

Case 95

Smart Growth Initiative

Surdna Foundation et al, 1999

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Background. The late twentieth century saw an explosion in urban sprawl. As cities crept farther and farther outward, residents complained of a range of worsening conditions. Increased air pollution and runoff, disappearing park-lands, rising infrastructure costs, and ever more obesity: these are just a few consequences of urban sprawl.¹³³⁵ By the mid and late '90s, many state and local governments were experimenting with ways of slowing—if not stopping outright—the proliferation of vast suburban landscapes.¹³³⁶ States such as Oregon, New Jersey, and California struggled with the appropriate balance between development, on the one hand, and, on the other, environmental protection and economic efficiency. In Maryland, Governor Parris N. Glendening pioneered a multi-pronged strategy called by some “the most promising new tool for managing growth in a generation.”¹³³⁷ Glendening’s approach followed a set of precepts known as “Smart Growth,” which encourage town-centered development, availability of multiple transportation options, and environmental protection. As Glendening has said, “the goal of smart growth is not no growth or even slow growth. Rather, the overall goal is sensible growth that balances our need for jobs and economic development with our desire to save our natural environment.”¹³³⁸

Strategy. In 1999, the New York-based Surdna Foundation launched the Smart Growth Initiative to promote smart growth development and demonstration in four states: New Jersey, Maryland, New Mexico, and Utah. The Foundation chose to operate in four very different states so as to develop a broad range of workable Smart Growth strategies that could be adapted to varying environments. With funding of approximately \$1 million per year, over a projected 3–5 years, the Initiative focused on “reducing vehicle miles traveled,” so as to mitigate air pollution, while at the same time spurring controlled growth, job creation, and economic prosperity.¹³³⁹ In the spring of '99, Surdna invited six other foundations—the Turner, Irvine, Ford, MacArthur, Packard, and Energy Foundations—to join it in creating the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, a consortium “established to inform and strengthen philanthropic funders’ individual and collective abilities to support and connect organizations working to . . . create better economies, build livable communities, and protect and preserve natural resources.”¹³⁴⁰

Impact. According to Michael Barrette, of the journal *Planning*, “foundations across the country have [now] made smart growth and regionalism an explicit part of their mission.”¹³⁴¹ Private funders frequently collaborate with state governments to fund bricks and mortar projects, and to promote shared policy aims. According to Hooper Brooks, the Surdna Foundation’s Environment Program Director, the Foundation’s work in four dissimilar states has enabled it to gather data on which approaches work best in which circumstances. One major finding has been that broad coalitions of support—including many relevant public sector actors—are necessary to get things done. This has been the case, for instance, in both Maryland and New Jersey, where Governor James McGreevey in 2002 declared a “war on sprawl” featuring incentives for smart growth development. McGreevey’s initiatives brought in “nearly every state agency in ...‘the war on sprawl.’”¹³⁴² The Funders’ Network now has over 100 dues-paying members, and has grown far beyond a membership interested only in environmental protection to a diverse consortium of interested nonprofits. With Foundation support, replicable models of Smart Growth have been endorsed by the Environmental Protection Agency (in 2002),¹³⁴³ and are being tried out in a number of states, including Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Tennessee.¹³⁴⁴

Notes

1335. Linda A Long, "Infrastructure: Playing it Smart," *Foundation News and Commentary*, March/April 2003.
1336. In fact, some places began to take counter-measures even earlier. In the U.S., Oregon was first off the block with a set of tough zoning laws that "limited sprawl while protecting farmland and open space." Clark Williams-Derry, "Who is the Smart Growth Leader?" Elm Street Writers Group, 2002, available from Michigan Land Use Institute website at <http://www.mlui.org/>.
1337. Peter S. Goodman, "Glendering vs. Suburban Sprawl: Governor Banks on 'Smart Growth,' but Even Supporters Have Doubts," *Washington Post*, 10/6/1998.
1338. "What is Smart Growth," Fact Sheet, United States Environmental Protection Agency, available from <http://www.epa.gov>.
1339. Available from <http://www.surdna.org/programs/environment.html>.
1340. Available from <http://www.fundersnetwork.org>.
1341. Michael Barrette, "Smart Money," *Planning*, November 2001.
1342. Andrew Jacobs, "McGreevey, Focusing on Environment, Enlists in 'War on Sprawl,'" *New York Times*, 1/2/2003.
1343. Terry Rodgers and David E. Graham, "Smart Growth Supported by EPA Chief Whitman," *San Diego Union-Tribune*. 1/25/2002.
1344. Barrette, "Smart Money."