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PRIORITY GROWTH CENTERS

Description:

A designated Priority Growth Center provides a mechanism for concentrating investment in areas that are targeted for growth and development, and establishing a process that will effectively reduce costs and delays in the permitting and approval of development.

A Priority Growth Center typically incorporates a mix of uses (including retail, offices, services, commercial, civic, recreational, industrial, residential, public spaces, gardens, village squares, churches, schools, and other elements) within a densely developed, compact area. A center encourages land-development density that is greater than existing allowable densities in other parts of the municipality; can encourage in-fill development and redevelopment of historic areas; is conducive to walking, biking, and other modes of non-vehicular or small-motor vehicular transit; and supports use of public transit. The mixed-use and compact development characterizing a Priority Growth Center provides formal and informal places to gather, thereby promoting social interaction among community members.

In some cases, regional and municipal centers are once-thriving areas that have fallen into decline; while they have underutilized structures and resources, they may be selected as a priority growth center on the basis of their existing sewer and water infrastructure, available public transportation, close proximity to other developed areas, and the belief that, if redeveloped, additional positive growth will occur around them.

Village centers, hamlets, downtowns, Main Streets, urban cores, historic districts, former Brownfield sites/Brownfield Opportunity Areas, and older first-tier suburbs often present ideal locations for targeted dense and mixed-use Priority Growth Centers, and areas adjacent and connected to these centers can also be considered as part of the priority area. In addition, newly developed town, regional, or city centers may also be considered Priority Growth Centers if they are built and/or planned as compact, mixed-use development and include activity centers.

Benefits:

For residents:

- The compact character of Priority Growth Centers provides easier access to transit options and maximizes opportunities to use alternative mobility modes such as walking, biking, and small-motor vehicles—aspects of a walkable community.
- Proximity of a mix of community elements in a targeted development center, as well as proximity of housing to the center, allows easier, quicker, more efficient access to the features and amenities needed to conduct routine activities of daily

life—allowing frail older people and people with both chronic and temporary disabilities (who may regularly require assistance with accomplishing routine daily trips and tasks) to conduct these tasks with less/no assistance, thereby achieving a greater sense of independence, competency, and self-esteem that accompanies decreased dependency on others.

For communities:

- Targeted, concentrated growth presents the ideal opportunity for compact, mixed-use, vibrant, walkable communities with access to public amenities, such as transit, libraries, restaurants, offices, and many others—the elements of community design that favor age-integrated development.
- By utilizing existing infrastructure and concentrating capital improvement resources in a compact area, a community can realize efficiencies in service costs.
- By directing development inward toward municipal and regional centers, Priority Growth Centers can reverse the tendency to develop on suburban and rural Greenfields and farm lands, thus protecting vital open space and natural resources.
- The potential for utilization of existing housing stock in priority growth areas and the creative reuse of other historic structures can help create more opportunities for affordable housing located in vibrant areas with access to goods and services.
- Tax credits are available for commercial and some residential properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Redeveloping existing centers, as opposed to Greenfield development, is rarely controversial.

Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:

- Conventional funding for redevelopment and Brownfield projects is often more difficult to secure than funding for Greenfield development.
- Asbestos and lead abatement can increase the cost of projects involving the rehabilitation of older buildings.
- Low-density, single-use zoning areas can be difficult to re-zone; and public opposition to, and misperceptions about, density add to the difficulty.

Resource—examples and ordinances:

- Smart Growth Vermont—*Smart Growth Vermont: Summary of Smart Growth Policies and Legislation*: www.smartgrowthvermont.org/help/policies/.

- Genesee County, NY, Department of Planning—*Genesee County Smart Growth Plan* (May 9, 2001): <http://www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/30475/Genesee-County-Smart-Growth-Plan.pdf>.
- Orange County, NY, Department of Planning—*Orange County Comprehensive Plan: Strategies for Quality Communities* (adopted April 11, 2003; updated 2004 and 2010):
<http://www.orangecountygov.com/content/124/1362/1460/4304/default.aspx>
- Ulster County, NY, Planning Board—*Ulster County Open Space Plan*:
www.co.ulster.ny.us/planning/open.html.
- Dutchess County, NY, Department of Planning and Development—*Dutchess County Greenway Communities Report – Priority Growth Areas*:
www.co.dutchess.ny.us/EnvironmentLandPres/growthareas.pdf.

Resource—written and web:

- (November, 1997), "Smart Growth: Designating Priority Funding Areas," *Managing Maryland's Growth*. Baltimore, MD: Maryland Office of Planning.
- Jeremy Stone (2005), *Breaking Ground: Planning and Building in Priority Growth Districts, A Guide for Local Leaders*. White Plains, NY: Pace University, Law School, Land Use Law Center.
- (2002), *Growth Centers: Recommendations for Encouraging Growth and Investment in Economically and Environmentally Sound Locations in Rhode Island*, A Report of the Governor's Growth Planning Council. Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and Economic Development Corporation.
- (October, 2003), *Models Projects: The Report of a Partnership Project for Achieving Smart Growth in Commercial and Industrial Development*. Providence, RI: Vermont Forum on Sprawl/Vermont Business Roundtable.