



**CITY OF UNIVERSITY PLACE**  
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE**



**MAIN STREET AND SMART GROWTH PRIMER**

**Introduction**

Many of the ideas and possible strategies that the Task Force has been discussing at its meetings have referenced land use and development principles and approaches to support the community's vision and enhance the quality of life of residents. Some of these principles are reflected in the foundation of the Main Street Program and Smart Growth Approach to development and land use.

The purpose of this primer is to provide an overview Main Street and Smart Growth principles and approaches to development, summarize some statewide and national applications, and offer some suggestions for implementation.

- The Main Street Program is primarily focused on developing local, community-based commercial district revitalization.
- Smart Growth is a broader based approach that looks at land use, including development of center to a community and the surrounding area with pedestrian- and transit-oriented infrastructure to create livable, walkable communities.

Some of the design elements outlined in the Smart Growth approach and Main Street Program may not be applicable to the University Place setting and current situation. It may be possible, however, to apply some of the design standards and elements to specific areas of the City in order to promote the types of uses and development described by Smart Growth and Main Street approaches.

**Smart Growth and Main Street In Practice**

In some cases, these models and approaches are most successful when applied to new, developing communities. However, redevelopment efforts have also been successful in established downtown cores. The scale of projects varies, as does the size of jurisdictions utilizing the Main Street and Smart Growth approaches to development. In most cases, local planning officials offer support and encouragement of Smart Growth policies and Main Street programs through planning policies and flexible zoning. In some cases, support is also offered through financing or development of public-private partnerships.

There are many different ways to use and apply the integrated approaches to development that are outlined in the somewhat similar Main Street and Smart Growth principles. Each of these models promotes community vision as a springboard for developing a sense of place and centered, compact development. Relying on common vision and community identity, the models seek to use and promote the community's strengths in the planning and development of a combination of mixed use and open spaces serving the needs of businesses, residents and workers. Building more compactly can lead to lower infrastructure and development costs, more efficient land use and preservation of environmentally-sensitive areas, creating more opportunities for pedestrian access.

Proponents of Smart Growth and communities with Main Street programs have cited reduced vacancy rates and increased sales tax revenues and property values. Communities have also leveraged private investment after making investments in downtown areas, applying flexible zoning, bringing storefronts to the street level and creating reasons for pedestrians to be in the area through events and development of civic centers or plazas.

## **The Main Street Program<sup>1</sup>**

Main Street, developed by the National Main Street Center, is a philosophy, a program and an approach to downtown commercial district revitalization. It is aimed at providing a flexible framework for using the traditional assets of a downtown area (unique architecture or locally-owned businesses) to work as a catalyst for economic growth and community pride. There are four points to the approach and eight guiding principles.

The Main Street Program has been credited with bringing residents and businesses back to city centers around the nation, using public investments in street improvements, lighting and pocket parks to leverage investment by the private sector in façade improvements. Successful programs point to increased sale tax revenues, declining commercial vacancies, arrival of new businesses and additional job creation.

Usually, the Main Street program is initiated by community leaders (both private and public) and implemented through a hired manager of a newly formed, independent non-profit organization, its board and committees (usually structured around the four approaches). This group develops a long-term, incremental strategy to strengthen its commercial activity and improve its buildings after completing an examination of the commercial district's needs and opportunities. Programs tend to be more successful when funded primarily by local public and private sources.

### ***Prescriptive, Comprehensive, Integrated Four Point Approach***

1. Organization – build a strong organizational framework to work together in renewal of downtown; should be well-represented by business and property owners, bankers, citizens, public officials, chambers of commerce, and other local economic organizations.
2. Promotion – create excitement and customer traffic downtown through festivals, parades, retail events, image development campaigns.
3. Design – enhance physical appearance of commercial district.
4. Economic Restructuring – analyze market forces and develop long-term solutions. Examples of these types of activities include: recruiting new business, creatively converting unused space for new uses, and sharpening the competitiveness of traditional merchants.

For more information, see:  
<http://mainstreet.org/AboutMainStreet/msapproach.htm>

### ***Eight Guiding Principles***

1. Comprehensive – not just a single project focus but an on-going series of initiatives.
2. Incremental – small projects make a big difference and show that things are happening.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: National Main Street Center, Washington State's Office of Trade and Economic Development – Downtown Revitalization Program, local Main Street Programs in Washington State Communities.

3. Self Help – local leadership breeds long-term success and fosters community involvement and commitment.
4. Public/Private Partnership – support and expertise from both sectors is needed.
5. Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets – unique offerings and local assets.
6. Quality – throughout organization, from storefront design to promotional campaigns and special events.
7. Change – help shift public perceptions/practices, community attitudes/habits.
8. Action-Oriented – frequent and visible changes in look and activities of commercial district help to reinforce perception of positive change and remind community that effort is underway.

### ***Main Street Programs in Washington***

Washington State's Office of Trade and Economic Development (OTED) has supported a Downtown Revitalization Program since 1984. The program offers resource materials, technical assistance and training in downtown management and economic revitalization basics, and certification in the Main Street Program. In 2000, there were eleven certified Main Street communities in Washington. In that year, the communities saw "incredible increases in downtown reinvestment by the private sector including: 284 acquisitions, expansions, and new businesses; 877 new jobs; 154 buildings rehabilitated; and \$36,882,325 in building rehabilitation and construction." (Downtown Dispatch, January 2001, OTED.)

There are certified Main Street Programs operating in the following communities: Auburn, Enumclaw, Kent, Pasco, Port Angeles, Port Townsend, Puyallup, Vancouver, Walla Walla, Wenatchee, and Winslow. Many organizations across the State are participating at some level and in some fashion with OTED and the Main Street approach. Most of these programs emphasize creating opportunities for people to come downtown through events and farmers markets. Each community effort is tailored to the area and has a different focus. In Puyallup, for example, property owners purchased decorative street lights and other amenities through a Local Improvement District. The program also developed a gift catalogue that allows individuals or businesses to purchase benches or bike racks, street trees or hanging baskets, or sponsorship of an event. The Downtown Walla Walla, Foundation has an emphasis on historic preservation and has developed a voluntary design review process for all downtown area re-development and improvements. The Foundation also offers grants and loans for improvements and has developed a database tool to match available commercial property with businesses interested in locating in the downtown area.

### **The Smart Growth Approach<sup>2</sup>**

Smart Growth is growth that is economically sound, environmentally friendly and supportive to community livability. The approach is primarily concerned with the community's sense of quality of life, design, housing and transportation issues. Smart Growth is a long-term community development investment strategy and approach that emphasizes local and regional collaboration to provide town-centered, pedestrian- and transit-oriented development with a greater mix of housing, commercial and retail uses while preserving open space. Smart Growth works to capitalize on a sense of place and generate reinvestment in existing communities, starting from a shared community vision of what is

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<sup>2</sup> Sources: Urban Land Institute materials and Smart Growth case studies, National Association of Home Builders, Smart Growth Network materials, Local Government Commission

currently valued about the community and where they want to go. The approach recognizes that each community is different and one approach may not work for all communities.

### **Ten Principles of Smart Growth**

1. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices – housing for all income levels
2. Create walkable neighborhoods
3. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration – responding to community's sense of how and where it wants to grow
4. Foster distinctive, attractive places with strong sense of place – community crafts a set of development and construction standards that response to community values.
5. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective – to be successful, must be embraced by private sector.
6. Mix land uses – integrate into communities
7. Preserve open space, natural beauty and critical environmental areas
8. Provide variety of transportation choices
9. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities (those already served by infrastructure)
10. Take advantage of compact building design

For more information, see:  
<http://smartgrowth.org/about/overview.asp>  
and  
<http://www.lgc.org/>

Elements of Smart Growth are present in many existing communities and can be applied to development of new communities or re-development of existing communities. The Urban Land Institute (ULI) profiled twelve areas in its Smart Growth Case Studies. Often, local officials support mixed-use by creating new zoning districts to accommodate the development. In addition, just over half of the nationally recognized case studies (seven) provide examples of public-private partnership to help finance the development, including:

- Investment of public resources in reclamation and liability protection at a contaminated brownfield site, transformed into a multi-use development with high-end housing, public park with office, light industrial retail and recreation uses.
- Developer used low-income housing tax credits, tax exempt bonds from a municipal housing authority, and a loan from the municipal development cooperation to redevelop a brownfield into high density affordable housing.
- Community sponsorship – one project was developed through a joint venture of a nonprofit affordable housing organization and a municipal housing authority; donations of labor and materials reduced project cost by approximately 15%. Another project had a community health care provider acting as a sponsor of the development.
- Public funding for signalizing intersection to connect development to freeway.
- Other funding mechanisms: tax credits, redevelopment action grants, industrial revenue bonds from local industrial development board.

Some specific Smart Growth strategies include development of a compact a city center, industry clusters or concentrations of inter-connected businesses, and technology infrastructure. In infill or brownfield developments, two or more of the following uses are combined in a compact area:

- Parks/recreation uses or open space
- Office, medical office, light-industrial, retail uses (from specialty to big box), storage facilities
- Affordable and market rate single-family, town houses, lofts, and apartments

- Pedestrian and transit-oriented features (easy access to bus and future rail/trolley lines, bicycle storage room)
- Historic buildings and new construction; energy efficient design/construction

Because of its emphasis on creating mixed income housing, Smart Growth is viewed as a method for increasing access to and the quantity of quality affordable housing units in a community. Successful land use, planning, and community strategies, and other financing mechanisms to help develop have been documented in “Affordable Housing and Smart Growth: Making the Connection” (available at <http://www.neighborhoodcoalition.org/AH%20and%20SG.pdf>). In addition, the National Association of Home Builders (NAB) has developed a policy on Smart Growth that is focused on meeting housing needs in smarter ways. NAB promotes communities working toward combining mixed-use development, higher densities, range of home prices and variety of housing types, neighborhoods that emphasize walking, town centers and public spaces.

### **Creating Livable Communities and Enhancing Walkability<sup>3</sup>**

The Smart Growth and Livability movements propose using design elements to develop density, a mix of land uses, pedestrian- and transit-oriented central focus in order to reform sprawling development patterns. In urban environments, applications of these principles are focused on rebuilding older cities and creating vibrant city centers in new cities. In existing suburban environments, efforts to build walkable, neighborhood commercial centers are focused on building a heart of a community and a locus for neighborhood services, stores, restaurants and transit hubs.

As the walkability of a community is also an important criteria to its livability, the Local Government Commission’s Center for Livable Communities has produced some material describing the “Economic Benefits of Walkable Communities” ([http://www.lgc.org/freepub/PDF/Land\\_Use/focus/walk\\_to\\_money.pdf](http://www.lgc.org/freepub/PDF/Land_Use/focus/walk_to_money.pdf)). Design features of successful livable communities have shown the economic benefits of walkable communities and include systems of interconnected (often narrow) streets, sidewalks, a mix of residential, retail and office land uses, and street trees, short front yard set-backs, front porches and rear garages accessed by alleys. Walkability is understood to attract the smaller, decentralized firms of the new economy, promote interaction and networking, draw in tourists and be good for retail sales.

The Ahwahnee Principles, which form the basis of the Local Government Commission’s work on livable, sustainable communities, address economic development and issues of people and community, community design, transportation, and the environment, energy and waste prevention. Principles include:

- Create complete and integrated communities containing housing, shops, workplaces, schools, parks and civic facilities essential to the daily life of residents.
- A community should contain a diversity of housing types to enable citizens from a wide range of economic levels and ages groups to live within its boundaries.

For more information, see:  
<http://www.walkable.org/>  
 and for specific implementation standards  
<http://www.walkable.org/trbpaper.pdf>  
 (UP is profiled in “Case Studies and Best Practices” section)

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<sup>3</sup> Sources: Walkable Communities, Inc. and the Local Government Commission (a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership organization, composed of elected officials, California city and county staff, and other interested individuals.)

- The community should contain an ample supply of specialized open space in the form of squares, greens and parks whose frequent use is encouraged through placement and design.
- The size of the community should be such that housing, jobs, daily needs and other activities are within easy walking distance of one another.
- The location and character of the community should be consistent with a larger transit network
- The community should have a center focus that combines commercial, civic, cultural and recreational uses. Regional institutions and services should be located in the urban core.
- Public spaces should be designed to encourage the attention and presence of people at all hours of the day and night.
- Streets, pedestrian paths and bike paths should contribute to a system of fully-connected and interesting routes to all destinations. Their design should encourage pedestrian and bicycle use by being small and spatially defined by buildings, trees and lighting; and by discouraging high speed traffic.
- Materials and methods of construction should be specific to the region, exhibiting continuity of history and culture and compatibility with the climate to encourage the development of local character and community identity.
- Each community or cluster of communities should have a well-defined edge, such as agricultural greenbelts or wildlife corridors, permanently protected from development.
- Economic Development should include government, business, education and the community working together to create a vibrant local economy, through a long-term investment strategy that: encourages local enterprise, serves the needs of local residents, workers and businesses, promotes stable employment and revenues by building on local competitive advantages, etc.
- Create industry clusters – identify specific gaps and niches local economies can fill, promote diversified range of specialized industry clusters.
- Support wired communities – use and invest in technology to support ability of local businesses to succeed, provide open access to information and resources

Typically, local governments have helped to build livable communities by planning proactively, assuring public participation, using public facilities and development to attract investment, assisting with project financing or providing in-kind assistance, zoning for mixed use and higher-density development, encouraging rehabilitation, streamlining the permit process, and providing public services.

### ***Principles of Walkability***

According to experts in the field, walkable communities can have one or more of the following elements ([www.lgc.org/freepub/land\\_use/articles/ten\\_keys.html](http://www.lgc.org/freepub/land_use/articles/ten_keys.html)):

- Compact and lively town center that contains housing and a variety of stores offering products and services.
- Pedestrian and bicycle linkages that make it possible and practical for people of all ages to walk or bicycle to parks, schools, libraries and commercial centers from residential areas.
- Neighborhood scaled development – to walking radius of ¼ miles (allows people to get across area in 10 minutes).
- Street designs, like Bridgeport Way, – for safe and efficient movement of all vehicles (including bicycle lanes), interaction between people with comfortable, connected five foot wide sidewalks and compact intersections. Multiple safe and easy crossings that are separated by

300 feet. Speeds on neighborhood and main streets should be kept low to be conducive to walking. Local streets keep traffic moving with fewer stop signs and traffic signals delays.

- Built public space and parks designed to support and attract all ages
- Land use and transportation uses benefit each other, are the proper size and scale and provide development of mixed uses serving mixed incomes.

Specific methods for promoting pedestrian-friendly environment and increased walkability include:

- Reduced vehicle speeds
- Interconnectedness/pedestrian passages to other uses (parks, shopping)
- Mix of residential, retail, and office land use
- A defined gateway
- Streetscape improvements: widened sidewalks, lighting, colored paving stones in sidewalks and streets, trees, benches, curbs bulbed out at intersections (creates slalom-like pattern to slow traffic)

### **Summary of Key Issues and Ideas for University Place**

Smart Growth and Main Street offer some specific approaches to development to help communities promote community identity, quality of life and center through strategic orientation to design and development. The City of University Place is currently applying a number of the Smart Growth principles in its approach to and plans for development, and it may be possible to apply others (e.g. design standards) to specific areas of the City as University Place plans for its future.

The Task Force can further the City's efforts to-date by helping to craft a community vision and recommendations for development of commercial centers, roles and suggestions for public-private partnerships. In addition, the Task Force may choose to apply some ideas specific to re-alignment of suburban business districts to model the community's vision by recommending efforts to:

- Provide interconnection between the City's business districts
- Increase pedestrian activity by linking centers via pedestrian paths, creating downtown-focused events, and more off-hour use
- Determine with the "center" focus should be and recommend density increases there
- Build to street alignment with little separation between building and breaking up super block arrangements
- Develop shared parking to decrease reliance on vehicles.
- Encourage clustering of interconnect uses such as office, retail and residential

## ATTACHMENT 1: GLOSSARY AND DEFINITIONS

**Affordable housing** is generally described as housing that is priced at 30% median income of a community. Several jurisdictions in Washington State have incorporated these measures into their development standards.

**Centers** are compact, well-defined areas to which a mix of higher density growth or intensive land uses are directed, connected and served by an efficient, transit-oriented, multi-modal transportation system. (PSRC)

**Cluster development** groups homes or lots tightly on the more buildable portions of a site, leaving more open space to preserve natural features such as trees, valleys and steep slopes (NAHB's Smart Growth Report). This concept is also known as Open Space Development or Conservation Development.

**Compact communities** are often in urban locations outside of centers which offer transportation, housing and shopping choices that reduce the need for automobile travel and support an efficient development pattern. (PSRC)

**High density development** achieves more compact development because it places a higher overall number of units on the same amount of land. Higher densities can be achieved by building homes on smaller lots, by building attached home (row houses or townhomes) or by building multifamily structures (apartment buildings). Higher densities make it easier to create walkable communities and efficient connections to transit services. (NAHB's Smart Growth Report)

**Livable communities** are neighborhoods that include a range of housing options, jobs, commercial services, and recreational opportunities all within easy access of transit services. These are communities in which residents, workers, and shoppers can get around without the need of an automobile. (PSRC)

**Mixed use development** combine several uses on one site in a coordinated way including office, retail, hotel or residential (NAHB's Smart Growth Report).

**Transit-oriented development** emphasizes walking, a mix of housing types and commercial uses, town centers and public spaces. Transit-oriented development (also called TOD) refers to pedestrian-friendly land development activities that are built within easy walking distance of a major transit station. TOD's generally include a compact mix of different land uses that are oriented to public walkways and automobile parking is minimized to promote pedestrian activity. (PSRC)

**Sustainable development**, also referred to as "sustainable communities," implies that growth and development occur in a manner that does not degrade and is balanced with the preservation and management of the natural environment and resources, and is supported by physical infrastructure and financial resources. Sustainable communities function within physical and biological limits of the environment, and support long-term use and reuse of natural resources. (PSRC)