

City of Austin: Smart Growth Initiative

Issue Area: Community Planning

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Smart growth is one side of the “sprawl/smart growth” coin that is at the heart of many cities’ community plan. Recently Smart growth has become identified as a major growth pattern that runs concurrent to aging in place. On the other side, Urban sprawl tends to accomplish the opposite goals of aging in place and is the pattern of growth typified by a loss of open space, congested traffic, and a reliance on automobiles to get around. Communities not built with smart growth design are not designed for easily accessible transportation or walking. Austin, TX has joined a recent phenomenon as one of the first cities to start a major non-sprawl initiative. Austin’s initiatives extend to almost every part of the government. Programs envelope such things as neighborhood planning, infill and redevelopment amendments, downtown redevelopment programs, and open space preservation.

Smart Growth describes the efforts of communities to manage and direct growth in a way that minimizes damage to the environment and builds livable, sustainable towns and cities. Austin’s main reason for using smart growth is to compensate and prevent negative environmental, economic, and social impacts of its fast growth rate. The City’s population is expected to grow by nineteen thousand residents annually from 1990 to 2010. The realization that a major change is needed to accommodate these people for a long-term basis has placed emphasis on their initiative. Austin has developed three major goals as part of their initiative: determine how and where they grow, improve their quality of life, and enhance their tax base.

The city has created ten major programs that will make up their Smart Growth initiative;

- Neighborhood Planning
- Downtown Redevelopment Program
- Smart Growth Initiative Programs
- Traditional Neighborhood Development
- Green Builder Program
- Infill & Redevelopment Amendments
- Open Space Preservation
- Corridor Planning
- Sustainable Communities Initiative
- Mueller Municipal Airport Redevelopment

Several of these programs are particularly friendly to aging in place. The Downtown Redevelopment Program seeks to redevelop a vibrant downtown that mixes residential, entertainment, and business uses. This would provide a mini community within the city where older adults would not need to travel far in order to accomplish daily tasks. The Open Space Preservation program will enable more public spaces and recreational options for older adults and Corridor Planning will help to make public transportation more efficient and accessible for older adults. Austin's Smart Growth Initiative is an example of how aging in place issues can be addressed through a larger citywide agenda that benefits the ageless community.

Related Resources:

“Smart Growth Initiative.” City of Austin. <<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/smartgrowth/>>.

Smart Growth Online. <<http://www.smartgrowth.org/>>.

“Congress for the New Urbanism.” <<http://www.cnu.org/>>.