplexes of Missing Middle Housing, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), also known as granny flats, expand a community's housing stock to include price points more accessible to those at different income levels or different life stages.

ADUs are small units, either within a house or freestanding in the yard, that create flexibility and a possible income stream. Owners can rent out the ADU or, if they want to downsize, live in the ADU and rent out the main house. These 'granny flats' can be especially successful when multiple generations of a family are involved, allowing for independence and proximity as needed. The addition of such a unit can add value to a property and become a vehicle for building intergenerational wealth.

Cities that have embraced the addition of ADUs have made the appropriate changes to their zoning codes, and local REALTOR® associations have anticipated the learning curve by creating tools like a How-To guide and even pre-approved architectural drawings, helping to speed up the process and drive down the cost for owners. As with the addition of duplexes and triplexes to a neighborhood of single-family homes, ADUs add density, giving the local economy a boost.



Credit: Ileana Schinder

SEE ALSO:

- planning.org/knowledgebase/accessorydwellings/
- smartergrowth.net/affordable-housing/dc-adu-homeowner-online-workshop-with-upo/
- handbook.dcoz.dc.gov/use-categories/other-uses/accessory-apartments/

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Invite an expert to provide insights on strategies to bring ADUs to your community.
- Use a grant to support an effort to study which areas of the community show the most promise for supporting ADUs and what, if any, zoning changes would be needed.
- Use the Growth Polling program to measure community attitudes toward ADUs and other infill-housing strategies.

NAR RESOURCES:

- Growth Management Fact Book

Success Stories:

Pacific Southwest Association Contributes to Award-Winning Handbook for City of San Diego

Bounded as it is by the Pacific Ocean, a large military base, and Mexico, the City of San Diego has hard-and-fast limits to solving its dire housing shortage. The Pacific Southwest Association of REALTORS® is addressing the challenge by focusing on Accessory Dwelling Units, and making it easier to understand the ins-and-outs of creating them: with support from a [Smart Growth Grant](#) from the REALTOR® Party, it helped develop a [San Diego Companion Unit Handbook](#) that earned kudos from the mayor and the Urban Design Award from the San Diego Section of the American Planning Association.

The concept first arose in 2018, when California law made it easier for homeowners to build ADUs. Recognizing that clear and centralized information would be essential to helping potential housing units become reality, the REALTORS® joined in coalition with the City Council and key local housing organizations to create a comprehensive resource for planning and constructing an ADU. The REALTORS® were well positioned to contribute expertise in areas such as renovation lending, which enables homeowners to take on projects that will add considerable value and provide an income stream – like the construction of an ADU – without having much equity in their homes.

The new handbook is a free resource, and its clear branding credits the REALTORS® as active participants in solving housing issues and creating opportunity in the community. To see the award-winning handbook, visit: sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/2019-companion-unit-handbook.pdf

For the full story, see: [Pacific Southwest Association Contributes to Award-Winning Handbook for City of San Diego](#)

Utah Association of REALTORS® Back Bill to Simplify Permitting for Accessory Dwelling Units Throughout the State

Although Utah's 2019 REALTOR®-supported Affordable Housing Modifications legislation had codified a dozen strategies to address the state's growing housing shortage, one of the simplest of these – enabling homeowners to rent out internal Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) – was not making much headway. So, with an Issues Mobilization Grant from the REALTOR® Party, the state association helped push through a bill that cuts the red tape.

Because internal ADUs are within an existing home, there's very little infrastructure cost. Rental arrangements are often mutually beneficial; typically priced at about 60% of the market rate, they can be ideal for those on a tight budget. The new legislation, drafted with input and support from the REALTORS®, requires municipalities throughout the state to accept internal ADUs as a permitted land use, regardless of local zoning laws and classifications. While it eliminated specious requirements such as lot size or street frontage, it retains all the safety measures already in place through mandated inspections.

During its annual REALTOR® Day, the Utah Association launched a three-week campaign touting ADUs as “A Free-Market Solution to Utah's Housing Shortage.” Through digital ads, email blasts, and a dedicated website, the REALTORS® attracted a record level of engagement, with members from every district in the state sending lawmakers over 3,000 emails urging passage of the bill. It did pass, by a large margin, and is poised to relieve significant pressure on the rental market.

For the full story, see: [Utah Association of REALTORS® Back Bill to Simplify Permitting for Accessory Dwelling Units Throughout the State](#)

Community Revitalization:

Putting distressed and vacant properties back into productive use

Strategy: Better Block

On the surface, a Better Block event looks like a block party being held on Main Street, but underneath, it is so much more: a tried-and-true strategy to revive a downtown district that has seen better days. The magic is in dressing up a segment of a downtrodden commercial street for a weekend and inviting the community, business leaders, public officials and those in neighboring towns, so that everyone can share in the vision of the once and future lively block.

The event shines a bright light on what is missing from the block's permanent state that might need to be rectified to make the area attractive again. Much of this starts with public sector investment in the public realm. The list of improvements may include crosswalks, bike lanes, street trees, curb cuts at the block corners, and zoning that permits café tables and benches on the sidewalk in front of businesses.

By making the block what you want it to be for a day or two, the community can visualize the steps needed to make the temporary experience a permanent reality.

Consider that main streets are like shopping malls, which tend to have one or two anchor tenants, such as a department store, serving as the primary attraction. So, too, with a healthy main street, the public realm acts as the anchor tenant, which then gives confidence to private capital to invest in the buildings.



Credit: Team Better Block

SEE ALSO:

- realtorparty.realtor/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Programs-Grants-Community-Outreach-Better-Block-Guide.pdf
- betterblock.org
- teambetterblock.com

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Use an Smart Growth Grant to bring in an expert to talk you through the Better Block process, including pro tips.
- Work with city and community partners to make a workplan.
- Use a Smart Growth Grant to purchase or rent items needed to make the Better Block happen.

NAR RESOURCES:

- [Better Block Guide for Associations](#)

Success Stories:

REALTOR® Party Smart Growth Grant for Better Block Event Leads to Five-Year Span of Investment from the City of South Bend

Back in 2014, when the South Bend Area REALTORS® used a [Smart Growth Grant](#) to help fund a [Better Block](#) project along a run-down two-block stretch of Western Avenue, the lively pop-up event gave them hope for the future of the neighborhood. What they could not have anticipated was the infusion of investment that the event spurred – millions of dollars over the next five years – improving eleven blocks of the commercial corridor and uplifting the surrounding community.

Just for a weekend, the area had been transformed with wider sidewalks, bike lanes, landscaping, music, food vendors and a beer garden. Then-Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who was among the many visitors, remarked that the project would lead to safer streets and a more vibrant atmosphere for residents and businesses. He was referring to the city's new Smart Streets program that focused on renewing strategic corridors throughout the city. The highlighted blocks of Western Avenue were noticed – and targeted for substantial improvement. In three phases, at a cost of about \$2.5 million each, Western Avenue received infrastructure improvements including a reconfiguration of traffic lanes, the addition of bike lanes and on-street parking, curbing, new streetlights, and trees. The city also made grants available for improving business facades.

Beyond triggering the city's investment in permanently improved streetscapes, the Better Block event brought community leaders and business owners together, creating an effective consulting mechanism and forging important relationships among those with the area's prosperity and well-being at heart.

For the full story, see: [REALTOR® Party Smart Growth Grant for Better Block Event Leads to Five-Year Span of Investment from the City of South Bend](#)

With Better Block Event, Longleaf Pine REALTORS® Demonstrate Just How Pedestrian-Friendly Haymount Can Be

Blessed with neat neighborhoods of cottage-style homes and proximity to downtown Fayetteville, North Carolina, the Haymount neighborhood had been cursed, however, by an environment hostile to pedestrian traffic in its vibrant commercial district – where there had already been one pedestrian fatality. Armed with a vision and a [Smart Growth Action Grant](#), the local Longleaf Pine REALTORS® (LPR) set out to change that. They partnered with the North Carolina chapter of the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals, the local business community, and other local organizations, to mount a [Better Block Event](#), revealing over the course of a weekend how basic improvements such as bike lanes, crosswalks, reduced traffic lanes, and widened sidewalks could transform the area for the better.

The night before the event, hard-won permits in hand, the REALTORS® pre-marked the roads. At 8 a.m., they were out stenciling bike-lane markers and applying eight critical crosswalks with architectural drafting paper and duct tape. The event attracted over 3,000 visitors, and motorized traffic took it all in stride; businesses and pedestrians begged for the transformation to be made permanent. Surveys collected from more than 300 attendees were compiled in a report for the City Council, and the Councilman representing Haymount promised to find funding for painting the new crosswalks in the next budget cycle, as a start.

In addition to the immediate issue of pedestrian safety, the effort is expected to benefit property values, business activity, and community connectedness, and could likely set a positive precedent for the entire region.

For the full story, see: [With Better Block Event, Longleaf Pine REALTORS® Demonstrate Just How Pedestrian-Friendly Haymount Can Be](#)

Strategy: Main Street Assessment

Like the Better Block strategy, the Main Street Assessment is a mechanism for getting a down-and-out main street functioning again. Instead of leading with a vision, however, this approach entails methodical information-gathering and community data analysis which is then used to suggest the vision.

Once a locale has been approved by the program, a Main Street specialist will come to town and spend several days interviewing various constituencies of the main street, including shopkeepers, building owners, residents, leaders of civic organizations, and elected officials.

From this data-gathering process, a transformational strategy called the Main Street Four Point Approach® is developed. This involves crafting a plan for design, promotion, organization, and creating economic vitality. Each of these aspects plays a critical role in the success of the main street revitalization effort.

The Main Street Assessment is primarily an economic development strategy, and the process is most successful if an entity already exists that can serve as a local coordinator. Most [states](#) have a main street program that provides guidance, resources, and grants to [local](#) main street programs.



BEFORE



AFTER

Credit: Kitty Dougoud

SEE ALSO:

- realtorparty.realtor/wp-content/uploads/appsDocs/community-outreach/walkable/WalkableCommunities_MainStreet.pdf
- mainstreet.org/home
- savingplaces.org/guides/celebrating-40-years-of-main-street-america-successes#.YzM4_3bMI2w

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Use an NAR Smart Growth Grant to bring in a Main Street expert to talk about the process described above so that community leaders understand what advance work is needed for the best chance of success.
- Use a Smart Growth Grant to help underwrite the cost of hiring a Main Street consultant to perform the assessment.
- Use the Growth Polling program to survey residents about the main street, and use this data as input for the assessment process.

Success Stories:

Three North Carolina Communities Jumpstart Revitalization with Mainstreet Downtown Assessments Supported by the REALTOR® Party

As most of the country's tourism markets were taking a big hit from the pandemic, some communities in western North Carolina saw glimmers of opportunity: between the allure of the great outdoors, the blossoming of remote work options, and their own authentic small-town charms, they experienced a distinct up-tick in interest and housing prices as visitors found their way along the scenic mountain parkways. Many of those visitors want to stay and the demand isn't going away. That's why, in 2021, three communities in three different counties explored how they might capitalize on their existing assets to drive sustainable residential and commercial growth. [Smart Growth Grants](#) from the REALTOR® Party helped with the process.

For the full story, see: [Three North Carolina Communities Jumpstart Revitalization with Mainstreet Downtown Assessments Supported by the REALTOR® Party](#)

Carbon County [PA] REALTORS® Help Bring Tiny Borough of Lehighton Back to Life

The three-stoplight borough of Lehighton, Pennsylvania, in the foothills of the Poconos, was two years shy of its sesquicentennial and not feeling very celebratory: having suffered the loss of the railroad and its garment mills decades before, its four-block business district was in a bad state of decline.

Things began to turn around when the region's 82-member Carbon County Association of REALTORS® learned about the REALTOR® Party's Smart Growth program. Applying jointly with the state association, it secured a Smart Growth Grant that fully funded a revitalization survey by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Center. The resulting analysis and recommendations set Lehighton back on the path forward to a prosperous future.

Two consultants from Main Street Center conducted a three-day visit to the borough, convening focus groups, meeting with stakeholders and government officials, and participating in a lengthy walking tour. They listened to the insights of nearly 80 local residents and businesspeople, all of whom were heartened to be involved in lifting the borough's prospects. In its full assessment report, Main Street Center detailed its findings and made specific recommendations for revitalizing the borough's business district. These ranged from cost effective beginnings, like landscaping a "gateway" at one end of the main street, to more extensive projects like developing the riverfront to attract whitewater rafting traffic that comes downstream from the neighboring town. With a plan in hand, the next step would just be a question of resources.

For the full story, see: [Carbon County \[PA\] REALTORS® Help Bring Tiny Borough of Lehighton Back to Life](#)

Strategy: Transforming Neighborhoods

Communities can face all sorts of land use challenges, from a shortage of housing to vacant schools and vacant housing creating a drag on the local economy and, in a worst-case scenario, a catastrophic wildfire that burns the town to the ground. To recover from any of these situations a SWAT Team of land-use professionals is just the ticket to diagnose the underlying problem and set a course to resurrect the distressed area.

In such situations, you may want to engage the Counselors of Real Estate (CRE) Consulting Corps. The CRE is an international volunteer organization of highly regarded industry experts and one of their initiatives is a Consulting Corps that can travel to a troubled area and provide an objective assessment of the market conditions and strategies for undoing whatever roadblocks may exist that will allow the community to rectify the land-use problem. The result is guidance for moving forward using best practices and success stories from similar U.S. cities.

Each Consulting Corps assignment is conducted by a team of well-qualified volunteer members of the Counselors of Real Estate with expertise specific to the needs of the situation. The team delivers unbiased, market-driven action steps to address the real estate challenge.

Whether the answer is retooling the local permitting office to fast-track approvals to get the kind of real estate development the community needs or creating a mechanism for cities to transfer their derelict properties to a landbank/land trust organization to take on the responsibility of rehabilitating the properties, having a group of people who know all the options figure which is the best for your community's situation can set your community on the right path.



Credit: Samantha DeKoven

SEE ALSO:

- cre.org/initiatives/cre-consulting-corps/
- realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/housing-opportunity/resources/transforming-neighborhoods

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Contact the CRE Consulting Corps at contact found on this [web page](#) to discuss your community's land-use challenge.
- Have your association's Government Affairs Committee watch the Transforming Neighborhoods video found in the shaded box at [this page](#) to get a sense of the process and the benefits

NAR RESOURCES:

- [Hot Topic Alert-Landbanks](#)

Success Stories:

Peoria Area Association of REALTORS® Jump-Starts Neighborhood Revitalization

Through the REALTOR® Party's new Transforming Neighborhoods Program, the Peoria Area Association of REALTORS® welcomed a team of experts from the Counselors of Real Estate® Consulting Corps to study the potential of two severely dilapidated neighborhoods, with an eye toward housing and economic development. The team's in-depth report will provide a road map for bringing these neighborhoods back to life.

Shortly after meeting with the newly elected mayor of Peoria, Illinois, the local REALTORS® pitched her a proposal: to collaborate with the Peoria Area Association of REALTORS (PAAR) in applying to NAR's Transforming Neighborhoods Program. Securing one of the coveted spots would mean receiving an in-depth study of the best use of land left after the demolition of two dilapidated schools – complete with actionable recommendations – by NAR commercial affiliate The Counselors of Real Estate (CRE). With the mayor's enthusiastic agreement and strong support from Illinois REALTORS®, PAAR submitted one of the program's three successful applications of 2022.

For the full story, see: [Peoria Area Association of REALTORS® Jump-Starts Neighborhood Revitalization](#)

Housing Opportunity Grant Helps Bring Counselors of Real Estate to Spokane for Housing Needs Study and Action Plan

Recent census data has shown housing inventory in Washington state to be the lowest in the country – and the Spokane numbers are even worse. With only roughly a two-to-three-week supply of homes, leaders within the Spokane Association of REALTORS® knew they needed a plan with a powerful list of recommendations... and fast.

The CRE application process was strenuous, he admits, and required a heavy lift to demonstrate the full scope of Spokane's situation. But once their project had been accepted, the payoff was remarkable: a CRE Consulting Corps team including experts in housing, economics, and policy making came to town, conducted over thirty interviews with lawmakers, developers, and other housing stakeholders, and applied their considerable brain power and national perspective to the city's housing challenges. The result was an 89-page Action Steps to Increase Spokane's Housing Supply report with a roadmap of proven solutions for the city of Spokane, addressing everything from in-fill development to leadership and staffing of the municipal Planning Department.

For the full story, see: [Housing Opportunity Grant Helps Bring Counselors of Real Estate to Spokane for Housing Needs Study and Action Plan](#)

Community Planning:

Crafting the vision for your community's future

Strategy: Community Design Charrette

A charrette is an intense period of design or planning activity. In land-use and urban planning, the charrette has become a technique for consulting with all stakeholders during a compressed time period of several days regarding a specific proposed development that will impact the community. It is led by planning and design professionals who listen carefully to the wants and needs of municipal officials, developers, business owners, and residents. Draft plans and images are developed and feedback is garnered. A successful charrette promotes joint ownership of solutions and attempts to defuse possible confrontation between those with conflicting priorities, such as residents and developers.

Through an iterative cycle of priority-seeking, illustration, and feedback, a vision for a community or large, multi-use parcel of land can be created in a short time. Once the vision is solidified, logistical and legal aspects of bringing the concept into existence, such as ensuring proper zoning, can begin.



Credit: Hugh Morris

SEE ALSO:

- canr.msu.edu/nci/
- courses.planetizen.com/course/charrettes-introduction
- planning.org/pas/memo/2018/nov/

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Use a Smart Growth grant to hire a charrette expert to deliver a one-hour brown-bag lunch educational session for your members, other civic leaders and city planning staff and elected officials.
- Use a Smart Growth Grant to help fund a design charrette for a community, a downtown revitalization, or a large publicly owned parcel. Seek partnerships with other civic leaders, community foundations and public agencies. A local university with an architecture or planning department may have the ability to execute the charrette.
- Use the Growth Polling program to gather input from residents about what they view as a desirable vision for the project area.

Success Stories:

Charrette helps Austin REALTORS® Imagine Their Community

It was a classic stand-off of Texan proportions, between a big developer and a suburban neighborhood. A 31-acre, twelve-building office park near downtown Austin had been bought by a developer who sought to re-develop it along higher-density mixed-use lines, in keeping with the city's recently adopted 30-year growth plan. The property's neighbors, already concerned about traffic congestion, saw only tall buildings, increased traffic and no benefit to themselves in the proposal.

The opposing parties agreed to engage in a charrette, an intensive collaborative design and planning process in which all stakeholders have a voice. In a gesture of good faith, the developer committed \$88,000 in funding for the charrette. The Austin Board of REALTORS® secured a Smart Growth Grant from the REALTOR® Party, which it contributed in the interests of reconciling redevelopment goals with the values of the community.

A national expert and local professionals guided the process. Over the course of several weeks, community gatherings attended by more than 250 neighbors – and the developer – collected opinions and ideas that would inform the week-long design workshop. The design and engineering team worked feverishly to present alternative plans based on the community values, constantly striving for balance between competing priorities, and revising according to public feedback until a consensus was reached. In the end, a strong majority of neighborhood participants accepted additional development impact in terms of square footage and traffic, in exchange for community benefits like parkland, bike lanes and a trail along the creek.

For the full story, see: [Charrette helps Austin REALTORS® Imagine Their Community](#)

Maine Association Facilitates Smart Growth for Once-thriving Mill Town

The vacant and unused manufacturing spaces in Maine's old mill communities offer a great opportunity for revitalization through mixed-use development of the downtown centers. To help the once-prosperous mill town of Sanford envision a future with walkable affordable housing and fresh economic contributors, the Maine Association of REALTORS® (MAR) used a [Smart Growth Action Grant](#) to support a three-day charrette, or stakeholder-informed design session.

The Workforce Housing Coalition of the Greater Seacoast (WHC) facilitated the project, which served as a springboard for lots of ideas that had been percolating for a while: the municipality had already done advance leg work, from redefining its zoning code to hiring a dedicated staff member to focus on housing. About ten REALTORS® participated in the charette, along with dozens of other local stakeholders. On the first day, they toured the mill complex, and submitted ideas and insights. The following day, the professional team of architects and planners analyzed the community input, from which they created two plans, accompanied by a feasibility document; these were revealed at the end of the third day.

The concept and values of the charrette aligned perfectly with MAR's longstanding housing advocacy and continual striving for smarter alternatives to urban sprawl. Since the charrette, the development in Sanford has been swiftly progressed. With one former mill slated for development, and plans for residential and retail units underway, Sanford's civic leaders know they can continue to count on the REALTORS® to bring their expertise to the community housing, planning, and development process.

For the full story, see: [Maine Association Facilitates Smart Growth for Once-thriving Mill Town](#)

Strategy: Comprehensive Plans/ Master Plans/General Plan/Zoning

A community's Comprehensive Plan is its core document of long-term planning, mapping future land use for a jurisdiction, usually a city or a county. It lays out a community's goals and aspirations for its built environment over the following couple of decades.

Typically, comprehensive plans have chapters covering housing, transportation, and open space. The document includes policies and actions that set priorities for the community's land use, public services, infrastructure, and capital investments. The 'Comp Plan' also guides the use, density, and design of buildings.

The process of developing a comprehensive plan typically runs in five-year cycles with a look to the future spanning at least twenty years. The steps involved are, themselves, comprehensive, including all planning elements of the jurisdiction (housing, transportation, open space), a wide range of public input opportunities, oversight by a planning commission and, ultimately, approval by the governing body, such as a city council.

The resulting plan guides all specific proposed development, as well as where municipal infrastructure for transport, water, and sewer will be needed to support that growth.

SEE ALSO:

- planetizen.com/definition/comprehensive-plans
- plandc.dc.gov/page/frequently-asked-questions-faq
- [City of Durham, NC – brief video on the value of a comprehensive plan](#)

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- When your community begins working on a comprehensive plan, offer to host public input sessions funded by a Smart Growth Grant.
- Make use of a Growth Poll to determine community attitudes towards growth and share it with the Planning Director.
- Use a Housing Opportunity Grant to help fund the housing chapter of your community's comprehensive plan.



Credit: Debbie Werling

Success Stories:

Greensboro Regional REALTORS® Contributes Key Element to City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan: Smart Growth Polling

Through the REALTOR® Party's [State and Local Growth Polling Program](#), the Greensboro Regional REALTORS® Association (GRRRA) commissioned a poll to help inform the City of Greensboro Planning Department as it drafted its 20-year comprehensive plan. The results provided valuable insight into the housing and transportation priorities of the region's residents, a contribution that will keep on giving.

GRRRA worked with NAR staff, their polling expert, and a few members of Greensboro's Planning Department to refine an existing national growth survey – cutting out questions about subways for example – for a week-long telephone poll that netted a solid sample of 412 responses for the city of roughly 300,000. The hundreds of pages of information revealed a strong appetite for Smart Growth.

To capitalize on the survey effort, GRRRA hosted an event for local industry leaders to promote the merits of affordable housing, strong public transportation, walkable communities, and other aspects of [Smart Growth](#). The REALTORS® delivered the survey results directly to the City Planning Department, and were eventually asked to provide comments on the initial draft of the comprehensive plan. It was so aligned with their way of thinking, and committed to the Smart Growth values that Greensboro residents have embraced, that they advocated for its adoption and will continue to use the survey results as a multifaceted advocacy tool moving forward.

The City of Greensboro received the 2021 Marvin Collins Planning Award for a Comprehensive Plan from the North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning.

For the full story, see: [Greensboro Regional REALTORS® Contributes Key Element to City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan: Smart Growth Polling](#)

Knoxville Area Association of REALTORS® Defeats Detrimental Zoning Proposals with Trifecta of REALTOR® Party Resources

The good news was that Blount County had attracted major employers like Amazon and Smith & Wesson to eastern Tennessee. What concerned the Knoxville Area Association of REALTORS®, whose area of service includes Blount County, were the extreme new zoning changes that the county was proposing: first, to eliminate planned unit development and cluster development, and then, to elevate required lot sizes. The proposed ordinances would severely hinder future residential development in one of the state's fastest-growing counties, exacerbating the state of housing affordability, and effectively devaluing privately owned land in the areas affected.

Using multiple resources from the REALTOR® Party – an Issues Mobilization grant, Advocacy Everywhere, and the Land Use Initiative program – the local REALTORS® were able to stave off the threatened restrictions – a major victory for the real estate industry, property owners, and aspiring homebuyers.

The REALTORS® first submitted the proposed ordinances to the REALTOR® Party's Land Use Initiative program for review. The resulting analyses provided the basis for talking points that were used in discussion with the county's elected officials; the second report, in particular, helped to frame the Issues Mobilization Campaign the REALTORS® mounted to rally public opposition to the new zoning. A Call for Action through the Advocacy Everywhere program supported the campaign, just prior to the public hearing. Though the odds were stacked against them, the effort managed to hold the County Commissioners' vote to a tie, preventing restrictive zoning from choking off the region's housing development.

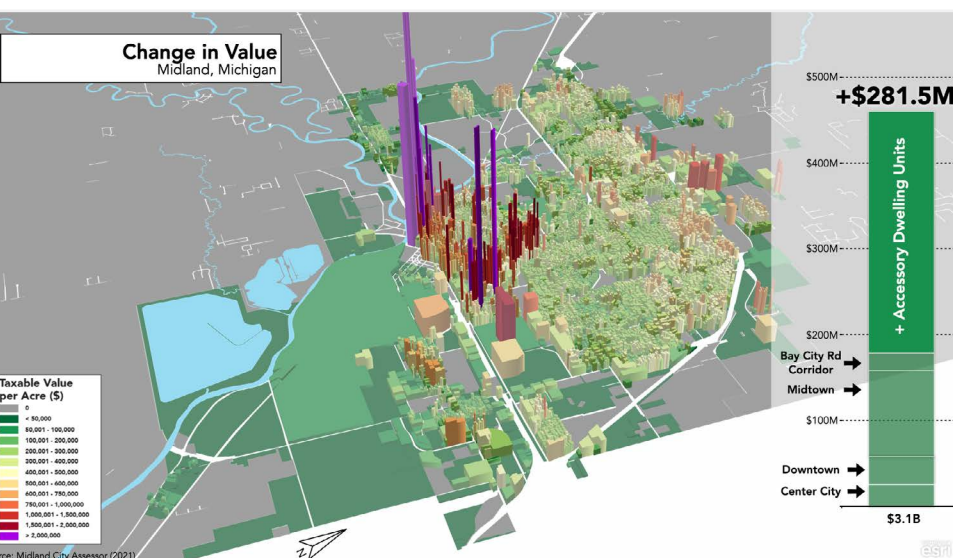
For the full story, see: [Knoxville Area Association of REALTORS® Defeats Detrimental Zoning Proposals with Trifecta of REALTOR® Party Resources](#)

Strategy: Fiscal Impact of Development Patterns

Though research on the fiscal impacts of various development patterns has been around for several decades, the digitization of data that has occurred over the past decade, along with increases in computing power, has made it possible to perform a thorough, parcel-level analysis of an area's fiscal impact from current and future land use.

Such an analysis looks at both parcel-level revenue from property and sales taxes, as well the costs of public infrastructure that supports the community. Generally, what is found, is that low-density development on the edges of town is subsidized by the higher density, mixed-use development in the economic centers. The fiscal danger this presents for a jurisdiction is that as development sprawls outward, the revenue created by the high-density, mixed-use core is overtaken by the more costly services provided to outer, low-density development.

Once the scales tip and costs start to regularly exceed revenue, the choice for a local government is either to tax its citizens and businesses at a higher rate or to change the land use rules such that the more lucrative form of development (higher density, mixed-use) becomes the norm.



Credit: Urban-3

SEE ALSO:

- Strong Towns: strongtowns.org
- Urban-3: urbanthree.com
- smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/rationale-model-fiscal-ordinance/

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Use a Smart Growth Grant to bring in a national expert on the fiscal impact of growth patterns to educate community leaders on what such an analysis can show and the implications it has for the long-run fiscal health of your community.
- Use a Smart Growth Grant to partner with other community organizations to fund an analysis of your community's current fiscal health.
- Use a Smart Growth Grant to fund a community educational strategy to develop support for needed land use changes to set the community on a sustainable fiscal path.

Success Stories:

Is Smart Growth the Key to Preserving Montana's 'Big Sky?' Gallatin REALTORS® Funds Study to Find Answers.

In a land known as 'Big Sky,' it's no surprise that there's a certain cultural resistance to development density. Yet, in Gallatin County, Montana, which has been topping best-places-to-live-and-retire lists, tremendous growth is forcing a closer look at the best ways to accommodate the burgeoning population. With a [Smart Growth Grant](#), the Gallatin Association of REALTORS® (GAR) funded an eye-opening comparative analysis study that is informing the development debates by quantifying the fiscal implications of dense development versus sprawl for the greater Bozeman region.

The study was conducted by Urban3, an Asheville, NC-based consulting firm whose analytical methods demonstrate the return of property-tax-per-acre through a clear visual model. The findings are illustrated by a series of colorful 3-D images that convey relative land value, tax value, and value-per-acre at a glance; in the Bozeman study, projected tax revenue was shown to be maximized by reinvesting in urban centers and historic commercial corridors. When the report was presented to city staff, local homebuilders and developers, REALTORS® and the public, the tax implications of building up the urban core, as opposed to developing the outskirts, or way out in the country, made a very compelling argument for smart growth.

Shortly thereafter, GAR used a [Housing Opportunity Grant](#) to help fund an Affordable Housing Summit that brought stakeholders together to begin discussing goals for Bozeman. As they continue to contribute to the growth policy planning process, the REALTORS® hope to promote smart growth development standards in their region and spur a movement toward compact, walkable neighborhoods.

For the full story, see: [Is Smart Growth the Key to Preserving Montana's 'Big Sky?' Gallatin REALTORS® Funds Study to Find Answers.](#)

Data from Traverse REALTORS® Proves Invaluable to Downtown Development Planning for Affordable Housing

In the highly desirable downtown neighborhoods of Traverse City, Michigan, affordable housing is scarce. Bounded by water, the city's land base is already largely built, and development is further limited by zoning that restricts building height to 65'. This presents challenges for the economy of the city, whose largest employers are located downtown; for the surrounding counties, which rely on the urban property tax revenue; and for the REALTORS®, who aren't able to respond to the demand for affordable housing where it is needed.

With a REALTOR® Party [Smart Growth Grant](#), the Traverse Area Association of REALTORS® (TAAR) helped the city to engage Urban 3, the specialized consulting firm, to create a 3D economic model showing the projected tax revenue from various possible development configurations. The report was dramatic and clear. One valuable finding was that 52% of the land in Traverse City is, in fact, un-taxable, and therefore not part of the revenue stream, at all. Through dramatic visuals, the report also revealed beyond question that development with the highest potential tax-value would occur in the heart of the city.

TAAR invited the principal of Urban 3 to present the firm's findings to a broad local audience at four different venues, where he demonstrated that building vertically would be the only way to capture ample tax revenue for the city and county to prosper. Driving the point home, he also shared examples of other cities that have limited building heights, and how such restrictions ultimately defeat prosperity.

For the full story, see: [Data from Traverse REALTORS® Proves Invaluable to Downtown Development Planning for Affordable Housing](#)

Transportation:

Ensuring that people of all means can get where they need to go by any means

Strategy: Walkability

Walkability is the proverbial canary in a coalmine for the health of a neighborhood. If people are walking, it is an indication that they feel safe doing so, that they are in good health, and that they have lower transportation expenditures because they are not entirely dependent on cars.

Getting to that healthy point requires some effort if a community was planned long ago when the car was the preferred or only mode of travel. To retool a community into a 15-minute neighborhood, defined as a place where residents can walk to just about anything they need within 15 minutes, there are several factors that make walking not only possible, but enjoyable as well.

The recipe calls for a mix of land uses, ideally building-by-building, which give people destinations to which they can walk, and a welcoming walkable environment that may include street trees, benches along the sidewalk, appropriate sidewalk widths, curb ramps at intersections, and crosswalks with appropriate traffic control. If the streets are wide, a refuge halfway across makes pedestrians feel safe, as do lower traffic speeds.

The best way to find out how to make a neighborhood more walkable is to conduct a walk audit. This entails talking a walk around the neighborhood and making note of the existing conditions. The second link under Resources, below, will take you to an example.

Eliminating the expenses of driving and the necessity of parking, a walkable neighborhood can be both time-efficient and economical. NAR's Community & Transportation Survey shows that over the last decade, half of all respondents would prefer to live in a community where they could reach everything they need on foot.



Credit: Hugh Morris

SEE ALSO:

- Walk Audit Guide: saferoutespartnership.org/resources/toolkit/lets-go-walk
- Planetizen-What is Walkability?: planetizen.com/definition/walkability
- Urban Institute-Redefining Walkability: urban.org/features/redefining-walkability

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Associations can convene a walkability summit for members, community leaders and public-sector representatives.
- Associations can support bringing in a walkability expert to conduct a walkability audit to determine why residents may not be walking much.
- Use the Growth Polling Program to determine a community's level of interest in walkability, and what infrastructure and destinations the public would appreciate having.

NAR RESOURCES:

- [NAR's Walkable Community Web Page](#)

Success Stories:

Southern Minnesota REALTORS® Jump-start Walkability in Mankato

In Mankato, MN, the local REALTORS® used a [Smart Growth Grant from the REALTOR® Party](#) to sponsor a WalkShop event in the Old Town district, which had lots of old charm and a new public amphitheater, but lacked a pedestrian-friendly infrastructure to link the two.

The REALTOR® Association of Southern Minnesota (RASM) applied the Walkscore concept to the Old Town riverfront area of Mankato, which is perceived as a 'driving community.' The neighborhood is heavily industrial, including quarries and a metal scrapyard, but had insufficient parking, and poor visibility from one point to the next. In hosting the WalkShop, the REALTORS®' goal was to make the area more accessible, functional, and welcoming.

The day began with an informal breakfast at a local bakery, where the invited stakeholders could meet and mingle. They included representatives from the City Center Partnership and the Old Town district, the Mankato Council for the Arts, public safety officials, neighboring towns, and, of course, local REALTORS®. A professional walkability consultant delivered a presentation on the goals and successes of walkability efforts elsewhere in the country, after which, the group toured the area on foot, returning to the bakery to brainstorm ideas in small groups over lunch. The consultant's written report, delivered a few weeks later, outlined practical improvements that focused on working with Old Town's existing assets.

The event inspired several local organizations to create a "Vitality Fund" to support projects including the suggested walkability measures, and RASM has secured a REALTOR® Party [Placemaking Grant](#) to help the community envision some of those ideas.

For the full story, see: [Southern Minnesota REALTORS® Jump-start Walkability in Mankato](#)

Central Indiana Community Walks the Talk on Walkability

MIBOR REALTOR® Association, a strong advocate for walkability issues throughout central Indiana, knows that the connectivity, safety, and quality of life of a community is important to homebuyers, and has been shown to improve property values, as well. To address these issues on a tangible level with community leaders and elected officials in the region it serves, MIBOR used a Smart Growth grant from NAR to host a walkability audit and WalkShop in Franklin, IN, twenty miles south of Indianapolis.

The two-day event was led by national walkability experts Dan Burden and Samantha Thomas of Blue Zones, LLC. They began with a walk audit along a mile stretch of US 31, a thoroughfare built for high levels of vehicular traffic, to the detriment of pedestrian traffic and community connectivity. Participants including the Mayor of Franklin, City of Franklin planners, Indiana Department of Transportation officials, representatives from the Johnson County Chamber of Commerce and Johnson County Development Corporation, and local REALTORS® surveyed sidewalk width, driving lane width, crosswalks, curb cuts, barriers, buffers and more.

A powerful message of the WalkShop was that focusing on people and community first is the key to promoting walkable connectivity. As Burden explained, "If we plan for cars and traffic, we get cars and traffic. If, instead, we plan for people and places, we get people and places." In addition to being an eye-opening experience for the region's officials and community leaders, the program was also a great opportunity for the REALTORS® to share insight on consumer preference and the demand for walkable communities.

For the full story, see: [Central Indiana Community Walks the Talk on Walkability](#)

Strategy: Transit and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

Transit-oriented development integrates buildings meeting a variety of moderate- to high-density land uses with a strong transit hub. By creating urban places designed to bring people, activities, buildings, and public space together, with easy walking and cycling connections between them and reliably good transit service to the rest of the city, a community builds a foundation for long-term sustainability, equity, and shared prosperity. Such a configuration provides access for all residents to local and citywide opportunities and resources by the most efficient and lowest financial and environmental cost, and with the highest resilience to disruptive events.

Creating a successful transit-oriented community requires substantial planning. One exemplary model was built in Arlington County, VA just across the river from Washington, D.C. when the region started to plan its subway system. The transit-oriented development initiative was carried out over three decades in a low-density commercial corridor. The government of Arlington County became an early proponent of TOD as a strategy that could be used to retrofit the 3-mile-long corridor—a commercial center that had never been incorporated as a city—in order to reverse major declines in both population and commercial activity. The skyline of the corridor is a testament to the success of the plan, with large, mixed-use buildings marking the subterranean location of the subway stations. Private capital flowed to the locales of these massive public investments.



Credit: slobo (Getty Images)

SEE ALSO:

- planetizen.com/definition/transit-oriented-development
- Eight Principles of TOD: tod.org/placemaking/principles.html
- cnt.org/planning-tod

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- If your community is just beginning to explore the idea of a TOD, use a Smart Growth Grant to bring in a national speaker on the topic to discuss the best practices.
- Associations can work with public-sector planners to develop a transit-oriented development plan for a community, including conducting a design charrette.
- Offer to work with the local transit agency and/or city planners to use NAR's Growth Polling program to gauge public support for creating a place with such transit synergy in your community.

NAR RESOURCES:

- [NAR Transit & Property Values Report](#), Smart Growth Grants, Growth Polling.

Success Stories:

Orlando Association Gets On Board With Commuter Train Travel

While the 9,000-member Orlando Regional REALTORS® Association (ORRA) had been energetically supporting SunRail, central Florida's first commuter rail project, association leaders felt some first-hand experience for their members and local decision makers would kick it up a notch. Using a Smart Growth Grant from the REALTOR® Party, ORRA was able to arrange for a train ride for nearly 170 REALTORS®, leasing agents, elected officials, Chamber of Commerce members and other community stakeholders. During the trip, the passengers were treated to presentations about the new depots and transit-oriented development projects planned along the route. The grant also provided substantial collateral materials for all participants, including "Transit Oriented Development 101," produced by the Center for Responsible Transportation.

For the full story, see: [Orlando Association Gets On Board With Commuter Train Travel](#)

REALTORS® Help Bring Light Rail to Hampton Roads, VA

When a referendum to bring light rail to Hampton Roads, VA came back for yet another round, the Hampton Roads REALTORS® Association (HRRRA) got busy – again. The local REALTORS® had supported light rail proposals before, but this time they took their campaign efforts to the next level with an Issues Mobilization Grant from NAR, in addition to funding from their own coffers and the state association, making the REALTORS® the single largest contributor to the cause. In the end, the referendum was carried in 90 of 95 local precincts, with the approval of 62 percent of the voters.

For the full story, see: [REALTORS® Help Bring Light Rail to Hampton Roads, VA](#)

Strategy: Bike Facilities for Trip-making: On Road and Trail

When it comes to getting around by bicycle, research has shown that if bike-related infrastructure is developed, people will use it: the very presence of dedicated bike lanes encourages trip-making by bicycle. Many cyclists feel safer riding in roads with their own lanes, and given those conditions, are more prone to choose bike travel.

There are many benefits to making a trip by bicycle. On the public-sector side, the cost of bicycle infrastructure is substantially less than that for automobiles. In fact, substantially less infrastructure is needed to carry the same number of bicycles as cars.

On the private side, as with walking, the benefits of making a trip by bicycle are many: the cost of the trip is virtually zero; parking is abundant and free; you don't pollute, and you do get exercise.



Credit: vgajic (Getty Images)

SEE ALSO:

- National Association of City Transportation Officials: nacto.org/publication/urban-bikeway-design-guide/
- Bicycle Facility Types: montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Appendix-B-PB-Final-5.3.18.pdf
- Bicycle planning courses: courses.planetizen.com/topic/bicycle-planning

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Associations can work with local leaders to develop and/or implement a complete streets policy, safe routes to school policy, or a trail network plan for a community.
- Sponsor a design charrette or other collection of public input to learn where residents would like bike lanes and trails.
- Using NAR's Placemaking Grants, associations can work with local officials to help develop trailheads (trail access points).

NAR RESOURCES:

- Smart Growth Grants, Placemaking Grants.

Success Stories:

Ulster County (NY) REALTORS® Help Transform Old Network of Railways into New Hiking/Biking Trails

In its day, the City of Kingston, NY – the only urban community in Ulster County — was a major railway hub connecting multiple corridors. Today, with the help of an NAR Smart Growth Grant, the nearly 600-member Ulster County Board of REALTORS® is transforming Kingston into a hub of rail-trails that connects the city's neighborhoods and business districts with each other and with the rural areas beyond.

For the full story, see: [Ulster County \(NY\) REALTORS® Help Transform Old Network of Railways into New Hiking/Biking Trails](#)

Selkirk REALTORS® Protect Quality of Life in Bonners Ferry

The scenic city of Bonners Ferry, Idaho, is taking careful steps to avoid becoming a victim of its own success. To preserve the high quality of life that attracts many visitors and would-be residents, it has spent several years developing a Comprehensive Plan and Transportation Plan that will foster the compact growth of its community, while encouraging walking and biking in and around town. Coming to the table with [Smart Growth Action Grants](#), together with considerable knowledge and understanding of its own, the Selkirk Association of REALTORS® has become an important partner in the creation of a robust pedestrian/bicycle mobility plan for the area.

The plan is for a network providing safe and convenient pedestrian/bicycle routes that both meet current demand and encourage even more usage. In turn, increasing the [walkability](#) and bike-ability within Bonners Ferry will create opportunity and purpose for improved housing in the city. The Selkirk Association of REALTORS® received a total of three [Smart Growth Action](#) Grants for the complex project, supporting initial planning, drafting, a site visit, branding, and a kick-off. REALTOR® members were actively involved at many levels of the plan's development, from being interviewed about existing conditions, to attending public meetings, to serving on a pedestrian bicycle advisory group. This continual engagement has helped the REALTOR® community establish itself as a trusted, knowledgeable, and caring partner, and has brought it into a closer working relationship with the Mayor of Bonners Ferry, the City Administrator, and the Boundary County Economic Developer.

For the full story, see: [Selkirk REALTORS® Protect Quality of Life in Bonners Ferry](#)

Community Gathering Spots:

Creating access to outdoor opportunities for all

Strategy: Placemaking – Community Gardens

Though the REALTOR® Party's Community Outreach program has a grant specifically for Placemaking, the concept has a place here in the Smart Growth Toolkit because one of the [10 Smart Growth Principles](#) calls for communities to create a strong sense of place through distinctive and attractive elements within the community. Here are two types of Placemaking projects that convey a wide range of benefits –

Community gardens are one of the most popular forms of placemaking, possibly because of the large basket of benefits they deliver, including:

- serving as a gathering place for gardeners and non-gardeners, alike
- beautification of vacant lots
- augmentation of local food supplies
- building social capital by increasing connections between residents
- reinforcing community pride
- providing a place to teach kids about growing food
- providing a point of interaction between multiple generations and other demographically diverse elements of the community

The creation of a community garden also provides a wonderful opportunity for your local REALTOR® association to rally in support of a neighborhood that could use an uplift and demonstrate that REALTORS® are good stewards of the community by turning out to help build the garden during a REALTOR® workday.

When creating a community garden, consider raising some of the beds off the ground by several feet so that seniors may participate without having to bend over or kneel to the ground.

For those who enjoy the garden but don't want to actually get their hands dirty, or for those who do but need a rest, consider putting in benches.

Lastly, informational signs about the land and who is responsible for the garden and how to get involved are a good way to build community participation.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Meet with local elected officials to see if there is city-owned land that might be available for a garden.
- Solicit donations of materials from local hardware stores and garden nurseries or use a Placemaking Grant to purchase the materials.
- Plan a REALTOR® workday to help create the space; invite elected officials to help with the build-out and also to the ribbon cutting.

NAR RESOURCES:

- [Placemaking Guide for REALTOR® Associations](#)



Credit: Compassionate Eye Foundation/
Natasha Alipour Faridani (Getty Images)

Success Stories:

Wilmington Regional Association of REALTORS®

Once a year, hundreds of members of the Wilmington (NC) Regional Association of REALTORS® (WRAR) get out of the office for REALTOR® Action Day—aka “RAD”. In 2016, on the grounds of St. John’s Episcopal Church, nearly 100 WRAR members built a sizeable community garden, and installed two park benches and a tool shed, using a [Placemaking Micro-Grant](#) from the REALTOR® Party.

The eleven raised garden beds will be cared for by members of the community and the church, including children at the preschool. The produce they raise will become nutritious ingredients at the Good Shepherd Center, a downtown soup kitchen serving more than 150 neighbors a day.

WRAR’s Community Affairs Committee motivated, mobilized, and coordinated all the preparation that took place before the volunteers arrived on site for their shifts. The morning’s work strengthened bonds between the REALTORS® and the local non-profits and municipal agencies involved, including the County Department of Parks & Gardens. To find a good location, the committee tapped into its relationships with community gardener groups and shops. The year before, WRAR built a similar community garden that is maintained by Burmese refugees, who value the ability to grow produce particular to their homeland – that which southerners understand as ‘comfort food’ – and also appreciate the link to the agrarian life they left behind.

Between the high-visibility REALTOR® t-shirts worn by the volunteers and plenty of positive media coverage, placemaking projects like these go a long way toward maintaining WRAR’s reputation for civic good in the community.

For the full story, see: [Wilmington Regional Association of REALTORS®](#)

Plymouth and South Shore Association of REALTORS® Plant a Sense of Community with Garden Project

Using a [Placemaking Micro-Grant](#) from the REALTOR® Party, members of the Plymouth and South Shore Association of REALTORS® (PASS) helped to build an organic community garden at the Davis-Douglas Farm site of the Wildlands Trust, a rural property in Plymouth that has been conserved and transformed into a public gathering space.

Over the course of two days, multiple raised garden beds emerged on the landscape, thanks to about 20 PASS members, including members of the Government Affairs Committee, the Community Service Committee, and the newly formed Young Professionals Network, working alongside Wildland Trust volunteers. A dedicated demonstration bed was built in a special educational programming area, and the remaining beds are available for public gardening. The community is encouraged to donate excess produce to area food pantries.

The garden is fully inclusive, bringing together people from all segments of the community, from the elderly living in facilities without gardening spaces, to professionals living in the newer high-end career-oriented complexes without hands-on gardens, and people of all different backgrounds and abilities. Some of the beds are even accessible to those in wheelchairs.

The garden is just one component of a larger site that also features benches, picnic tables, a community hall, and a tree swing to welcome visitors to the scenic open fields and nearby complex of walking trails. Right on-brand, the REALTORS® have joined the community to foster community.

For the full story, see: [Plymouth and South Shore Association of REALTORS® Plant a Sense of Community with Garden Project](#)

Strategy: Placemaking – Dog Parks

Like community gardens, dog parks are a popular form of placemaking and provide a community with a wide range of benefits. Not only do these projects create great community gathering places, but they also deliver:

- a place for residents to make new friends
- the conversion of an unused piece of land into a community asset
- beautification of the property
- a place for senior citizens and people with temporary or permanent disabilities to exercise their dog when using a leash is a challenge.

These types of projects provide an opportunity for the REALTORS® to work with local elected officials and other community leaders to develop solid, long-term positive working relationships.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Investigate the possibility of using an unused parcel of city-owned land for a dog park.
- Seek co-sponsorship or donations from local pet stores and veterinary practices, hardware stores, and garden nurseries or use a Placemaking Grant to purchase the needed materials.
- Plan a REALTOR® workday to help create the space, and invite elected officials to help with construction as well as the grand opening.

NAR RESOURCES:

- Placemaking Guide for REALTOR® Associations



Credit: meaghanbrowning (Getty Images)

Success Stories:

Placemaking and Puppy Love Go Hand-in-Hand for Kenai Peninsula REALTORS®

Partnering with the local Rotary Club and the City of Soldotna Parks and Recreation Department, Alaska's small but active Kenai Peninsula Association of REALTORS® (KPAR) used a [Placemaking Grant](#) to help build a large pavilion in a community dog park.

The 3 Friends Dog Park is a public-private partnership: a city-owned property, its development was funded by the estate of three friends and is maintained by the city's Parks and Recreation Department. The dedicated fenced lot features separate off-leash zones for both large and small dogs, a trail, a water station, toys, a canine agility course, a community bulletin board, and a pet memorial wall. But the park was missing a covered space to shelter owners from the elements and accommodate activities and events.

As KPAR considered ways to increase its community involvement to align with the National Association of REALTORS® Core Standards, using a [REALTOR® Party Placemaking Grant](#) to help complete the popular dog park was a prospect that excited everyone involved.

The grant funds were presented to the city to pay for construction supplies, and significant elbow grease came from many REALTOR® and affiliate member volunteers who joined with members of the local Rotary Club and hardworking Parks and Rec employees over the course of three days to construct the lofty wooden structure. At a later date, they were back at it, constructing built-in benches under the new pavilion, further improving the quality of life for Soldotna's four-legged friends – and their humans.

For the full story, see: [Placemaking and Puppy Love Go Hand-in-Hand for Kenai Peninsula REALTORS®](#)

Hopkinsville, KY Goes to the Dogs with the Help of a Placemaking Grant

The Hopkinsville Dog Park was the brainchild of Kentucky's 56-member Hopkinsville Christian & Todd County Association of REALTORS® (HCCBOR,) and a [Placemaking Micro-Grant](#) from the REALTOR® Party helped make it a reality.

It was a real community effort. HCCBOR members prepared their proposal to the city by visiting dog parks in nearby municipalities and forming a task force that included volunteers from the local chapter of the Humane Society. The property was donated by the water company. The Parks & Recreation Department is responsible for the park's upkeep and maintenance. The City budgeted \$50,000 for the project, and HCCBOR pledged to raise another \$25,000. The [REALTOR® Party Placemaking Micro-Grant](#) got things rolling by funding a [dedicated Facebook page](#), which became a primary fundraising platform, as well as a place to share information and progress; the grant also supported the cost of fences and signs. Donations came from the water company, animal hospitals, veterinarians and many other individuals who were eager for a dog park in the area. One of the most successful fundraisers, the "Mutt Strutt," has become an annual event, to continue raising money for more canine play features.

The park is located right at a trailhead of the Hopkinsville Greenway System, a six-mile rail trail that draws fresh air-seekers to the area. While the REALTORS® spearheaded the creation of an environment that is specifically for dogs, it is a community gathering place for all to enjoy.

For the full story, see: [Hopkinsville, KY Goes to the Dogs with the Help of a Placemaking Grant](#)

REALTORS® SERVING IN A PUBLIC OFFICE WITH LAND USE RESPONSIBILITIES

The following four profiles present REALTORS® who not only manage a real estate practice but also serve their community in an official capacity that involves managing land use in their community.



**Veronica Malolos,
CCIM**

The complex and often large-scale nature of commercial real estate means that a seasoned commercial REALTOR® may be particularly well equipped with the vision and expertise that a municipal planning board needs. Veronica Malolos, CCIM, has proved this true in central Florida's Osceola County, one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation. Her longtime service helping to oversee the growth of the county, including three terms as Planning Commission Chair, is in addition to serving as 2010 President of the Osceola County Association of REALTORS® and as District 12 Vice President of Florida REALTORS®; extensive community involvement; and a notable career as a managing broker.

Her path to the Planning Commission began when Malolos attended Leadership Osceola, an experience she encourages all REALTORS® to pursue at their own local academies. As her engagement in the community increased, she came to the attention of her elected County Commissioner, who appointed Malolos to the Planning Commission when there was a vacancy for her district. She held the position for ten years, including two as Vice Chair, and the last three as Chair. After stepping down, Malolos accepted an appointment to the Osceola County Board of Adjustments, a position with a lower time commitment that keeps her 'in the game.'

As she describes the Planning Commission, "It is an important quasi-government board that plays a key role in re-shaping the community, especially through zoning; we are fortunate in Osceola County to have a very good comprehensive master plan to guide us through the next 10-20 years." While the county mandates that there be a real estate professional on the Planning Commission, it doesn't specify a commercial REALTOR®. However, Malolos asserts, "As a commercial

REALTOR®, you understand Smart Growth principles, and you are exposed to what makes re-development work. You are trained to see the big picture, and you recognize the patterns: commercial development typically follows residential development, and retail attracts retail. Commercial REALTORS® have the vision to see what growth will demand.” During her term chairing the Planning Commission, Malolos also served on NAR’s Smart Growth Advisory Board, including a year as Chair. “That benefited both boards, as I brought real-world, real-time experience to NAR, and would often find myself explaining Smart Growth principles from the bench, back home,” she recalls.

Malolos prepared for the monthly meetings by reviewing agenda items with the Planning Commission staff a day in advance, and asking lots of questions. “When those questions were asked at the meeting, I had the answers,” she reports; “There were certain applications that would bring the public out ‘with pitchforks,’ and in those cases, especially, it paid to be prepared!”

Her experience on these boards, says Malolos, has increased her skill as a commercial real estate broker:



“I bring to the table a greater understanding of what we need to do to realize a client’s goals, starting with checking the zoning status on any parcel of interest. I know what questions to ask, and the answers come back quickly, because of my strong relationships with the Planning Commission staff. This is invaluable to my clients, whether the answer is a disappointment or a happy surprise: there is big time and money saved when I am able to advise that it’s not going to be worth trying to have a parcel re-zoned; on the other hand, I have also been able to inform a developer that he would be permitted to build more units-per-lot than expected. In both cases, my clients benefit, and that’s good business.”



Asa Fleming

As Chairman of the Planning Board of Wake County, North Carolina, Asa Fleming has both a grasp of the details and a bird's eye view of all the land-use issues in the region where he lives and works as an award-winning REALTOR®. Past President of both the Raleigh Regional Association of REALTORS® and NC REALTORS®, Fleming possesses the leadership experience and boots-on-the-ground knowledge necessary to guide his community in its land-use and zoning efforts.

As he explains it, his service on the Planning Board grew from his long history of involvement with various civic campaigns and projects, serving on task forces, and building relationships. “With a real estate background, you understand what people want, you know the importance of attracting commerce to the community and finding a balance between neighborhoods and developers,” he says. “In all our planning decisions, we strive to reach an amicable middle ground and ensure that any growth is smart.”

Before his appointment to the Planning Board, Fleming served on one of its sub-committees, the City of Raleigh Appearance Commission, which oversees urban aesthetics. After six years, he was appointed to the ten-member Planning Board, itself, serving staggered two-year terms with his fellow board members, who include landscape architects, civil engineers, architects, commercial REALTORS®, and specialists in other related fields. Elected Chair in April 2022, he now presides over monthly meetings. The time commitment varies, he notes, depending on how much preparation the agenda calls for any given month.

During Fleming's tenure on the Planning Board, it has secured two major bonds: in 2016, a \$1.3B Transit Bond supported by a REALTOR® Party Smart Growth Grant; and in 2020, an \$80M Affordable Housing Bond. A \$530M Wake County School Bond will be decided in the next election.

“We're incredibly fortunate to have won the Transit Bond, especially, and we worked hard for it with a major ridership study, a lot of legwork out in the community, and determined

lobbying of some doubtful Raleigh City Council members,” says Fleming. “Wake County is consistently ranked the #1 place to live in the country (right up there with Boise!) but we had no mass transit. Now, at last, we have robust bus service and we’ll finally be getting a commuter rail train. It’ll take years, but it’s a big step in the right direction.” Most projects that come before the Planning Board are typically more modest, and Fleming enjoys engaging in problem-solving directly from the podium. “If a developer applies to increase the size of a proposed project, we look at how that will affect all parties: Are residents going to want this? Would some turn lanes or an adjusted green light cycle alleviate the increase in traffic? We’ll give their engineers suggestions, and they’ll go back to drawing board for a cost-benefit analysis.”

Service on the Planning Board has also brought Fleming an unanticipated benefit: “I am absolutely aware of what’s going on all over my county all the way to 2050, probably much more so than any other real estate professional in the community. That knowledge and investment has brought me all the work I need. These days, there’s no reason for me to go beyond the county limits.”

Along those lines, he reflects, “I wish more REALTORS® would come to these civic meetings. When I was President of NC REALTORS®, I traveled around state urging members:



‘Get involved! It’ll make you more knowledgeable! It’ll make your business better! You get to give input during the public hearing component – that gives you power!’”



Gregory S. Herb

Boyertown, Pennsylvania is a growing rural area forty miles northwest of Philadelphia, so it only makes sense that Greg Herb, who has practiced real estate there since 1979, is keenly attuned to land use issues, environmental concerns, and the principles of Smart Growth. He helps guide the efforts of his state and local community in these regards by serving on an Advisory Board of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and on Act 209 Committees of several municipalities.

“It’s important to give back, and I get satisfaction from contributing to solutions,” says Herb, whose assertion is backed up by his service as past President of his local and state REALTOR® associations, on the Board of Directors of the National Association of REALTORS®, and on numerous committees at all levels of the industry. Community organizations ranging from the YMCA to The United Way also benefit from his leadership, and ten years ago, when he saw a need, he helped establish the Foundation for Boyertown Education.

In 2019, communication with Pennsylvania’s Department of Environmental Protection regarding a commercial real estate transaction resulted in his appointment to the department’s Technical Advisory Board of Public Water Systems. Prior to accepting, Herb contacted several real estate professionals who preceded him in the post for inside information about the role, the commitment, and the expectations. Now, every quarter, he travels nearly two hours to Harrisburg for the six-hour meeting; there’s also significant prep-time involved. “It’s entirely possible that I over-prepare,” he admits. “The board deals with highly technical aspects of the state’s water systems and water quality, for example, how pfobs affect municipal water supplies. My fellow board members are scientists, environmentalists, and representatives from large water supply companies; I am the designated real estate expert, bringing practical, real-world knowledge of how these issues affect property. Still, it’s important that I understand the basics of chemistry and things like well-drilling because we’re setting standards, and sometimes developing

public policy. It's good to have a seat at the table and be in a position to offer thoughts and solutions, but in order to do so, I do plenty of homework – and sometimes that means calling on my well installers for clarification!”

At the local level, Herb serves on Act 209 Committees, which are formed by Pennsylvania municipalities to study issues related to anticipated growth, such as land use and road sufficiency. The process typically takes 18 months, and the work of the committee is, again, highly technical, assessing how a grade change or a stop sign will affect a community; the state mandates that the committee include a real estate professional. “It’s very gratifying to participate in decision-making that has a real impact on zoning and the growth of the local tax base,” he says. Over the past few decades, his acquired knowledge keeps gaining value and he finds himself passed between three or four regions to begin again, he reports – now, often chairing the committee.

From his long experience, Herb understands the two-way benefit of this kind of public service. “The way to make a difference in a community is to get involved. You may not always get the results you want, but you might just move the needle.” Besides which, he notes, participation creates opportunities:



My involvement has benefitted my real estate practice, although that’s not the reason to get involved. Volunteer your time and effort because you care, and become known as a reliable source for information. Connections, and business, will naturally follow.”



Oscar Puig-Corve

When a city is created from scratch, its City Council and Board of Planning have tremendous responsibility – and a great opportunity.

Such was the case in the Doral district of Miami-Dade County, where REALTOR® Oscar Puig-Corve moved in 2000, 15 years before it became incorporated as one of the county's thirty-four municipalities. At the time, he says, the locale was not considered a very attractive choice, but over the years, the City of Doral has become a vibrant, desirable place to live and work, with an efficient and responsive government. Puig-Corve has been deeply involved with this achievement, from his activism with One Doral, the grassroots group that advocated for incorporation, to his subsequent service on Doral's Community Council, its Community Foundation, its Economic Development Advisory Board, and the Doral Charter Review Commission. In 2020, he was elected to the four-member City of Doral Council, which governs with the Mayor and a City Manager.

Prior to incorporation, he explains, there were only two elementary schools in the Doral district, and students were bussed 40 minutes away to middle and high school. There were no parks at all, and the community relinquished \$20M in annual taxes to the county. "We rallied people to build a better community, and now we have twelve schools and a tremendous park system," he notes with pride. The City Council acts as its own Planning Board, and is guided by a thoughtful Master Plan that preserves a balance of high- and low-density areas, and commercial/industrial and residential zones, as it continues to grow. At the heart of the city, where there had once been a large two-story office park, now rises Downtown Doral, a model of Smart Growth development featuring 18-story buildings where people work, live, play, and shop – no cars necessary! A new city hall and a cultural arts center have just been added, and plans for a library are underway. Further out, the City Council recently re-zoned a warehouse district with an overlay to allow for the development of an arts district complete with gallery spaces, boutiques, and cafés.

Having campaigned for a seat on the City Council without success in 2010, Puig-Corve threw his hat back in the ring in 2019. “It’s hard to run for office, and extremely time-consuming,” he cautions. “It takes a toll on work and personal life; I don’t believe I sold a single property that year.” But he did win the election.

“Serving on the Council is very rewarding,” he says. “I get to know members of my community and learn what they like and what concerns them. I have the opportunity to share my knowledge, solve problems, and help shape the growth of the city.” The City Council meets twice a month, reviewing the agenda a day in advance with the City Manager. Depending on the complexity of the items, preparation might take anywhere from an hour to a full day; regardless, notes Puig-Corve, “every two weeks, my week is effectively short by two-to-three days.”

He advises anyone interested in running for local office to go to the public meetings, citing this as the best way to gain an understanding of the civic process. In fact, he says, meeting attendance has value to all residents of a municipality:



Local government can affect your life in a quick, decisive way. It can change your business, or your life, in a minute. Even if no one attends, proposals will either pass or not pass; so, if you have an opinion about it, the only way to have an effect is to speak up and participate!”



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