

BELLINGHAM TOMORROW

a newsletter for citizens who want to know about tomorrow today

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Special Interest Articles:

- Learn More About-- Smart Growth.
- The High Cost of Sprawl.
- Overlay Districts-- What are they?

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*** SPECIAL ISSUE ***

Innovative Planning Tools in Bellingham

Bringing the latest planning ideas to practice in town.

This list contains just a few of the many terms that are now commonly being used to describe the latest trend in planning-- **Smart Growth**. You may have heard of all or some of them.

Smart Growth principles protect the natural

environment, enhance the quality of life, offer housing choices, and improve municipal finances by taking into consideration location, design and long-term costs (Source: *Massachusetts Smart Growth Tool Kit*).

These principles promote responsible development, as opposed to no-growth, and are being promoted state and nationwide.

Locally, several of Bellingham's zoning by-laws

already have elements of smart growth: the Major Residential Development special permit focuses on clustering smaller lots together to preserve open spaces and the Mill Reuse District promotes the reuse of existing mills for affordable elderly housing.

We hope the concepts in this issue will get you thinking about how you envision future development in Bellingham.

FROM THE NEWSWIRE: BELLINGHAM AWARDED SMART GROWTH GRANT FROM STATE.

On October 27, 2006, Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) Secretary, Robert W. Goolledge, Jr., announced that 51 communities in Massachusetts, including Bellingham, will receive grants to assist in land use planning and Smart Growth efforts.

The grant proposal, submitted in late spring of

2006, was initiated by the Bellingham Southwest Area Planning representative, Mary Chaves, and Planning Board member Roland Laprade. The grant application was for the creation of two mixed use overlay districts in the Town Center and Pulaski Boulevard.

Says Mary Chaves, "It's great to have the resources available to us to work proactively in developing the future of Bellingham. We've currently formed a task force

to look at a mixed use overlay for Pulaski Boulevard that would spur redevelopment of the area."


Pulaski Boulevard
The mission of the Pulaski Boulevard Mixed Use Overlay Task Force is to "...formulate a cohesive vision of Pulaski Boulevard" with

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The High Cost of Sprawl – dollars and sense

Why Do People Prefer Smart Growth?

Sprawl generates more traffic, longer trips and more dependence on automobiles.



Smart Growth
Better Choices for Our Communities

Smart Growth
America

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

--Margaret Mead, anthropologist, 1901-1978

Ask anyone in Bellingham about their major concern regarding the direction the town’s growth and chances are they would say, “TRAFFIC, TRAFFIC, TRAFFIC!”

We all moan about traffic, but have we taken the time to understand some of the underlying reasons for the increase of volume on our roads?

One of the main culprits is “Sprawl.” Webster’s New World Compact Desk Dictionary defines sprawl as “to spread out awkwardly or unevenly.” We all know sprawl as the loss of our town’s open space and farms to large single-family homes (often called the “McMansion”) and the strip malls with

miles of parking. Because of sprawl, we now have to drive everywhere to do our day-to-day activities and so does everyone else. Thus, more traffic.

Dollars...

- ☑ 44 acres of land is consumed by development every day in MA, and 9 out of 10 acres goes to residential development with 65% of that for low-density, large-lot development. (MA Audubon Society, “Losing Ground” 2003)
- ☑ Americans spend 1 out of every 5 dollars on transportation – more than on food and health care. (Smart Growth America)
- ☑ A home 10 miles from a downtown on a 1/3 of an acre lot costs twice as much as a compact lot in a downtown. (Source: Urban Land Institute)

...and Sense

- ☑ Compact growth could reduce suburban and rural towns’ projected sprawl-related deficits by an average of \$10.6 million a year over 20 years. (Grow Smart Rhode Island 1999)
- ☑ It costs \$.27 per dollar of revenue raised to provide services to commercial / industrial properties, \$.36 to working and open space and \$1.16 to residential. (American Farmland Trust, 2002)
- ☑ Improving pedestrian amenities in downtown Lodi, CA increased downtown sales tax revenues by 30%.

Overlay Districts—What Are They?

“What is an overlay district?” An overlay is a zoning district with special properties that is laid over the existing zoning without removing any of the existing regulations. Imagine a vellum sheet of text placed over picture. You can still see the picture underneath, but you can also read the text on the vellum. An overlay gives the option of utilizing either the existing zoning or the overlay zoning.

“What is the point of the overlay if it doesn’t take away the existing

zoning?” An overlay offers the flexibility to encourage development that may be more appropriate to an area than the underlying zoning would normally allow. For instance, a type of overlay called “mixed use” would allow for both residential and commercial uses to be grouped together on one parcel—something the current zoning doesn’t allow.

“Can an overlay float over any zone?” No. An overlay is created with specific boundaries and cannot be placed outside

those boundaries or float to any zone or area as a developer wants.

A good example of an overlay in Bellingham is the Mill Reuse Overlay District. It allows the Pearl Street Mill buildings-- whose original purpose has become obsolete-- to be reused for affordable elderly housing in an area where housing otherwise could not be built under the existing Industrial zone. It also promotes common open space and mixed uses, like medical offices, that complement elderly housing.

Sprawl Vs. Smart Growth



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LEARN MORE ABOUT-- SMART GROWTH

Simply put-- Smart Growth is the old-fashioned downtown of years ago.

It is a return to neighborhoods and town centers where people can live and work in the same place; residents can walk to do the shopping instead of drive; open spaces, farmlands and nature are protected; a variety of housing is provided to meet differing needs and incomes levels.

The implementation of smart growth principles limits sprawl and the traffic that sprawl creates (think the intersection of Hartford Avenue and Rte. 495!).

Limiting sprawl also limits the costs of new infrastructure by taking advantage of existing services. It puts the needs of the community first and those things that make a community special.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has developed a list of ten principles for sustainable development that express the characteristics of smart growth:

1. Redevelop First.
2. Concentrate Development.
3. Be Fair.
4. Restore / Enhance the Environment.

5. Conserve Natural Resources.
6. Expand Housing Opportunities.
7. Provide Transportation Choice.
8. Increase Job Opportunities.
9. Foster Sustainable Businesses.
10. Plan Regionally.

You may see some these principles being brought to Town Meeting in the future as the Planning Board, along with other departments like the DPW and Conservation Commission, strive to improve our by-laws and regulations by implementing smart growth in Bellingham.

SMART GROWTH GRANT AWARDED TO BELLINGHAM

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input from local residents, businesses and property owners, and to create a village district as called for in the Master Plan.

The task force, consisting of representatives from the Selectmen, Planning, Zoning, Conservation and citizens at large, will be drafting a mixed use overlay for Pulaski Boulevard. The intent of the mixed use overlay is to revitalize Pulaski Boulevard through creating a more pedestrian friendly area where people can live,

work and shop all in one place.

The task force held the first of several citizens' meetings in early November to introduce the concept of a mixed use overlay and get feedback from those living and working in the area.

While people expressed interest in the revitalization of Pulaski Boulevard, there were concerns about infringement on property rights and impacts to the adjacent residential areas.

Some of the issues the

task force will be looking at for the mixed use overlay by-law for Pulaski Boulevard will be:

- Promoting mixed use development. That is ground floor retail or commercial with residential or offices above or behind.
- Allowing for more density in housing to promote more diverse housing opportunities for elderly, special needs or new graduates who live on a budget.
- Creating sign and design guidelines to create a visual sense of Pulaski Boulevard.

Why Do People Prefer Smart Growth?



Smart Growth Provides Safe Places to Walk, Bicycle and Tricycle

Smart Growth
Better Choices for Our Communities

Smart Growth America

Keep up-to-date on the status of the Pulaski Boulevard Mixed Use Overlay District at:
www.bellinghamma.org/Pulaski

Join us for a citizen's meeting about the Pulaski Boulevard and Town Center Mixed Use overlay districts on January 31, 2007 at 7:30 PM in the Arcand Meeting Room, Municipal center.

Bellingham Planning Board

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HOURS:
Tuesday and Thursday
8:30 AM – 3:30 PM
Friday
9 AM – 1 PM

Let us know what you think!

Send or email your thoughts and we may print your letter in the next issue.

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.bellinghamma.org

For More Information

Websites:

“**Smart Growth America** is a coalition of national, state and local organizations working to improve the ways we plan and build the towns, cities and metro areas we call home.”
www.smartgrowthamerica.org

“The **Local Government Environmental Assistance Network** (LGEAN) is a ‘first-stop shop’ providing environmental management,

planning, funding, and regulatory information for local government.”

http://www.lgean.org/html/w_hatsnew.cfm?id=1006

Massachusetts Smart Growth Toolkit

<http://www.mass.gov/envir/sgtk.htm>

Massachusetts Low Impact Design Toolkit

<http://www.mapc.org/lid.html>

2006 Smart Growth Conference Proceedings - If you couldn't make the conference, or didn't know about it, all the workshops are posted here:

<http://www.mass.gov/envir/sgconf.htm>



Up and Coming in 2007

During 2007, the Planning Board expects to incorporate more Smart Growth initiatives into their procedures and regulations.

- The Town Center will become the focus of a possible mixed use overlay district.
- Developers will be asked to improve their designs from the status quo to the exceptional-- more attractive building designs, sustainable environmental plans and creative traffic and parking management.
- We will apply for more grants to help us implement ideas that make Bellingham an even better place to live and work.

Goodbye to Ed Guzowski. After two terms (6 years), Ed decided to hang up his planning hat. Ed's resolve in making developer's accountable when it comes to the impacts of their projects on the traffic and safety of residents in Bellingham will be missed. Good luck and best wishes to you, Ed!

A fond farewell to Kate Buyuk, Planning Board Associate member, who had resigned her position because she and her family moved to a new town. Kate's insight, particularly in legal matters, was much appreciated.