



THE NATIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD COALITION

Neighborhoods, Regions, and Smart Growth Project

September 2000

SMART GROWTH, BETTER NEIGHBORHOODS: COMMUNITIES LEADING THE WAY

From Los Angeles to Little Rock and from Austin to Boston, sprawl is creating patterns of too much growth in certain areas and not enough in others. Rapid development on the outskirts of metropolitan areas has led to less green space, more traffic congestion, and overcrowded classrooms; it has also led to a loss of opportunity, population, and funds for critical services in inner cities and older towns and suburbs. Concern about the high cost of sprawl is spreading, however, as are new ideas about smarter ways to grow.

In July 1999, with support from the Ford Foundation and the US Environmental Protection Agency, the National Neighborhood Coalition (NNC) launched Neighborhoods, Regions and Smart Growth, a project to bring the perspectives of lower-income neighborhoods and community-based organizations into national and local conversations about regional growth and sprawl. Low-income neighborhoods and communities of color have an important stake in smart growth. Sprawl has left residents of inner city and older suburban neighborhoods isolated from the social and economic mainstream. For many it means long commutes by public transit to jobs in fast-growing suburban centers, exposure to environmental hazards, neighborhood disinvestment and abandonment, and unwanted forms of development. Rural communities and small towns are also being affected and are struggling to find new opportunities for residents as traditional jobs and industry disappear, town centers decline, and unique aspects of their cultural and natural heritage are threatened.

The smart growth movement, which is gaining momentum across the country, is not just about fighting sprawl but is also about proposing an alter-

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native — development that better utilizes existing infrastructure and is environmentally responsible, fiscally sound, and socially equitable. Smart growth provides a new opportunity to address the persistent challenges facing low-income inner city neighborhoods and older suburbs by redirecting growth and investment back into existing communities. Community development corporations and other community, neighborhood, and faith-based organizations play a major role in the revitalization of inner-city and older neighborhoods and are an important part of the smart growth movement. They bring to the process a critical ingredient — community involvement, particularly those communities that have benefited the least from recent economic growth and new development. Smart growth policies will be enacted regardless of whether community groups are involved, but without their participation unintended adverse effects, such as displacement resulting from rising property values and rapid gentrification, are possible. When community groups do participate, however, residents of lower-income urban and rural areas are much more likely to benefit.

The purpose of this report is to share the experiences and lessons of community-based organizations that have recognized the impact of sprawl on their neighborhoods and begun to do something about it. It summarizes the key findings of 15 case studies compiled by the National Neighborhood Coalition in its publication, Smart Growth, Better Neighborhoods: Communities Leading the Way (2000). The organizations featured in the case studies are community-based, nonprofit advocates for and practitioners of equitable smart growth. They tell their stories of struggle against blight and gentrification and provide thoughtful suggestions on how communities can use to their advantage the most promising practices of smart growth and community development. Their activities embody the National Neighborhood Coalition's Neighborhood Principles for Smart Growth, which promote a strong community voice in growth decisions and more equitable distribution of regional resources among all communities (see Neighborhood Principles below). They repre-

sent a much larger universe of organizations and efforts that focus on community leadership, mobilization and empowerment, and neighborhoods asserting their voices in discussions about transportation investment, school locales and affordable housing, and the need for open space, access to natural resources, and environmental quality.

Revitalizing low-income neighborhoods has been the domain of community-based organizations for dozens of years. In many instances, the efforts described in Smart Growth, Better Neighborhoods are not entirely new, but what is new is that for the groups highlighted, the horizons have shifted. Their work has gone beyond neighborhood boundaries and taken on regional significance because of their understanding that neighborhood and region are inextricably connected. These examples suggest both more inclusive thinking about smart growth and broader approaches to community development. Powerful visions of the future derive from community development that looks beyond the immediate neighborhood to the region (as a source of both problems and solutions) and smart growth that looks beyond preserving open space to reviving neighborhoods. This vision is one of growth that is environmentally and economically sustainable and is also a potent tool for achieving equity for all American communities.

COMMUNITIES LEADING THE WAY: THE ISSUES, THE ORGANIZATIONS

The National Neighborhood Coalition and its Project Advisory Committee (see p. 14) worked together to select 15 groups from around the country to illustrate through a range of strategies, issues, goals, and projects what smart growth means for low-income communities. Collectively, they tell the story of sprawl and neighborhood decline, but they also show that the commitment of neighborhood leaders and community-based organizations is a powerful force for change. Their experiences prove that with information, organizing, strategic partnering, and a certain amount of perseverance it is possible to change the tide of disinvestment and neighborhood abandonment and restore community and opportunity.

NNC NEIGHBORHOOD PRINCIPLES FOR SMART GROWTH

Smart Growth promises new forms of growth and development that redirects investment into existing communities and combines greater fiscal and environmental responsibility with more livable communities. In order to be truly smart, growth strategies require regional alliances and coordination and must incorporate an equitable, neighborhood-focused approach that links low-income neighborhoods to regional economies and brings the benefits of growth to all communities.

1. All neighborhoods and communities should have a fair share of the benefits as well as responsibilities of growth.
2. Growth should meet the economic, environmental, and social needs of low-income and other communities.
3. Low-income neighborhoods and communities of color should have a strong voice in decisions about growth.
4. Growth should not displace low-income residents or people of color in urban or rural areas from their homes, livelihoods, or communities.
5. Growth strategies should promote racial, economic and ethnic integration.
6. Growth strategies should make use of the human, economic and physical assets within communities.

COMMUNITIES LEADING THE WAY CASE STUDY ORGANIZATIONS

In August 1999, the National Neighborhood Coalition released a call for nominations for community-based organizations working to address the effects of sprawl on their communities. The Coalition's Project Advisory Committee and Board of Directors selected 15 organizations from among 170 nominations from groups across the country working on everything from brownfield redevelopment to housing for the homeless. The groups that were selected represent a wide range of strategies and goals. There are many excellent examples of organizations addressing these or similar issues.

Alliance for Metropolitan Stability

Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN
Inclusionary Housing Campaign

Bay Area Transportation and Land Use Coalition

San Francisco Bay Region, CA
Campaign to Restore Transit Funding

Bethel New Life

Chicago, IL
Transit Oriented and Focused Area Developments

BREAD

Columbus, OH
Access to Jobs Campaign and Jubilee Housing Campaign

Citizens Planning and Housing Association

Baltimore, MD
Campaign for Regional Solutions

Coastal Enterprises, Inc.

Wiscasset, ME
Sustainable Economic Development Initiative

Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley

Bethlehem, PA
Lehigh Valley Spirit of Investment Campaign

El Concilio

Austin, TX
Neighborhood Land Use Plan

Emerson Park Development Corporation

East St. Louis, IL
Comprehensive Neighborhood Revitalization

Handmade in America

Asheville, NC
Rural Leadership Development Initiative

New Kensington Community Development Corporation

Philadelphia, PA
Open Space Program

New Schools - Better Neighborhoods

Los Angeles, CA
Civic Engagement Demonstration Project

Nos Quedamos, The Point CDC, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice

South Bronx, NY
Campaign to Decommission the Sheridan Expressway

Sustainable Little Rock

Little Rock, AR
Anti-Sprawl Campaign

Sustainable Roxbury

Roxbury, MA
Transportation, Development, and Environment Initiative

These case studies take us from devastated inner cities, through gentrifying neighborhoods, to older inner-ring suburbs and on into rural communities. The organizations vary in their geographic focus: some are single community development corporations in urban neighborhoods, like the New Kensington CDC in Philadelphia, the Emerson Park Development Corporation in East St. Louis, and Bethel New Life in West Garfield Park, Chicago; others are regional coalitions, like the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability in Minneapolis–St. Paul, the Citizens Planning and Housing Association in Baltimore, and BREAD in Columbus, Ohio. One is a statewide non-profit, Coastal Enterprises, Inc. in Maine.

These organizations and coalitions are working on initiatives at a variety of levels, from individual neighborhood plans to campaigns spanning city and suburban neighborhoods. Whatever their scope, all have recognized the importance of the connection between neighborhood agendas and the larger regional picture. They realize that cooperation across jurisdictional lines and specific issue areas is necessary to bring investment and revitalization back to their communities, to achieve regional equity, and to curb sprawl.

These groups all have a base in community organizing and education, and all share advocacy for low-income neighborhoods and communities of color as an integral part of their work. In many

ways these organizations are typical of others found throughout the country, but for a variety of reasons they have moved beyond traditional community development to focus on regional issues and strategies for smart growth.

Environment

Environmental issues have a profound effect on the health and quality of life of residents of inner cities and other lower-income communities. Several of the case study organizations are working on environmental issues, including open-space management, better access to parks, and development that does not threaten the health of residents. In Philadelphia, the New Kensington Community Development Corporation is stopping the illegal dumping of trash in its neighborhood and reclaiming littered, abandoned lots as parks, gardens, and side yards. In Boston, the Sustainable Roxbury Coalition has been instrumental in involving residents in the re-siting and redesign of a proposed parking garage and other plans that threaten neighborhood air quality and pedestrian safety. Coalition members acted out of concern about the connection between soaring asthma rates and traffic congestion. In the South Bronx, Nos Quedamos, The Point CDC, and Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice are working together to decommission an underused highway that blocks neighborhood access to parks and waterfront areas and threatens the health of residents.

Transportation

Improved public transportation is another area of vital importance to neighborhoods. In Columbus, Ohio, and Baltimore, Maryland, coalitions have campaigned for better and expanded bus routes to take central city workers to jobs in the suburbs. The Bay Area Land Use and Transportation Coalition in California worked for a more participatory, alternative regional transportation plan that would better meet the needs of low-income bus and transit riders. Both the Emerson Park Development Corporation in East St. Louis and Bethel New Life in Chicago have developed plans for their neighborhoods that rely on transit stations as the focal point of revitalization efforts.

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is a key component of smart growth. Affordability across a region helps to prevent the isolation of low-income residents and allows workers to live close to jobs. In the Minneapolis–St. Paul region, the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability worked to get an inclusionary housing bill passed in the state legislature. This legislation provides incentives to builders who set aside a certain percentage of housing units as affordable homes in new developments. In Columbus, BREAD is promoting a three-pronged approach to providing affordable housing in the metro area through the creation of an Affordable Housing Trust Fund, adoption of an ordinance requiring developers to include affordable housing in new projects, and development of a Housing Reinvestment Plan for the central city.

Schools

Education and schools have emerged as an important part of the regional growth equation. Poor performing schools are indicators of neighborhoods in trouble and contribute to flight to the suburbs. In Los Angeles, New Schools – Better Neighborhoods is working to permanently alter the Los Angeles Unified School District’s approach to siting, selecting, designing, and programming schools by involving neighborhood residents in the decision-making process from beginning to end. They are linking smart growth with smart schools by creating small, community-centered schools that serve as neighborhood anchors, providing a range of services that can be used by all.

Planning and Land Use

Some organizations are addressing the broader topics of planning and land-use policies. El Concilio, a Mexican-American coalition of neighborhood associations in East Austin, Texas is pushing for more community participation in the city’s planning practices and equal treatment for Austin’s low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. The coalition worked successfully to get a zoning overlay amendment passed that requires developers to present their plans to

residents and neighborhood associations prior to beginning construction. The Sustainable Little Rock Coalition devised a citywide campaign to counter sprawl with sustainable growth policies. The coalition's comprehensive agenda includes strategies for infill development in inner city neighborhoods, an open housing policy, preservation of green space, and enhanced public transportation.

Regional Representation

Several organizations are working to get a seat at the regional table for themselves and other community-based groups. In Baltimore, the Citizens Planning and Housing Association undertook the Campaign for Regional Solutions to engage citizens in developing and pursuing an agenda of strategies and reforms that hold promise for ensuring the long-term vitality of the Baltimore metropolitan region. The campaign's first policy objectives focused on regional transportation planning and investment and regional tax-base sharing to reduce fiscal disparities among jurisdictions. The Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, which serves low-income residents of the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania, worked with corporate leadership to develop a strategic plan based on the core assumption that the region could not survive

without healthy cities. The plan is a progressive document that calls for, among other things, tax-base sharing, consolidation of municipal services at the county level, and regional land-use planning.

Rural Revitalization

Rural communities are also feeling the effects of uneven growth and development, and many organizations are trying to find ways to grow smarter in rural communities. Under its Rural Leadership Development Initiative, Handmade in America, based in Asheville, North Carolina, is training a civic leadership corps that can successfully undertake improvement projects in small communities that do not have professionally trained town managers and planners. Coastal Enterprises, Inc. is bringing smarter, more sustainable growth and development to rural Lincoln County, Maine, through its Sustainable Economic Development Initiative. A major outcome of the initiative has been Coastal Enterprises' selection by the County Planning Commission to serve as the provider of planning and economic development services for the county.

Bringing smarter growth to neighborhoods and regions is long-term work and along the way the organizations discussed here have faced significant challenges. Many of the groups are actively searching for financial resources for their efforts, for new members and partners, and for effective tools and techniques to help them remain fresh and engaged. They have discovered that regional equity and sustainable development are not attainable through short-term projects, but must be achieved by making such efforts ongoing, integral parts of an organization's mission, strategic planning, and activities. They have had to bring their communities up to speed on complex issues such as regional transportation spending and land-use policies. They have had to maintain communication and build relationships among diverse partners to sustain the momentum of their campaigns, and they have dealt with political opposition to their efforts.

Despite these very real challenges, these organizations have all had some measurable impact or success. For a number of them, successfully galva-

SMART GROWTH NETWORK'S SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES:

- 1) Mix land uses.
- 2) Take advantage of compact building design.
- 3) Create housing opportunities and choices for a range of household types, families and incomes.
- 4) Create walkable neighborhoods.
- 5) Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- 6) Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, historic buildings and critical environmental areas.
- 7) Reinvest in and strengthen existing communities to achieve more balanced regional development.
- 8) Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- 9) Make development decisions predicable, fair and cost-effective.
- 10) Encourage citizen and stakeholder participation in development decisions.

nizing their community or changing the internal orientation of the organization in order to pursue expanded goals have represented significant achievements. Some have orchestrated major victories, such as obtaining new resources for affordable housing, restoring funding for transit, and taking actions that lead to safer, cleaner, healthier neighborhoods. The organizations have found common ground and formed relationships with partners who might have in the past been seen as enemies. They have discovered that finding a voice at the regional level means a better future for their neighborhoods and learned valuable lessons that they want to share with their colleagues in other communities and with others in the smart growth movement.

THEMES FROM CASE STUDIES

Collectively these case studies represent critical components of growth that is equitable and economically and environmentally sustainable. Transit-oriented development, reclamation of brownfields and vacant lots, infill development, transportation choices and access, environmental justice and protection of natural resources, affordable housing, school siting, and civic participation are all essential elements of a smarter approach to growth and investment of public and private resources.

The case study groups are tackling tremendous problems, in some cases one issue or neighborhood at a time and in other cases more comprehensively. No matter what the specific challenge or issue, what these studies illustrate is the power of community participation, the need for advocacy and planning, and the strength and importance of visions that emerge from the grassroots. They also demonstrate that community leaders are a rich source of information, practical ideas, and wisdom not only for the community and the region but also for other community-based organizations as well as for policy makers, funders, national organizations, and others.

A number of common themes run through the case studies and reflect the reality of other organizations working on similar issues. The individuals

leading these local efforts also share their lessons and pass along recommendations and messages for other community-based organizations, decision makers, funders, and others. The following are the general themes from the case studies.

It's about sprawl

The organizations featured in the case studies realize that the unchecked outward growth of the suburbs is something they need to be concerned about. They understand that complex forces are driving people, jobs, and resources from their neighborhoods; they also understand the need to stem flight to the suburbs by reviving their communities, providing amenities that are typically found in suburban areas, and managing growth in a way that meets the needs of the community. The New Kensington CDC understands, for example, that by converting trash-strewn lots into attractive gardens it is reversing one of the factors keeping people from finding the neighborhood an attractive place to live. By improving housing opportunities, developing commercial space, and improving the physical appearance of their neighborhoods, the Emerson Park Development Corporation and Bethel New Life are improving the quality of life for existing residents and also creating an attractive destination point for transit riders. The New Schools – Better Neighborhoods' plan to improve the quality of overcrowded Los Angeles public schools will reduce the number of neighborhood children bused to distant suburban schools, alleviate traffic congestion, and stem the movement of residents to the suburbs.

It's not just about sprawl

While the case study organizations have taken on sprawling development as a foe that depletes their neighborhoods of opportunity and community, a larger battle is also being waged. Each of these groups is involved in a struggle for equity and justice, for all neighborhoods to have a voice and their fair share of regional resources and benefits of growth. Sustainable Little Rock, for example, concentrated on organizing the central city to ameliorate the education gap between lower-income central city neighborhoods and more

affluent suburban communities; it built a coalition of low-income African Americans, white working-class residents, and middle-class environmentalists to work for more equitable regional growth. El Concilio, like many of the other groups, has fought for a voice for lower-income minority neighborhoods that is equal to that of other, more influential interests and more affluent neighborhoods on the issue of community development. These groups understand smart growth as an opportunity to advance regional equity and recapture some of the opportunities and resources that have been lost as a result of shifting growth and development patterns.

Neighborhood and regional approaches are both necessary

The case studies illustrate two complementary approaches, both of which are essential for achieving more sensible and sustainable growth the neighborhood and regional level. Some of the case study groups are focusing their energies on reviving a single neighborhood or community, but they do so with one eye on larger regional issues. They remain aware that the problems of the neighborhood must be understood in a larger context and cannot be solved unless wider reform efforts are also undertaken. Other case study organizations focus on the regional picture, with an eye toward what it means for individual neighborhoods and the equitable distribution of resources. The Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley's involvement in a regional plan, for example, was based on the recognition that it shared with its corporate partners the view that the fate of cities and suburban jurisdictions are intertwined, and that without a strong urban core the whole region will decline. Likewise, Citizens Planning and Housing Association, which is an established community-based organization in the inner city of Baltimore, realized that the only way things at the neighborhood level would ever change would be by working at the regional level.

It is important for groups to know that they have the power to say no to something they do not want for their neighborhood...It is also important for groups to figure out what to say yes to.

Short-term milestones mark the path to success

It is important to have big, clearly articulated goals, but the process of setting and working toward the goals cannot be hurried. There are no short cuts to organizing a community to take on the powerful forces driving growth, development, sprawl, and disinvestment. An organization's research, time, resources, commitment, and relationships must all be solid for the effort to be effective. While it is necessary to keep the ultimate goal in focus, it is just as important to celebrate interim successes along the way and to clear all the hurdles before the finish line.

Having a vision is essential

A number of the case study groups started by opposing proposals that they thought would have negative consequences for their neighborhood. It is important for groups to know that they have the power to say no to something they do not want for their neighborhood; this is especially true for low-income and minority neighborhoods that have not traditionally felt their voice would be heard. It is also important for groups to figure out what to say yes to. This requires community planning, visioning, and organizing, but the payoff is potentially tremendous – in the process the neighborhood assesses its needs and develops a stronger message and a base from which to negotiate its fair share. Groups that formulate their own plans and advocate for them are much more likely to achieve their goals. The Bay Area Transportation and Land Use Coalition, for example, developed an alternative regional transportation plan and continues to promote this plan with the metropolitan transportation commission.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach

The strategies employed by the case study organizations show that there are a variety of strategies and approaches to getting involved in regional issues and smart growth. The appropriate mechanism is

the one that will best achieve the goals of the community. The case studies illustrate that political strategies are an effective tool. They also highlight the value of community organizing and strategic partnering, and they show that the hands-on approach of incorporating smart growth concepts into local projects and plans is a means for strengthening communities.

Issues are similar yet different for rural communities

Coastal Enterprises, Inc. and Handmade in America integrate sustainability into their work. Similar to their urban counterparts, rural community-based organizations are working to understand and address the needs of local residents, but they have a different set of challenges. In some rural

areas, if the economic base is not strong, it is hard to resist sprawling development if it brings jobs, goods, and services to the community. The price, however, may be loss of community character, development that is unsustainable or inappropriate, and use of public resources to pay for commercial rather than community development. The difficulty is that generally the planning capacity in rural communities is weak. Because many rural communities lack the public sources of planning assistance available in larger municipalities, they may not be in a position to analyze development impacts and propose alternatives. By focusing on local human and physical resources, rural communities can develop existing assets into a strong economic and social base for the community.

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CASE STUDY ORGANIZATIONS

For community-based organizations and coalitions

While the following lessons are directed toward community-based groups in particular, other stakeholders in the smart growth movement can benefit from these insights and may also gain a new appreciation for community-based organizations as potential partners.

Work regionally but do not lose the neighborhood focus. Community development corporations and other organizations have for years created models for revitalizing neighborhoods and providing services. However, neighborhood concerns like affordable housing, access to public transportation, environmental quality, zoning and planning, and tax-base sharing are regional in nature. Mary Nelson, president of Bethel New Life, encourages community-based organizations to take the regional leap. “Look for opportunities to cross boundaries and work with groups in other areas of the region.” Her comment suggests that community groups are, indeed, beginning to look to new models of community development that embrace this regional picture. Mary Matheny offered this perspective based on her work with the Citizens Planning and Housing Association in Baltimore: “Regional policy is not just another program to work on. It’s a new way of seeing and understanding issues; it affects everything you work on.”

Smart growth policies will be enacted whether or not community-based organizations are involved, but they are more likely to benefit low-income neighborhoods and communities of color if community-based organizations make their presence felt. Organizations that take on the challenge of regional involvement point out that the work requires a commitment of much time and money. Community-based organizations need to “fund up and staff up” and educate their staffs and boards about what is required.

Research the issues. Whether the project is a regional campaign for affordable housing or mixed-use neighborhood development, it is important to start with solid and focused research. Good research and information helps build respect and credibility, increases the effectiveness of a project or campaign, and can be an important source of power. When taking on an issue that is regional in nature start by becoming thoroughly grounded in what is going on in the region, including current conditions, trends, prevailing attitudes and concerns, the political climate, and what is in local, county, regional, and state plans (if any). Community-based organizations can hire consultants, partner with other organizations that have research experience, or work with other groups to find or pool resources for an analysis of regional dynamics.

Russ Adams of the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability in Minneapolis–St. Paul says that one necessary piece of research is to “find out where and how decisions are made and get your organization to the table.”

Educate your board, staff, and members. Before it is possible to educate residents of a region about a project or issue of concern, it is essential to educate those at home. Key staff, members, board members and other participants will need to develop an expertise and a vocabulary of regional issues so that they can engage decision makers. This includes learning about things like zoning and planning processes.

Organize. Organizing is key to success. “We need the passion of the people; community-based organizations should get out there and educate people,” says Carl Gray of BREAD. There are a number of things to consider when it comes to organizing around regional issues. Members of Sustainable Little Rock suggest organizing central city neighborhoods first, so that middle-class and suburban residents do not dominate the discussion. Others urge avoiding traditional battlegrounds by bringing in a wide range of potential allies from the beginning. Other organizing suggestions are as follows:

- ? choose issues that are specific and winnable;
- ? stay focused on the effort by concentrating on short-term projects that keep volunteers active and energized;
- ? do not let the policy or project be the end goal – think about follow up and implementation;
- ? do not get discouraged – regional issues are long-term issues.

Involve the community. All organizations agree that community residents must be engaged in the process from the beginning. The easiest way to involve people is to work on something that

PARTNERS

One of the main themes in the 15 Smart Growth, Better Neighborhoods case studies is the importance of partnerships. Community-based organizations can not do it alone. Congregations and faith-based organizations, corporations, environmental organizations, universities and other educational institutions, government, banks, and small businesses are valuable partners in working toward more equitable regional growth. National non-profits, labor unions, civil rights groups, and political parties are among the diverse partners involved in promoting smart, equitable growth. The following types of organizations were primary partners with the case study organizations.

Other Community-Based Organizations – Several case studies highlighted coalitions or partnerships of community-based organizations. These groups were able to divide tasks such as organizing, research, and communications and share the time and budget burdens of their campaigns and projects by working together. Community development corporations have provided leadership on housing and economic development issues for the last three decades and are critical partners for neighborhood-based smart growth efforts.

Faith-Based Organizations – Faith-based organizations are featured in two case studies and serve as key partners in several others. These groups are an important link between central cities and suburban areas and are crucial sources of training and leadership development. They also bring something unique – a perspective rooted in moral authority, values, and justice.

Environmental Organizations – All of the coalitions in the case studies included environmental groups. These organizations can serve as a resource for research, outreach, and organizing on local environmental conditions and environmental justice issues. The environmental movement is a strong supporter of smart growth, and environmental organizations, including environmental justice organizations, are natural strategic allies for community groups.

Private Sector – Corporations, builders, and private developers were involved in a number of initiatives. Builders supported the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability’s inclusionary housing bill, and corporate leaders partnered with the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley and Citizens Planning and Housing Association to lead the regional planning process. Private foundations also played an important role in most of the projects.

Public Sector – From the local to the national level, government is a major actor. The public sector provides funding, development, for planning of housing, transportation, economic development, and environmental and other projects.

Colleges and Universities – Educational institutions were key partners in four case studies, providing research, training, and technical support.

people care about. In Chicago, the closing of a local elevated train station spurred residents of West Garfield Park to begin talking with one another. For the New Kensington Community Development Corporation, getting residents involved in the clean up and planting of abandoned lots made all the difference. When residents took an active interest in their neighborhood they also took ownership of keeping the lots green. As a result, the lots were less likely to slip back into decay.

Develop leadership. Cathy Levine of BREAD says its leadership comes from its members, not just staff, because everyone in the organization has the opportunity for education and training. At the outset of their transit campaign, BREAD members all learned about the transportation system, including its funding and who its key decision makers were; with knowledge all members have the potential to become leaders in their own communities.

Work with partners and build coalitions.

“The most important lesson is partner, partner, partner,” says Vicky Kimmel Forby of the Emerson Park

Development Corporation. Working at the regional level requires new partnerships with other organizations, with business, and with government agencies to leverage financial, human, and technical resources. “I know I can’t do it all,” says Alexie Torres Fleming of Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, who has worked in partnership with Nos Quedamos and The Point CDC to address environmental justice and planning issues in the South Bronx. Community-based organizations must expand their notions of networking and organizing to identify and recruit potential new allies, such as environmental justice organizations, colleges and universities, lawyers, and business people. “Don’t assume that anyone is the enemy,” says Alan Jennings of the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, which found an important

partner in the business community. His organization is also among those working with suburban populations that many center city community organizations automatically write off as unsympathetic to their cause. Building partnerships and coalitions takes time. It is important to understand the value of building relationships and to be prepared to invest the requisite staff time.

Be Comprehensive. Smart growth by nature requires a comprehensive, balanced approach, with community-based organizations and others working toward social, economic, and environmental equity. Some organizations traditionally focused on environmental issues are finding that they need to think more broadly about the social justice context of sustainability and equity. Likewise, community-based organizations with a more traditional social service mindset and community development

corporations are branching out to take on issues of transportation and environmental quality. As one case study participant put it, these are complex issues; everything is interwoven with everything else. It is difficult for a single organization to be comprehensive, which is why coalitions and partners are necessary.

Think “out of the box”. An important awareness among the case study groups here is that they have begun to think differently from those around them, whether it pertains to local government, transportation agencies, and sometimes other community-based organizations. Getting involved in regional issues and smart growth projects pushes community-based organizations to break out of traditional roles, look at the big picture, take chances, and approach problems from new angles. As Alexie Torres Fleming of Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice says, “Who would have thought that Robert Moses would dare to move [the Bronx] river? But he did, and people accepted it and had to live with it. Now we have to be radical and change it.”

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-Alexie Torres Fleming

Communicate and use the media effectively.

Learning how to use the media is one of the most important tools that community-based organizations can develop for working at the regional level. Alan Jennings of the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley and Will Ward of Sustainable Little Rock advise organizations to recognize that the media is a critical ally and to invest the time and resources to become media savvy. Regional issues like inequities in transportation spending or the need for affordable housing in areas with high job growth need to be broken down in a way that is understandable to both the media and local government. At the same time, information should be presented in ways that resonate with neighborhood residents' practical, daily concerns. It is essential that communication be maintained over time, with the media, with partners, and with members. This is important for sustaining and increasing membership, keeping coalitions together, and keeping the media interested.

For national non-profit organizations and other intermediaries

Many community-based organizations are members of national associations or coalitions that work on community development, housing, civil rights, and other issues related to low-income neighborhoods. These national groups provide a link to federal policy and represent the needs of low-income neighborhoods at the national level, disseminate information, and provide connections to other organizations. The groups discussed here propose three specific recommendations on how national organizations can help.

Provide information and examples. National non-profits, intermediary organizations, and technical assistance providers can help get the word out about smart growth, why it is important for community-based organizations to get involved at the regional level, and what community-based organizations are currently doing to promote smarter growth that is good for low-income neighborhoods. These educational efforts can help build the critical mass necessary to shift the smart growth movement from one that is primarily oriented toward land-use

and environmental concerns to one that encompasses social equity and community interests as well.

Make the connections. At the national level, non-profits can engage in dialogue around the interrelated issues of central city and rural disinvestment, inequities in transportation spending, environmental degradation, and suburban sprawl. National organizations can promote common concerns across constituencies and facilitate linkages among environmentalists, transportation advocates, community development corporations, and others. These national organizations can, in turn, promote connections at the local level by encouraging their members to partner with other organizations and find a seat at the regional table.

Help with the legwork. One case study participant suggested that national non-profits create a pool of organizers for community-based organizations to tap into at the local level who could assist groups with smart growth projects and regional issues. Other organizations say that it would be helpful if their national partners provided locally focused information about funding opportunities. Research is always helpful, especially research that is useful at the local level, including more detailed information on smart growth and planning policies.

For colleges and universities

Many colleges and universities provide technical assistance to local organizations and link students to community-based organizations through research projects and internships. Vicky Kimmel Forby of the Emerson Park Development Corporation advises these institutions to train students who will be working in low-income neighborhoods before sending them out into the field. She suggests requiring 10 to 15 hours of course work geared at helping them understand what it means to be poor and what factors contribute to a community's descent into poverty. Community development work should be included as part of the curriculum for planning and community development students and those who are interested in smart growth and regionalism.

For policy makers

Governments at all levels – local, regional, state, and federal – have a role to play in promoting smart growth that is good for all residents of a region. One requirement is adopting good policies, but equally important is involving the community and community-based organizations in the planning, policy, and decision-making processes. Policy recommendations from the case study groups are oriented toward the process rather than substance of smart growth but suggest that the right process will yield better policies.

Involve the community from the start. Local and regional government agencies, from city planning offices to the metropolitan planning organizations that determine regional transportation spending, need to genuinely include neighborhood residents in planning. As Marcos de Leon of El Concilio says, “For a neighborhood plan to be true, its genesis must be with neighborhood residents.” This means including community residents and organizations as full partners from the beginning, not just to provide “token participation” or input after a plan has been developed. Truly involving residents in planning and decision making means that government agencies have to educate, involve, and organize residents. Elected officials, government agencies, and planners can inform residents about how some smart growth practices, such as building at higher densities or transit-oriented development, can save scarce resources and tax dollars while also helping to revitalize a neighborhood and provide new opportunities and assets for local residents.

Work closely with Community-based organizations and local coalitions. Community-based organizations can be an important resource for government agencies and planning departments, providing a direct link to residents, helping educate the public, and ensuring an inclusive, smooth, and fair process. These local groups are an excellent barometer and source of information about a community’s needs, attitudes, and concerns and can serve as partners on a range of issues, plans, and projects from developing affordable housing to connecting central city workers to suburban jobs.

Act regionally, think comprehensively, and keep a neighborhood focus. Local governments and elected officials can help communities, community-based organizations, and others to become more involved at the regional level by thinking more regionally themselves. Recognizing the connection between neighborhoods and regions and promoting the region as an essential unit for planning and decision making are good places to start. There must also be some structure or commitment to identify common concerns across jurisdictions and to develop joint efforts for sharing resources, infrastructure, assets, and tax revenue.

Local government agencies could lead by cooperating to collect and make available information on regional conditions and trends, for example, home ownership and rental statistics or new job creation. Planners and officials should be cognizant of the interconnection of issues such as public transportation, jobs, housing, and health care and social services and seek creative, comprehensive policies that simultaneously address multiple needs while also addressing larger land-use issues.

FUNDING FOR SMART GROWTH AND REGIONAL EFFORTS

Community-based organizations rely on a range of funding sources to pursue their smart growth and regional programs. A list of public and private funders that have supported the case study organizations, including local foundations, is included in the full report.

One resource for funders and others is the *Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities*. The network was created to inform and strengthen philanthropic funders’ individual and collective abilities to support and connect organizations working to improve quality of life, create better economies, build livable communities, and protect and preserve natural resources. Information about the network can be found at <http://www.fundersnetwork.org/> or obtained by calling (305) 377-4484.

Encourage good growth policies and support existing efforts. Government at all levels should examine how regulations, policy, and spending patterns encourage or restrict smarter growth and revise them to make smarter, more equitable, more sustainable growth a reality. Local, state, and federal governments could provide information, funds, and other kinds of support for community-based organizations to redevelop brownfields, provide affordable housing in proximity to public transportation, or pursue other forms of smart growth.

State and federal government should lead the way. State and federal spending and policy has had a tremendous impact on how cities and rural areas have grown, for example, by providing funding for transportation systems, insuring loans for home owners, and defining environmental regulations. State and federal governments could develop an equally powerful role in creating a framework for smarter growth. Providing incentives for regional cooperation, encouraging citizen and community participation, targeting resources to low-income communities, and funding community development in urban and rural areas should be priorities.

For funders

Funders have a critical role to play in promoting the focus on smart growth and regionalism among community-based organizations. While some of the case study organizations started with no funding for their work (and some still operate without funding), foundation support and funding from government agencies made it possible for a number of them to pursue new projects and goals outside the traditional realm of community development.

Limited budgets and the continuous search for stable, core funding are ongoing challenges that generally make it difficult for community groups to work at the regional level or across issue areas and jurisdictional boundaries. Funding for education, research, organizing, and capacity-building activities is key for community groups seeking to expand their ongoing efforts. Many groups view regional and smart growth issues as important but lack the resources to get involved or believe that they must

choose between working locally or regionally when, in fact, they should do both.

A particular challenge cited by the case study groups has been the limited funding available for coalitions, especially coalitions that are just getting started. A funder may already have given money to one or more of the individual organizations involved and may not understand why the coalition's work is needed or different. Funders may not know who to attribute the coalition's work to when many organizations are donating staff time and resources to the joint effort. For some community-based organizations it is difficult to overcome the incentives to compete with one another for funding of individual projects rather than collaborating in larger regional partnerships. Stuart Cohen says that the Bay Area Land Use and Transportation Coalition worked around some of these challenges by having member organizations write coalition support into their individual grant proposals.

Get the word out if you are interested in smart growth and regional effort. Funders can influence community-based organizations to think more broadly about their work by encouraging a focus on regional issues or smart growth projects like mixed-use, mixed-income developments and transit-oriented development. Funders who understand the importance of smart growth and regional policy issues to the community work that they have traditionally funded should make this known to the community groups that they work with.

Another way that funders can help build the critical mass necessary for neighborhood-based smart growth is to make it known that they are interested in supporting boundary-crossing collaborations among organizations. Partnering with other organizations is essential for most community-based organizations who are looking for ways to help their region grow smarter, and funders can help make that happen.

Provide adequate funding for “the basics”. Many community-based organizations that are providing essential services to their neighborhoods and reaching out to work with other organizations

in their region are struggling to survive. Not surprisingly, the most frequent request of the case study organizations and coalitions was for more funding for operating support. Community-based organizations need assistance with capacity-building efforts, namely funding for staff recruiting, staff and board training, outreach, research, and organizing. As noted in the recommendations for community-based organizations, education and outreach are essential to get an organization's members and the larger community up to speed on regional growth issues. Donors should think about providing funding over longer time frames and allowing for project evolution. Smart growth takes many forms, and as community-based organizations become more knowledgeable about and involved in the issues, projects naturally evolve, expand, and even generate new issues to tackle.

Fund regional coalitions. Across the country, housing providers, environmentalists, faith-based organizations, transportation advocates, job-training providers, and others are coming together across jurisdictional lines to examine local and regional policies that drive growth and development in some places and disinvestment and decline in others. They are finding ways to connect low-income neighborhoods to the prosperity around them. Funders need to recognize how important these coalitions are in meeting the challenge of smart growth and community development in low-income neighborhoods.

Work with community-based organizations to develop new approaches. The regional inequities caused by suburban sprawl will not be solved through traditional community development models. Funders need to work with their grantees to think about and find ways to support vehicles for equitable, neighborhood-based smart growth.

- ? Funders should consider working in a consulting relationship with community-based organizations to find the best approach for the local situation, rather than applying blanket solutions to the varied problems of sprawl.
- ? Think about new joint-use projects, like school buildings, and how they might incorporate community development and social service programs. For example, New Schools – Better Neighborhoods' "community engagement demonstration" in Los Angeles is working to site and build new public schools that would house adult education, job training, recreation and health activities as well as public school classrooms.
- ? Realize that rural areas are also struggling with growth issues and how they fit into smart growth. Their concerns are different from those of urban neighborhoods. Work with rural community-based organizations to better understand what smart growth means for them.

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INFORMATION RESOURCES

Here is a partial listing of organizations and Web sites. A more comprehensive list of information resources is in the full report

National Neighborhood Coalition:

www.neighborhoodcoalition.org, *Connecting Neighborhood and Region for Smarter Growth*, a comprehensive review of community development and smart growth literature, includes an annotated bibliography.

Smart Growth Network:

www.smartgrowth.org, 777 North Capitol St., NE, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201, (202) 962-3591.

Smart Growth America:

www.smartgrowthamerica.com, 1100 17th Street, NW, 10th Floor, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 974-5132, Contact Don Chen.

Transportation Equity Network:

www.communitychange.org/transportation.htm, Center for Community Change, 1000 Wisconsin Ave., NW Washington, DC 20007, (202) 342-0567.

SprawlWatch Clearinghouse:

www.sprawlwatch.org, 1100 17th Street, NW, 10th Floor, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 974-5157.

PolicyLink:

www.policylink.org, 101 Broadway 3rd Floor, Oakland, CA 94607 (510) 663-2333, fax (510) 663-9684.

Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy:

www.brookings.edu 1775 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington DC 20036, (202) 797-6000, fax (202) 797-6004.

National Neighborhood Coalition
1875 Connecticut Avenue NW #410
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202/986-2096 Fax 202/986-1941
E-mail: nncnnc@erols.com
www.neighborhoodcoalition.org

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Order a copy of Smart Growth, Better Neighborhoods. Learn about community-based organizations and coalitions that are tackling the negative consequences of sprawl and disinvestment in their neighborhoods and making growth smarter for low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Organizations share in their own words the lessons they have learned from working on such regional issues as public transportation, affordable housing, brownfields, schools, and more.

Contents of this 204 page report include 15 complete case studies, 11 short articles providing perspectives on smart growth and community, information sources and funding resources.

Name: _____

Organization: _____

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**Price includes shipping. To Order, send check to the National Neighborhood Coalition at 1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, #410, Washington, DC 20009, (202) 986-2096, fax (202) 986-1941, email: nncnc@erols.com.*

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