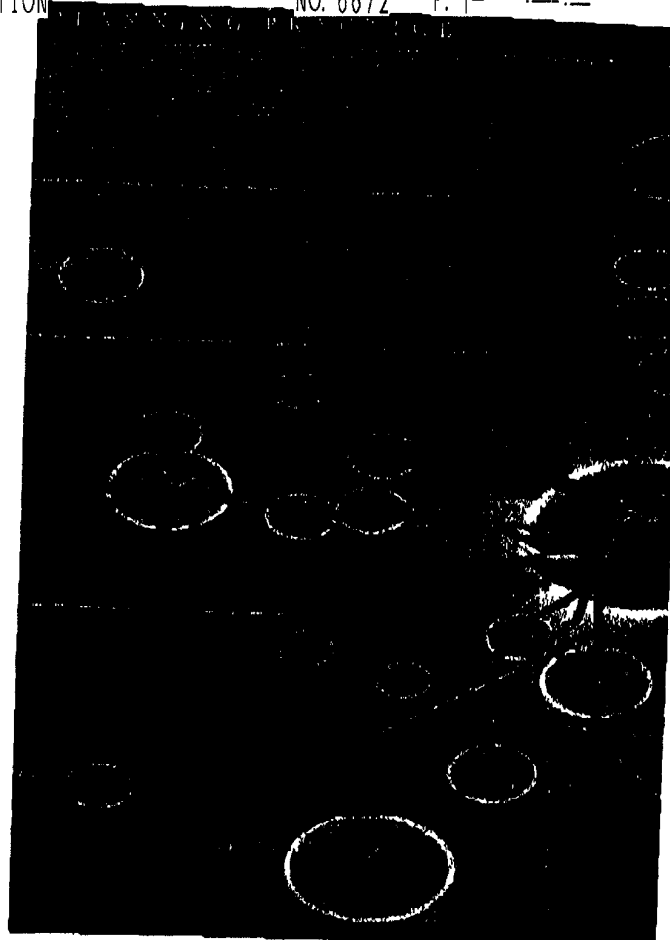


pg 10/4

To: Charlene Mitchell / From:
 City of Rapid City SD / Lois
 605 394 6636 (4120) / 312-431-
 4 pgs 072502 / 9100

*Right: the centers and corridors vision for North Carolina's
 Charlotte-Mecklenburg County region. Charlotte is the
 nation's second largest financial center, after New York City.
 Downtown Charlotte (opposite) contains half of all the
 multi-tenant office space in the region.*



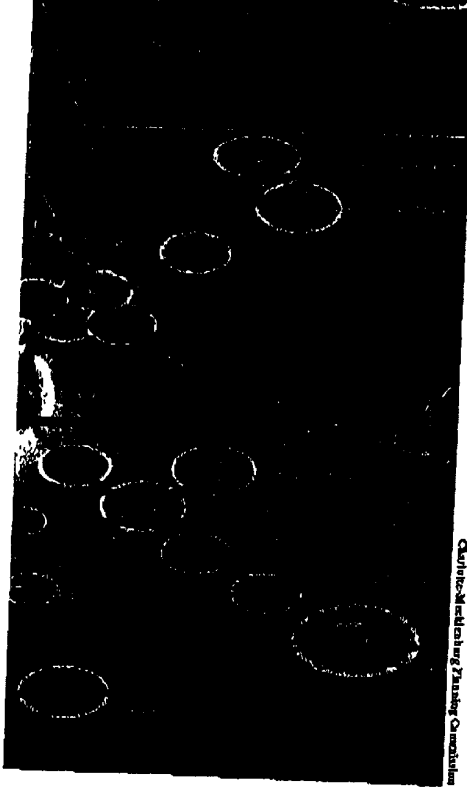
Does Your Growth Smart?

To fight sprawl, you have to measure it.

By Uri P. Avin, FAI

Suddenly, politicians everywhere are climbing on the smart growth bandwagon. Planners, who so rarely get their 15 minutes of fame, are now in the public limelight, drafted to show how and why a particular action or policy is friendly or inimical to smart growth.

pg 2094



Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission



Kens Sherry, City of Charlotte

and David R. Holden, AICP

Where to start

Most jurisdictions are likely to have a well-versed planning and growth management faction and a well-organized developer-and-free-market faction. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, we found that a good way to start was to blend the spectrum of interests of APA and NAHB.

Interestingly, both groups agree on two basic principles: offering variety and choice in housing and using land more efficiently. They also agree that higher density infill development is a way to get there. As expected, though, APA supports the general principle of planning for growth, while NAHB is lukewarm about that concept.

The points of agreement and disagreement between APA and NAHB were a jumping off point for Charlotte-Mecklenburg's smart growth audit. By combining the two sets of criteria, we were able to cover the basic issues that have received the most attention in local debates about growth. But in other communities, this comparison may not suffice. If environmental issues loom large, you may want to add Sierra Club elements to your definition. "Good government" interests may want to address fiscal responsibility, or local residents may want to stress community conservation and amenities.

Because Charlotte-Mecklenburg is a community with a strong laissez-faire development climate, we organized the APA and NAHB principles under four broad planning categories and added two process-related principles of our own:

- *Planning capacity and quality*
Anticipating and providing for development and growth (NAHB)
- Long-term comprehensive plan with adequate land supply (NAHB)
- *Urban form*
Compact development (APA)
Protection of natural resources (APA)
Substantial public open space (NAHB)
Infill development (APA)
Variety of housing (APA)

goal is to build a consensus about a smart growth future that fits the community's specific needs and resources. Not all highways are inherently dumb, and not all transit lines are necessarily smart.

Concerns about smart growth come from many quarters. It could be a city manager who wants to ensure administrative and fiscal consistency and to limit policy conflicts among agencies as a community grows. It could be officials or challengers gearing up for election in a community rent by controversies. It could be a citizen coalition eager to raise the drawbridge on new residents, traffic, and the loss of "their" open space and quality of life.

Whatever the sources, the smart growth audit should go beyond the immediate interests of any particular individual or group.

Just about everyone has a unique definition of smart growth. The American Planning Association and the National Association of Home Builders use definitions that overlap on some points and diverge on others. The Sierra Club, the Urban Land Institute, local chambers of commerce, and several state governments are promoting their own versions as well.

For starters, a smart growth audit must use a definition that reflects the particular concerns of all the major interest groups in a community. In other words, if you want to do more than stoke the fires of dispute, you must start off as inclusively as possible.

coming more and more evident.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg has not just sat on its hands. The planning commission has directed a lot of energy to maintaining the health of the center city and its surrounding neighborhoods. Downtown Charlotte contains 50 percent of the jurisdiction's multi-tenant office space—an atypically strong share.

But the trend to dispersion is strong, too. Worries about suburban growth have recently come to focus on I-485, an outer belt whose completion is still 10 years away—but whose finished segments and interchanges have already stimulated significant development in the south and northeast parts of the county.

A tool, not a weapon

The first thing to stress is that a smart growth audit is not a weapon with which to bash the "dumb growth" opposition. Its ultimate

One promising role for planners is to lead a Smart Growth Audit—a structured evaluation of how well a jurisdiction is promoting smart growth principles. To illustrate these points, we draw on the recent collaboration between LDR International, Inc. and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Planning Commission to produce that community's first smart growth audit, which was completed in September 1999.

Eight different governments and numerous local agencies were involved in the project, which was spurred by the extraordinary growth in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area over the last 20 years. Population there grew from 404,000 in 1980 to 511,000 in 1990 to an estimated 622,000 today. Other signs of booming growth—traffic jams, overcrowded schools, loss of open land, and leapfrog development—are be-

pg 3 of 4

Mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods (NAHB)

• Infrastructure

Balanced multimodal transportation (APA)

Maximizing existing infrastructure (APA)

Timely and fairly funded new infrastructure (APA)

• Supportive development decision-making process

Reasonable, predictable, and efficient plan review (APA and NAHB)

Supporting fiscal policies (audit team)

Ability to integrate land use, transportation, and infrastructure decisions (audit team)

Our definition will never appear on a bumper sticker, but it gave us a good tool for evaluating numerous documents and practices for their smart growth qualities. Not every policy will address all smart growth principles, but every policy should promote some of them. If not, the policy probably needs to be fixed.

Line up an independent team

One of the most important elements of a smart growth audit is an independent review panel. Such a panel should include planners, academics, or those in related professions who have strong smart growth backgrounds but no vested interest in the community's disputes or planning practices.

The review group's main role is to explain to a broader audience in a concise and objective way the smart growth strengths and gaps in all current policies and practices. It takes a lot of work to review the massive number of relevant documents, many of them quite technical. For this reason, it is unreasonable to expect that a large group of people can review all the pertinent material in detail.

In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, we reviewed 29 policy documents, not including such items as design manuals and many of the local area plans that could also have been part of such a review.

Our team of LDR staff and consultants took four weeks to complete the review, whereas the overall audit took four months.

Review all documents critically

Beyond the obvious candidates such as the comprehensive plan, the review team should evaluate all the key policy and planning documents that relate to smart growth—the official population and employ-

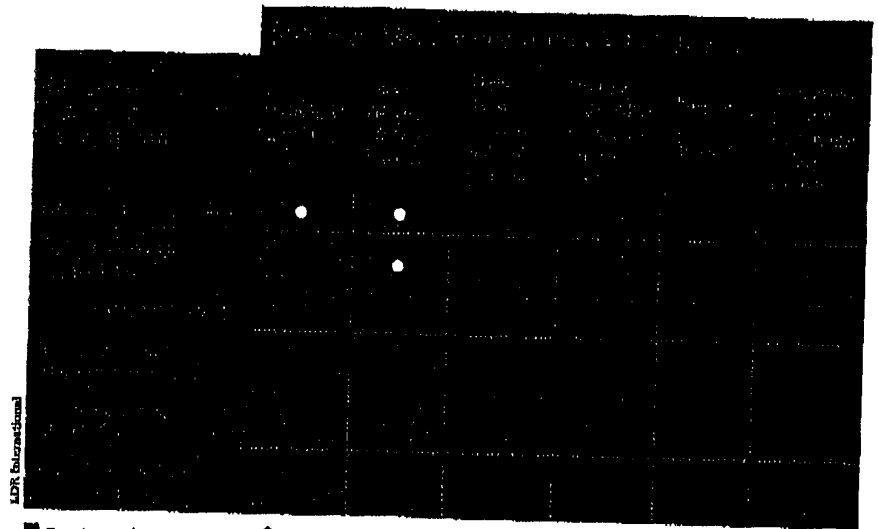
consistency to our reviews. Under principle number two—long-term comprehensive plan with adequate land supply—reviewers looked for evidence that a plan had a 20- to 30-year horizon, provided enough land to absorb the projected land-use demand, promoted consistency between zoning and the land-use goals of the comprehensive plan, and so on.

All this may sound mundane,

Interview key people

Only after the background documents have been digested should you interview key people. In Charlotte, we interviewed 19 people or small groups.

These one-on-one or small group interviews must cover a wide ideological spectrum and must include top agency staff and the managers of each jurisdiction. Interviews are primarily a tool to



■ Overlap and reinforcement ◆ Similar but important differences in emphasis ○ Potential lack of correlation

What exactly is smart growth? Different groups define it differently, which means that each community must settle on its own index before taking a smart growth audit.

ment projections and how they were arrived at, transportation plans, design manuals, sewer and water plans (especially for their policies on extending service), environmental protection policies (stormwater management, forest cover, floodplain and wetland protection), parks and open space plans, school master plans, and the capital improvements program.

This exercise is the most time consuming (and at times the most frustrating) part of the audit. It requires a lot of cross checking and, in some cases, some reading between the lines.

The audit must show how (or if) all of these policies work together. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, we created a checklist of smart growth concepts and a common reporting format to give order and

but the review often turned up big gaps in planning policy, background analysis, or implementation, even in documents that were on the whole well organized and focused.

The review phase of the audit should also produce a synopsis of the findings for each document so that others can quickly grasp their significance for smart growth. Synopses in Charlotte-Mecklenburg included the title, date, and author; a summary of the document's main points; the document's relationship to smart growth; and the responses or ideas generated. Reviews typically were summarized in two or three pages, but the "Ideas and questions" section always appeared on a separate page and was used only as an in-house tool for clarification and frank comments.

help the audit team better understand the smart growth climate. It is important that the interviews be confidential—so people feel free to talk.

Do independent analysis

Regardless of what documents say and people reveal, the on-the-ground reality may be different. The audit team may need to check development trends independently by looking at the nature, location, compactness, and accessibility of development. It may need to assess the holding capacity of zoned vacant land—and how those figures compare with official projections and the master plan.

Inconsistencies between planning goals and planning practices should be investigated. For example, arc water and sewer pipe

being extended into areas designated as "rural"?

This independent analysis can be broad-brush or in-depth, but it needs to be done quickly—to identify issues and set the stage for subsequent work. It is a reality check, not a substitute for current plans.

Keep the presentation simple

To stimulate interest and involvement in smart growth issues, the

Goals and objectives (preferably measurable) are identified.

• Analytical adequacy

Enough data have been developed to define the extent of the issue or problem.

The data are up to date.

Analysis is set in context and related to other issues.

• Level of implementation

The element is clearly embodied (and implemented) in codes,

highlighted the strengths and gaps in current policies and practices and gave the reasons for these judgments.

Throwing the first stone

A smart growth audit will stimulate local self-criticism. Know that you may be treading on sensitive ground.

Be sure to give credit for policies and practices that embody smart growth ideas or that could be easily modified to do so. Also, use diplomacy when pointing out gaps, especially because your first impressions may be wrong.

In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, we gave a core group of local people (six agency heads, the deputy city and county managers, and planning commission staff) first crack at a working draft. Their responses gave the audit team an essential mid-course correction regarding tone, emphasis, and accuracy.

The final version of the audit document includes a hypothetical 2040 vision to show readers how smart growth could build on present day policies to achieve a desirable future. And it concludes with six recommendations—establish a development monitoring system, for example—that will lead to some short-term gains while more long-term smart growth strategies are worked out.

Finally, audits don't have to be dead ends. They may become the first stage of a sustained effort. Park Helms, chair of the county commission, initiated the audit in the hope that it would lead to a policy umbrella for the county's development-related programs. Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory also signed on, and both the city and county provided the funding for the work of a 32-member task force appointed by both governments.

Late last year, the task force reviewed the audit with an eye toward recommending changes to such vital documents as the county's 2015 plan and the zoning codes for the city, county, and six independent towns. This work should be wrapped up by February.

Some words of advice

Although audits will differ in community, the following guidelines could apply to all of them.

Be sure to spend enough time with the local planning staff so that you understand the local planning culture and its pressures. Your audit should not be a Trojan horse concealing private agendas.

If a task force or steering committee is directing the smart growth audit, make sure this group is diverse. It must include opponents of smart growth as well as supporters.

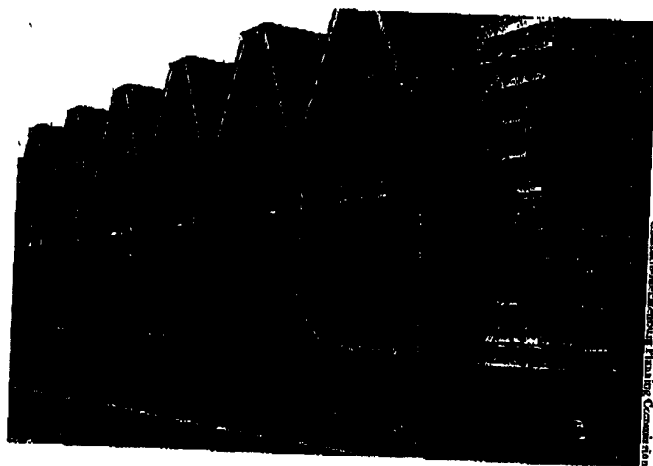
The task force must understand its mission and adopt appropriate ground rules from the get go. Will it be nothing but a community sounding board, or will it be authorized to manage the process and adopt final recommendations?

Set a positive tone and expectations from the start. Even if the community has many problems with growth management, build on any smart growth policies it has in place.

Educate the task force about smart growth activities in other localities. Focus on what's practical. Also, make sure that at least some of your recommendations will be easy winners—easily achieved immediately and appealing to several different coalitions.

Finally, keep channels open to elected officials, civic leaders, and staff in all affected agencies. Clear, concise reporting through newsletters, brochures, and a web site will help launch discussion of smart growth into the community at large.

Uri P. Avin, FAICP, is a principal and David R. Holden, AICP, is a senior associate with LDR International, Inc., a planning and urban design firm in Columbia, Maryland. Freilich, Leitner & Carlisle of Kansas City assisted with the audit, and the review team included Robert Cervero of the University of California, Berkeley; David Godschalk, FAICP, of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Arthur C. Nelson, AICP, of Georgia Tech; and Douglas Porter, AICP, of the Growth Management Institute in Chevy Chase, Maryland. For a copy of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg audit, send an e-mail to avin@ldr-int.com. Copyright by the authors.



The community's 2025 land-use and transit plan calls for development along five transit corridors and higher residential densities near transit stations.

audit findings must be communicated in a simple and precise way. Executive summaries, a "strengths and gaps" approach, even a scorecard format are all ways to summarize complex material.

Most of the audit report in Charlotte-Mecklenburg consisted of the team's evaluation of how well current policies, planning practices, and other actions carried forward the 14 smart growth principles. To structure this presentation, we looked at the influence of each smart growth principle from four vantage points:

• Conceptual completeness

Ideas are well defined and detailed.

Ideas are cross-referenced and fleshed out in several plans, regulations, and other documents and tools

regulations, and other tools.

Evidence exists that the objective or strategies have been achieved.

Ongoing monitoring and feedback systems are in place.

• Institutional readiness

Agencies have been identified to implement and monitor objectives.

Interagency coordination, if required, is in place.

There is evidence of political support.

Even this simple format required a great deal of effort. The Charlotte audit report went through the 14 principles one by one. We first had to match all the policies we had analyzed with the smart growth principles they related to most closely. Some policies related to many policies, some to only one or two. The summaries