MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Achieving Smart Growth in the Fremont Area Community

May 14, 2007

Credits

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- PowerPoint presentation prepared with assistance from Mike Forsyth and Nathan Powell, MSU graduate students in urban and regional planning

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Credits

- Presentation prepared in cooperation with the:
  - Fremont Area Joint Planning Commission
  - Land Information Access Association of Traverse City
- Photos by:
  - Members of the Fremont Area Joint Planning Commission, local government officials, interested citizens and staff of LIAA

Presentation Outline

- What is Smart Growth?
- What is SGRAT?
- Process Followed to Pilot Test SGRAT in City of Fremont, Dayton and Sheridan Townships
- Smart Growth Strengths, Achievements and Challenges by Tenet
- 10 Key Recommendations
- How to Prioritize Action
- Relationship to Joint Master Plan Update

What is Smart Growth?

"Growth is smart when it gives us great communities, with more choices and personal freedom, good return on public investment, greater opportunity across the community, a thriving natural environment, and a legacy we can be proud to leave our children and grandchildren." [Source: Smart Growth Network]

The Ten Smart Growth Tenets

1. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
2. Create walkable neighborhoods.
3. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration.
4. Foster distinctive, attractive places with a strong sense of place.
5. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost- effective.

The Ten Smart Growth Tenets

6. Mix land uses.
7. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices.
9. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.
10. Take advantage of compact building design.

For more information:
www.smartgrowth.org and
www.smartgrowthamerica.org

Intro to Smart Growth Readiness Assessment Tool: *Purpose*

- MSU created SGRAT, an online tool
- Comprised of a set of self-assessment questions and instructional material grounded in research to be delivered to:
  - Local communities
  - County and district MSUE land use agents
  - Citizen Planner programs
  - Broader land use community

Intro to Smart Growth Readiness Assessment Tool: *Objectives*

- Develop assessment tool for communities to help them **gauge their readiness** to implement the Smart Growth Tenets and/or the extent to which they are **developing according to** the Smart Growth Tenets.
- Identify and link to many research tools and techniques to assist communities with implementing Smart Growth.

Purpose of the Pilot Test

- Examine "real world" community applications
- Test the clarity of the questions
- Analyze overall effectiveness of the tool
- Identify problems and inconsistencies with its use
- Identify what methods for use will be most useful and which will not be
- Gauge usability, time and effort
- Provide Smart Growth recommendations for the Fremont Area

Process Followed on Pilot Test

- Two meetings in November 2006 with representatives of the City of Fremont, Sheridan and Dayton Townships
- First meeting: presented an overview of the tool; how to get online; "walked" the whole group through scoring on one of the ten tenets, and; settled on a process for each community team to score the tenets
- Second meeting: presented the individual community and combined results of the scores; walked through 10 recommendations; left a longer document with analysis of each of the 10 tenets with specific challenges and action items
- Wrote up the result as a Facilitation Manual to guide other communities in the use of SGRAT and trained MSU Extension personnel and planning consultants in use of the tool
- Unveiled the tool publicly at the MSU Land Policy Institute Annual Summit in February 2007.

Smart Growth Strengths, Achievements and Challenges by Tenet

- In order to help the community better understand how to use the SGRAT analysis, we prepared a document which reviewed by tenet:
  - Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements
  - Smart Growth Challenges
  - Proposed Action Items
- These are detailed assessments. Let's look at the strengths, achievements and challenges in more detail by Tenet.

3

Range of Housing Choices

What does it mean to provide a range of housing opportunities?
- Having homes or apartments in your community that people of all income levels can buy or rent.
- This includes homes for service industry workers, teachers, police and small business owners, professionals and executives, the handicapped and people in all stages of their lives.
- Providing choice and fosters sound personal investment in the community.

Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements

- A range of housing types and prices exists in the Fremont Area. (Q1)
- Most people who work in the community also live there, this represents livable, family oriented communities. (Q3)

Smart Growth Challenges

- Absence of innovative housing options such as TND and Conservation Design and incentives for affordability. (Q5)
- Insufficient zoning standards to connect multi-family housing and mobile homes to job centers and access points in the community. (Q14)
- Township zoning creates lot sizes that may hinder affordable homeownership. (Q13)

Walkable Communities

What are walkable communities?
- Walkable communities provide the infrastructure and amenities that make walking a practical, safe and attractive alternative to driving.

Walkable communities with public open space and recreation opportunities help foster healthy, active lifestyles.

Walkable Communities

Why are walkable communities important? Because they:
- Provide a higher quality of life and a healthier population (MI is the 3rd most obese state in the nation)
- Promote recreation and social interaction
- Reduce the use of fossil fuels and air pollution
- Reduce traffic congestion and crashes
- Require connected sidewalks and compact development.

Transportation accounts for the second largest portion of household spending. Walking is good for your health and your wallet!

Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements

- Public facilities are within walking distance (especially in the city). (Q14, Q15)
- Sidewalks exist in the city and are well-maintained and properly engineered.

Smart Growth Challenges

- Lack of pedestrian connectivity between sidewalks, destinations and jurisdictions. (Q1, Q2)
- No apparent sidewalks in Sheridan or Dayton Townships.
- Capital Improvement Program doesn't outlay a financial plan for sidewalk implementation. (Q5)
- No mixed-use zoning around the city center. (Q17)

Community & Stakeholder Collaboration

What is community and stakeholder collaboration?

- Making sure that all groups in a community are represented in decisions about how the community grows.
  – Citizens
  – Local government officials
  – Realtors and developers
  – Business owners
  – Community development and neighborhood organizations
  – Environmental organizations, farmers, recreation specialists
  – Schools and children.

Community & Stakeholder Collaboration

Why is community and stakeholder collaboration important?
- Helps ensure that interests of each group are considered.
- A step in gaining widespread support for growth and for new development projects.
- Each community group can contribute a piece of the puzzle of making growth fit into the community.

Stakeholder involvement leads to community supported growth and a greater sense of place.

Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements

- Outstanding joint planning efforts. (Q17)
- A variety of community and stakeholder outreach and involvement mechanisms are employed but could be improved to increase effectiveness. (Q2, 11, 12)

Smart Growth Challenges

- Community organizations (Q3) and residents do not (yet) propose Smart Growth. (Q4)
- Lack of consensus about multi-jurisdictional efforts to meet with stakeholder groups to discuss Smart Growth. (Q1)
- Outreach and involvement for township residents. (Q2, 11)
- Involvement of stakeholder groups critical to Smart Growth. (Q12, 14, 15, 16)
- No benchmarks to measure community success. (Q13)

Creating a Sense of Place

What does it mean to foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place?
- Reflect the values, culture and vision of residents through the growth and history of their community.

Historic Fremont Schools are a tremendous asset that create identity, maintain memories and foster a strong sense of place.

Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements

- Events to celebrate community (Q10)
- Public art (Q9)
- Community involvement (Q15, see also Tenet 3)

Smart Growth Challenges

- Historic and cultural resources preservation is not emphasized. (Q1, Q2, Q3)
- Inconsistent design guidelines discourage a cohesive community image and identity. (Q4 – 8)
- Visual aesthetics along corridors is not consistently preserved or managed. (Q17)
- Inconsistent community application and understanding of design guidelines for buildings and streetscapes. (Q4 – 8, Q12)

Predictable, Fair and Cost-Effective Decisions

What is predictable, fair and cost-effective decision making?
- Conduct in meetings influences whether decision making is predictable and fair to all parties.
- Decision making is predictable and fair when regulations are reasonable, and used consistently and equally with all parties.
- Decision making is cost-effective when the development permit process is clear and as rapid as possible while still producing quality development.

## Predictable, Fair and Cost-Effective Decisions

Why is predictable, fair and cost-effective decision making important?

- Limit costly lawsuits.
- Hold down the cost of development.
- Reduce cost to consumers in the way of higher prices for homes and consumer goods.

Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements

- Consistent Master Plan, Zoning Ordinance and Future Land Use Map. (Q4)
- Policies and regulations have been updated in accordance to state law. (Q1)
- Public meetings are efficient and provide a positive experience for stakeholder input. (Q16 – 18)
- No lawsuits or referendum in the past few years. (Q13)
- Officials pursue training and continuing education. (Q 11, 12)
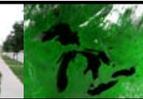
Smart Growth Challenges

- Smart Growth not (yet) being proposed by developers or residents. (Q8, 9)
- Impact of new development on quality of life. (Q7)
- Length of review process and treatment of developers. (Q2, 6)
- Development standards may be inadequate to meet community goals and objectives. (Q20)

Mix Land Uses

What is Mixed-use?

- Mixed-use combines commercial, retail or services uses with residential or office uses in the same building, site or neighborhood (within walking distance).

Office or Apartments

Commercial and retail services
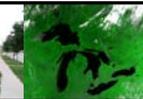
Mix Land Uses

Why is mixed-use important?
- Attract new commercial development
- Infill or adaptive reuse of existing buildings
- Promotes downtown development
- Provide for live-work units
- Residential supported economic development.

Tools to implement mixed-use
- Form-based code
- Planned Unit Developments
- Performance-based incentives such as density bonuses.

Downtown Fremont provides an excellent example of a traditional, well designed, mixed-use environment.

Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements

- Compact design and location of neighborhood destinations creates a strong foundation to support current and future mixed-use however it can be improved.
- The City supports mixed-use, live-work units and downtown residential units in the Central Business District. (Q2, Q11)

Smart Growth Challenges

- Limited application of planning and zoning techniques to encourage and implement mixed-use. (Q3, Q6, Q7)
- No township zoning for mixed-use and limited planning. (Q3, Q6, Q7)
- No planning for Traditional Neighborhood Development. (TND) (Q14)
- Lack of resident support. (Q5)

Preserve Farmland, Open Space and the Environment

- Preserve valuable natural and agricultural lands for long-term economic value, sustainability, and enjoyment.
- Natural resources provide many benefits to the community
  - Economy
  - Recreation
  - Quality of life and sense of place
  - Tourism
  - Open space.

The greater Fremont area is home to many culturally significant and valuable natural and agricultural resources.

Preserve Farmland, Open Space and the Environment

Why is protecting open space, natural and agricultural lands important?

- Major challenge for Michigan's future:
  - Land being consumed eight times faster than the population grows
  - Between 1982 and 1997 Michigan lost 1.5 million acres of farmland.
- Agriculture is the second largest industry in Michigan and tourism is third (forestry is about 11th).

West Michigan is home to some of the most productive agricultural lands in the US. Agricultural remains an important part of the Fremont economy.

Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements

- Natural Features Inventory conducted by all jurisdictions in coordination.(Q2)
- Community presence and involvement with land trusts, farmers, watershed organizations and a lakefront association. (Q8)
- Master Plan policies emphasize farmland preservation. (Q3)

Smart Growth Challenges

- Protective regulatory measures and their intended applications are inconsistent on a multi-jurisdictional level. (Q5 – 7, Q19, Q20)
- Valuable agricultural and natural lands are not permanently protected and remain vulnerable to development pressures. (Q9)
- Lack of open space and conservation design regulations in Sheridan Township is resulting in greenspace development. (Q15 – 17)
- Forestland preservation policies are not included in the Master Plan. (Q4)

Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices

Why are a variety of transportation options important?

- A balanced transportation system accommodates different lifestyles and different ages, as well as the needs of residential, commercial and other land uses.
- A properly designed transportation system can:
  - Reduce traffic congestion
  - Improve community health and safety
  - Support new businesses
  - Provide a higher quality of life for local residents.
- Not all modes of transportation are feasible for all communities.

Today only 10% of Michigan students walk to school. Providing "Safe Routes to School" is a nation-wide initiative

Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices

- Issues of concern that are driving living choices:
  - Gas prices and wear and tear on autos and family income
  - Living closer to work means shorter commutes and more personal time
  - Increases demand for compact, mixed-use walkable communities.
- Land use and transportation are closely connected, changes in one effect the other.

Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements

- Compact design allows area residents to bike and walk to numerous destinations.
- City of Fremont has several good strategies for managing traffic. (Q4)

Smart Growth Challenges

- Policies and regulations on a multi-jurisdictional basis are not effectively coordinated and applied. (Q2 – 4)
- Pedestrian transportation is commonly overlooked in transportation planning.

Direct Development Towards Existing Communities

What does it mean to direct development towards existing communities?

- Directing development towards areas that are already served by infrastructure and services is a fundamental component of Smart Growth.
- Seeks to maximize public investment for infrastructure such as water, sewer, roads and sidewalks.
- Multi-jurisdictional cooperation is vitally important to sustainable growth.

Fremont is a compact community which maintains many excellent development opportunities in the city and contiguous lands in adjoining townships to support more compact development and economic growth.

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Direct Development Towards Existing Communities

Why is it important to direct development towards existing communities?

- Impact of public infrastructure decisions are critical to the overall well-being of the community
  - Location of schools and public buildings
  - Extension of public sewer and water
  - Low density residential development does not contribute tax revenue like nonresidential; a balanced mix of land uses is much more sustainable.

Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements

- The Urban Growth Boundary provides guidance to the location and timing of growth. (Q1 -3)
- City brownfield development authority and DDA provides a structure for redevelopment in order to reduce need to develop previously undeveloped sites, and to focus new development within the downtown where infrastructure exists and businesses can be supported by a positive business climate. (Q6)
- City has programs and incentives to focus redevelopment within the town center. (Q8, Q9)

Smart Growth Challenges

- Capacity of the infrastructure to absorb new growth is unknown, making it more difficult to plan for growth. (Q1)
- Townships lack a fix-it-first policy that would provide a high quality of life for existing residents and limit potential financial burden of new development. (Q4)
- Townships appear to lack goals and strategies to promote infill development and reuse vacant, underutilized, or historic structures. (Q10)

Compact Building Design

What is compact building design?

- Using the least amount of land for development and supporting infrastructure as feasible to accommodate a wide variety of living and business choices.

Cherry Hill Village in Michigan uses principles of traditional neighborhood design to increase density and livability.

Compact Building Design

- **Why is compact building design important?**
- Seeks to combat sprawl with incentives for higher density development.
  - Provides a range of housing types and prices
  - Helps preserve open space
  - Facilitates the use of multiple transportation options.

Apartment buildings are an example of compact building design.

Smart Growth Strengths and Achievements

- The City of Fremont appears to have goals and strategies to promote compact building design in the town center. (Q1)
- The Joint Plan appears to promote higher densities in or near the town center. (Q1)
- Community leaders and officials promote compact development design in the town center. (Q3)

Smart Growth Challenges

- The Fremont Area communities do not yet have Form Based Zoning or Traditional Neighborhood Development provisions. (Q7, Q11)
- The communities do not have sidewalk, bikeway or pathway connections between the town center and nearby neighborhoods. (Q12)
- Residential densities of 16 units per acre are not permitted in the town center. (Q13)

Ten Key Recommendations

- Following are the ten key recommendations proposed by MSU Planning & Zoning Center staff as cross-cutting activities that would not only result in achieving major progress on individual Smart Growth Tenets, but also result in achieving progress in all Tenet categories.

Recommendations: Strategy 1

- **Develop a community involvement plan (to keep people informed about SG Tenets and seek their involvement)**
- Strength: Joint Planning and a variety of outreach mechanisms all ready employed
- Challenge: Involvement of key stakeholders such as developers, realtors, youth
- Action Steps
  - Improve smart growth awareness for residents through education, outreach and advocacy
  - Increase outreach and input mechanisms in the townships
  - Involve youth in the planning process
  - Increase involvement and contributions from developers, realtors, business owners, schools and youth in planning and zoning updates
  - Use newsletters, website, posters in grocery stores and churches, etc.

Recommendations: Strategy 2

- **Update the zoning review and approval processes to ensure effective decisions are made efficiently and in a manner that results in quality development** (after Plan is updated)
- Strength: Joint Planning Commission and Master Plan
- Challenge: Length of review process and treatment of developers, Smart Growth developments are not being proposed
- Action Steps
  - Re-examine the review process through multi-jurisdictional coordination.
  - Establish a pre-application meeting to present community goals
  - Examine consistency between policies, regulations and development standards
  - Provide incentives for expedite review for Smart Growth developments
  - Form based code work could help with this enormously if the development community is involved along with businesses and citizens
  - Insist on quality development!

Involve the Development Community

Recommendations: Strategy 3

- **Develop a green infrastructure plan**
- Strength: Natural Features Inventory conducted by all jurisdictions in coordination
- Challenge: Protective regulatory measures and their intended applications are inconsistent on a multi-jurisdictional level.
- Action Steps
  - Analyze the overall effectiveness of the Zoning Ordinance, Site Plan Review and Subdivision Regulations in preserving natural and agricultural resources
  - Identify and prioritize areas for potential conservation
  - Permanently preserve identified areas through community and stakeholder collaboration and innovative regulatory measures
  - Improve open space preservation while accommodating residential development through conservation design

THINK GREEN!

Review and if Necessary Enhance the Natural Features Inventory

- Base map (roads, rail lines, section numbers, community boundaries, water bodies, drains and the drainage system)
- Topography
- Soils by type, plus separate maps of:
  - Hydric
  - Steep slopes
  - Prime farmland
  - Sand, gravel and other minerals at
- Groundwater vulnerability
- Land use/cover depicting
  - Forests
  - Wetlands
  - Farmland
  - Scrub/shrub and old fields
  - Developed land

Natural Features Inventories (continued)

- Regulated natural features:
  - Regulated wetlands
  - Environmental areas
  - Steep slopes (for soil erosion and sedimentation)
  - (Sub-)Watershed boundaries
  - Inland lake management areas
  - Designated natural rivers
  - Floodplains
- Natural habitat elements:
  - Habitat types
  - Sites with known threatened or endangered plants or animals
  - Assessment of biological diversity
  - Pre-settlement vegetation
  - Undisturbed areas

WEST MICHIGAN TOOL KIT FOR LOCAL GREEN INVENTORIES

Natural Features and Natural Resources Checklist

- From the **West Michigan Toolkit for Local Green Inventories**
- Available to download from http://www.gvmc.org/

Recommendations: Strategy 4

- **Develop and implement a pedestrian and bicycling plan**
  - This could be an element of an updated Joint Plan, a free-standing Plan or an element of a Green Infrastructure Plan
- Strength: Public facilities are within walking distance
- Challenge: Lack of pedestrian connectivity between sidewalks, destinations and jurisdictions
- Action Steps
  - Inventory location of sidewalks and identify areas where connectivity can be improved between destinations as well as between sidewalks
  - Examine and amend the Capital Improvement Plan based on sidewalk inventory and create a long-range plan to improve connectivity
  - Improve pedestrian access between the townships and the city.

Recommendations: Strategy 5

- **Complete work on developing Form-Based Zoning** based on Traditional Neighborhood Design for the City and two Townships
- Strength: Joint Planning Commission and Master Plan
- Challenge: Lack of smart growth code
- Action Steps
  - Encourage mixed-use around downtown and commercial areas
  - Encourage rear parking and emphasize the pedestrian experience
  - Use TND techniques for high density residential areas
  - Compact design in nodes for regional centers
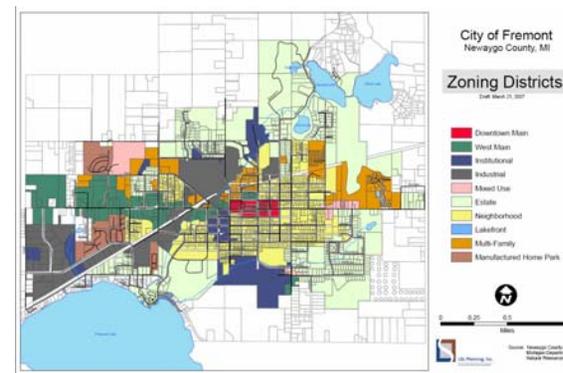 - Analyze community architectural style

Form Based Code

Update Zoning Map

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Recommendations: Strategy 6

- **Review the location of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB)**
- Strength: The UGB provides guidance to the location and timing of growth and the city maintains tools and incentives for focused growth.
- Challenge: Capacity of the infrastructure to absorb new growth is unknown, making it more difficult to plan for growth
- Action Steps
  - Determine capacity of infrastructure to support growth within the UGB
  - Evaluate the location of the UGB according to Smart Growth principles
  - Strengthen policies and ordinances as necessary to support the UGB
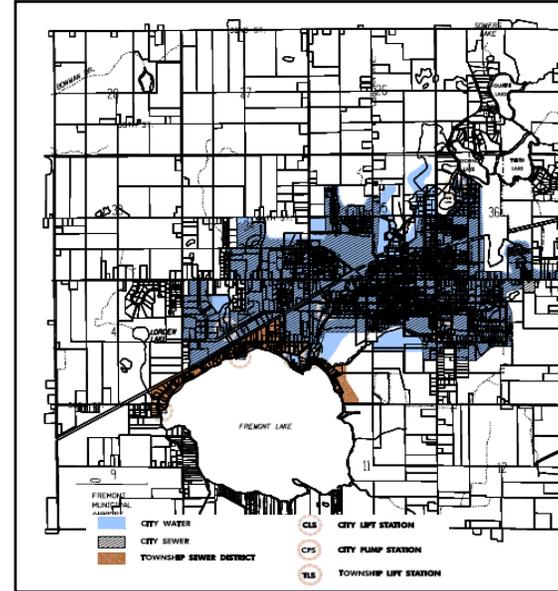
Existing Fremont Area Utility Service Area

A great place to start growth management.

Recommendations: Strategy 7

- **Coordinate multi-modal transportation improvement planning and financing on a multi-jurisdictional basis**
- Strength: Compact design allows area residents to bike and walk to numerous destinations.
- Challenge: Policies and regulations on a multi-jurisdictional basis appear to be ineffectively coordinated and applied
- Action Steps
  - Apply access management planning across the area using preexisting city policies and regulations as a model
  - Coordinate land use and transportation financing
  - Improve infrastructure for pedestrian transportation

Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices

What are a variety of transportation options?

- Equitable, healthy, cost-effective alternatives to automobile travel; including
  - Bus
  - Bike
  - Walk
  - Train, plane etc.

Providing public infrastructure (such as sidewalks and bikepaths) and connecting them to destinations is very important to making alternative transportation viable.

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Recommendations: Strategy 8

- **Promote mixed-use development in the town center and along M-82 on the west side of the City**
- Strength: Compact design and location of neighborhood destinations creates a strong foundation to support current and future mixed-use and zoning supports mixed-use, live-work units and residential units in the Central Business District
- Challenge: Limited application of planning and zoning techniques to encourage and implement mixed-use
- Action Steps
  – Adopt form-based zoning regulations and Joint Area Plan policies to support mixed-use development
  – Provide incentives for mixed-use development
 – Build public support through education and outreach

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Smart Growth Scenario

- Compact design
- Diverse business types and services
- Many local business owners
- Apartments or offices above businesses
- Walkable
- Unique identity
- Can accommodate a variety of uses depending on economic trends
- Emphasis on form and function

Common Scenario

- Low density design
- Large lot
- Single land use
- Separated from homes and other business
- Automobile-oriented
- Under-utilized parking
- Opportunities for infill development
- Attractive design in this example aims to replicate a traditional mixed-use downtown

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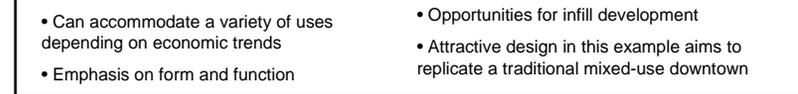
Recommendations: Strategy 9

- **Develop design guidelines and other implementation tools to help property owners understand how to retain and enhance the distinctive and attractive character of the Fremont Area**
- Strength: Strong sense of community pride and involvement
- Challenge: Inconsistent design guidelines discourage a cohesive community image and identity
- Action Steps
  – Create consistent signage regulations to encourage attractive identification of area destinations
  – Update light regulations to improve on-site appearance and function through out the area
  – Preserve scenic viewsheds along primary transportation corridors through conservation easements, vegetative buffers or other applications

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Design Guidebooks
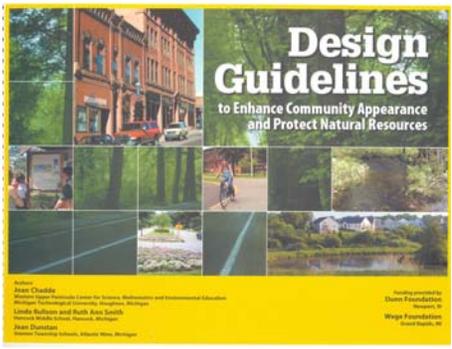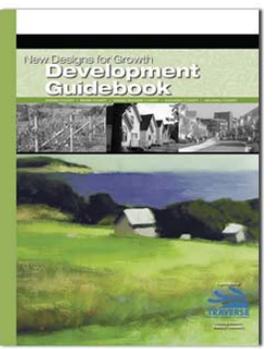
Recommendations: Strategy 10

- **Develop a town center and major commercial services corridor plan as a part of or follow up to the Joint Master Plan**
- Strength: The City of Fremont appears to have goals and strategies to promote compact building design in the town center supported by local officials.
- Challenge: Lack of zoning to encourage mixed-use and TND as well as limited pedestrian connectivity.
- Action Steps
  - Provide for higher densities than currently are permitted
  - Provide the foundation for implementation tools such as Form Based Zoning and TND
  - Educate citizens and local officials about the economic and social advantages of compact design
  - Support pedestrian transportation options and policies

Smart Growth Scenario

- Infill development in downtown and previously developed areas
- Take advantage of under-utilized parking and brownfields
- Mixed-use development
- Compact communities
- Walkability
- Commercial supported with residential.

Common Scenario

- Development of greenfields
- Lack of connectivity to the surrounding community
- Low density
- Reductions in walkability, mixed-use, multiple transportation options.

How to Prioritize Action

- Don't expect to begin work on all recommendations at once or in only one jurisdiction at a time (multi-jurisdiction efforts are better).
- Put prioritization into the context of the Joint Plan update and take advantage of public and stakeholder input into that process.
- Possible strategies to prioritize Smart Growth recommendations include:
  - Analyze key recommendations and identify action steps and entities responsible for action
  - High priority: Actions that are a precursor to other steps
  - High priority: Actions assigned to a particular group
  - Low priority: Actions not assigned to a group or that broadly identify the "city" or "township" as the responsible party
  - Low priority: Actions that don't list a responsible party.

Relationship to Joint Master Plan Update

- Identify issues that need to be addressed to make the plan timely and properly focus on both the short term and the next 20 years, and be consistent with enabling acts.
- Let the public and stakeholder groups assist with issue identification, vision and goal refinement, and priority setting.
- Integrate Smart Growth Tenets into the Plan.
- Integrate priority actions into the Plan that BOTH advance achievement of Ten Smart Growth Tenets AND other issues deemed important to the Plan update.

QUESTIONS?

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Our Future and Our Children's Future

Yours to Protect!

Yours to Sustain!