ULI Community Catalyst Report

NUMBER 6

Compact Development: Changing the Rules to Make It Happen

Urban Land Institute

NMHC National Multi Housing Council

COVER: The Market Common, Clarendon, in Arlington, Virginia.
Photo courtesy of McCaffery Interests.

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Compact Development: Changing the Rules to Make It Happen

Four ULI/NMHC Policy Forums on
Compact Development:

Washington, D.C. • June 6, 2006
Los Angeles, California • June 9, 2006
Fort Lauderdale, Florida • June 16, 2006
Atlanta, Georgia • June 27, 2006

Prepared by Prema Katari Gupta

Urban Land Institute

NMHC National Multi Housing Council©

ABOUT ULI–the Urban Land Institute

The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI is committed to:

• Bringing together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs;

• Fostering collaboration within and beyond ULI's membership through mentoring, dialogue, and problem solving;

• Exploring issues of urbanization, conservation, regeneration, land use, capital formation, and sustainable development;

• Advancing land use policies and design practices that respect the uniqueness of both built and natural environments;

• Sharing knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, and electronic media; and

• Sustaining a diverse global network of local practice and advisory efforts that address current and future challenges.

The Institute has long been recognized as one of the world's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development. Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 36,000 members from 90 countries, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines.

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ABOUT NMHC–THE NATIONAL MULTI HOUSING COUNCIL

Based in Washington, D.C., NMHC is a national association representing the interests of the larger and most prominent apartment firms in the United States. NMHC's members are the principal officers of firms engaged in all aspects of the apartment industry, including ownership, development, management, and financing. NMHC advocates on behalf of rental housing, conducts apartment-related research, encourages the exchange of strategic business information, and promotes the desirability of apartment living. Nearly one-third of Americans rent their housing, and almost 14 percent live in a rental apartment in buildings with five or more units. For more information, contact NMHC at 202-974-2300 or at info@nmhc.org, or visit NMHC's Web site at www.nmhc.org.

Doug Bibby
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ABOUT ULI COMMUNITY CATALYST REPORTS

ULI is influential in the discussion of and debate on important national land use policy issues. To encourage and enrich that dialogue, the Institute holds land use policy forums that bring together prominent experts to discuss topics of interest to the land use and real estate community. The findings of these forums can guide and enhance ULI's program of work. They can also provide ULI district councils, ULI members, and others addressing land use issues with information that they can use to improve quality of life, advance community values, and—in the words of the ULI mission statement—"provide responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment." *ULI Community Catalyst Reports* are intended to make the findings and recommendations of ULI land use policy forums relevant: accessible to and useful for practitioners at the community level, where land use decisions are made and their consequences most directly felt.

ULI Community Catalyst Reports can be downloaded free of charge from ULI's Web site (www.uli.org) or ordered in bulk at a nominal cost from ULI's bookstore (800-321-5011).

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Contents

Introduction

In June of 2006, ULI–the Urban Land Institute and NMHC–the National Multi Housing Council held four forums on compact development and ways in which communities can update their development regulations to encourage compact development in appropriate locations. Billed as "Compact Development: Building a Better Toolkit" and held in four cities—Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Fort Lauderdale, and Atlanta—these forums elicited an extraordinary response. Record numbers of invitees accepted the invitation and contributed many valuable thoughts and much information, which we have tried to capture in this report.

The four forums and this *Community Catalyst Report* will serve as the basis for additional research that will be captured in a future ULI/NMHC publication tentatively entitled *Compact Development: Building a Better Toolkit.* This publication will report on a wide-ranging assessment of tools being used throughout the country to better support compact development through visioning, planning, and new regulations.

Compact development is at the core of smart growth and is integral to solving the growth management problems facing communities across the country, including traffic congestion, school crowding, loss of open space, lack of pedestrian and bicycle access, limited transportation options, and poor connectivity among different transportation modes. In addition, lower housing and transportation costs for many households, increased efficiency in the delivery of public services, and environmental benefits make compact development an idea whose time has come.

Forum Themes

The four forums were united by a number of common themes, which are summarized in the following discussions. Also included are five case study illustrations that were presented at the forums.

1. More compact development is inevitable.

Demographic shifts, high infrastructure and construction costs, population growth, the long-term outlook for energy, and expected climate change make more compact development inevitable. In many growing, urbanized communities, the debate over whether to build compactly—up rather than out—is over. Based on various demographic, economic, and environmental factors, their leaders and residents have come to accept compact development as inevitable. For these communities, the debate is now over where to densify and how to best encourage, facilitate, plan, and design new compact development. Communities across the country have successfully integrated compact development into existing neighborhoods, attractive development that has added community amenities that improve the overall quality of life for all residents.

Of course, acceptance of compact development is not always the case. Ever since home mortgages and automobiles became widely available, low density has been the predominant development pattern and, to be sure, many communities continue to accommodate only low-density development, zoning out multifamily housing and mixed-use development. However, shifts in demographics have resulted in changes in the housing and lifestyle preferences of Americans. Many people seek housing options other than the typical suburban, single-family house. In addition, many seek a more convenient lifestyle that involves living closer to their work and within walking distance of shopping and entertainment opportunities. They want to spend less time in their cars and in traffic.

Two factors other than demographic shifts are making compact development inevitable. First, community leaders are becoming less willing to use public tax dollars to fund the additional infrastructure needed to support sprawl (see discussion under forum theme #2, page 5). Second, an emerging consensus is blaming the automobile for having a damaging effect on environmental quality. A growing chorus in the scientific community is warning that climate change is real and that our lifestyle based on fossil fuels may very well be contributing to the global environmental changes that have been documented.

While efforts are underway to limit the emissions of cars through the use of alternative energy sources, lower emissions will do nothing to alleviate the traffic problems that most communities face. Compact development, on the other hand—if it occurs near public transit and shopping where residents can

be less reliant on (or even give up) their cars for their daily needs—can reduce both the greenhouse gasses associated with the burning of automobile fuel and traffic. In addition to the environmental benefits, less reliance on cars means less dependence on other countries for America's energy needs.

Following are some other relevant trends and issues to consider:

■ In 2030, about half of the buildings in which Americans live, work, and shop will have been built after 2000, according to a recent report from the Brookings Institution. The majority of the new space will be residential. Where will this new construction go?

■ The U.S. population now stands at approximately 300 million; by 2030, it is likely to reach 350 million. Where will these people live?

■ Land is being urbanized (put into use for residential, commercial, industrial, or civic purposes) at a rapid rate. During the 1990s, the amount of urbanized land increased 47 percent.

■ So-called "traditional" families (comprising a married couple with children) make up less than a quarter of American households, and their relative share is dropping annually at an accelerating rate as people wait to marry or have children and the adult children of baby boomers move out of their parents' home to start college or a career, leaving behind two (often ecstatic) empty nesters.

■ Many people in rapidly growing categories of "nontraditional" families—young single-person households employed in "knowledge" jobs, couples without children, empty nesters, and immigrants—do not want to live in a low-density suburb.

While the argument for compact development grows more convincing every year, many Americans are surprisingly uninformed about the important role they can play in addressing the many issues their communities face. When higher-density development is proposed in their neighborhoods, they immediately think of bad examples of high-density from the past, while they seem to be resolutely unaware of the many examples of award-winning compact development that have occurred more recently through-

"With over 18 million residents, the southern California region is the second-largest metropolis in the nation. Blessed with one of the world's most dynamic economies, the region is also one of the most congested in the country, suffers some of its worst air pollution, and is facing a housing crisis. By the year 2030, another 5 million residents will be added, creating more pressure on already congested roadways and scarce housing and threatening advancements that the region has made in air quality.

"We need a blueprint for regional growth to address these challenges and provide for livability, mobility, prosperity, and sustainability for the future. Compass Blueprint represents a plan that, with only modest changes to development patterns, can point the region toward maintained and improved quality of life."

—Compass Blueprint: New Directions for Growth (www.compassblueprint.org)

out the country—and unaware as well of up-to-date research and data that support the concept of compact development. Accordingly, many citizens almost automatically oppose higher-density development.

It is therefore vitally important for community leaders to take an active role in informing the public about the demographic and environmental realities that are driving compact development. The finiteness of land and energy resources makes it urgent that the dangerous myths concerning low-density development be dispelled. Many people who oppose compact development remain unaware of how costly the prevailing pattern of low-density development is in terms of public finances, the quality of the environment, and the quality of life.

EDAW/PULTE HOMES

Pulte Homes has received approval to construct a mid- and high-rise development including offices, stores, and 2,250 townhouses, condominiums, and apartments just south of the Vienna Metro station in northern Virginia. The new community, which will replace 65 single-family homes, represents a trend in Washington, D.C.'s suburbs toward directing growth to areas with mass-transit access.

At the same time, community leaders must address powerful negative myths about compact development. Some opponents of compact development even mistakenly blame it for conditions —such as congested roads—that are largely the result of low-density, spread-out growth. Concerns over how such myths can impede making the difficult land use decisions that most communities must make led the Sierra Club, the Urban Land Institute, the National Multi Housing Council, and the American Institute of Architects to assemble a working group in 2005 to produce *Higher-Density Development: Myth and Fact* (available in pdf format from www.policypapers. uli.org).

Such public educational efforts can be enhanced by setting them in a context of regionally specific demographic trends. For instance, when the Southern California Association of Governments undertook a regional visioning and implementation program called Compass Blueprint, it asked participants to develop a plan to accommodate 5 million new residents by 2030. Similarly, the organizers of Reality Check, a visioning exercise for metropolitan Washington, D.C., asked participants to place 2 million new residents and 1.6 million new jobs throughout the region. The use of local trends data and forecasts helps constituents realize that growth is inevitable and gives them a practical understanding of how broader demographic shifts will affect the look of their communities.

ATLANTA'S BELTLINE: HEADING IN A NEW DIRECTION

A partnership of the city of Atlanta, the regional transportation authority (MARTA), and three nonprofit organizations —Park Pride, the PATH Foundation, and the Trust for Public Land—the BeltLine project seeks to transform a 22-mile railroad loop surrounding downtown and midtown Atlanta into a modern public transportation system that can support (and be supported by) nodes of compact, transit-oriented new development as well as the 45 existing neighborhoods that surround the loop. With Atlanta projected to add 400,000 new residents and 250,000 new jobs between 2005 and 2010, this railway redevelopment presents a significant opportunity to accommodate growth without creating more suburban sprawl.

RYAN GRAVEL

Located along the proposed BeltLine, Atlanta's old Sears building is slated to be redeveloped as Ponce Park, containing a mix of housing, office, and retail.

Its planners see the BeltLine as an urban growth boundary within which, ideally, new higher-density development (and redevelopment) will foster urban style livability and emphasize connectivity, walkability, and transit access. New trails and parks will connect to the BeltLine. In areas outside the boundary, growth will be discouraged and more emphasis placed on preserving open space.

Most of the buildings within the BeltLine development area will have four to six stories, with high-density nodes (up to 12 stories) expected to be developed on some segments of the rail line. This plan for compact development will enhance the city's property tax revenue, add transit ridership, and preserve open space (by building up rather than out). Transitions between the higher-density development and the single-family neighborhoods that surround the BeltLine development area are to be worked out through an extensive process of community planning and engagement.

Estimates of the cost to acquire the right-of-way and construct the BeltLine range from $400 million to $1.2 billion. In 2005, voters approved a tax allocation district that will be the primary source of funding. Federal matching funds will be used for right-of-way acquisition, trail construction, environmental cleanup, and other elements of the project.

The BeltLine symbolizes one city's decision to take a different direction in accommodating expected growth. Often disparaged as a poster child for sprawl, Atlanta is blazing a new path that could serve as a model for other low-density cities that are facing growth pressure. A more livable and sustainable environment with less traffic congestion, more urban amenities, and more open space is an articulated goal for Atlanta. To reach that goal, it is necessary to encourage well-designed and well-integrated compact development.

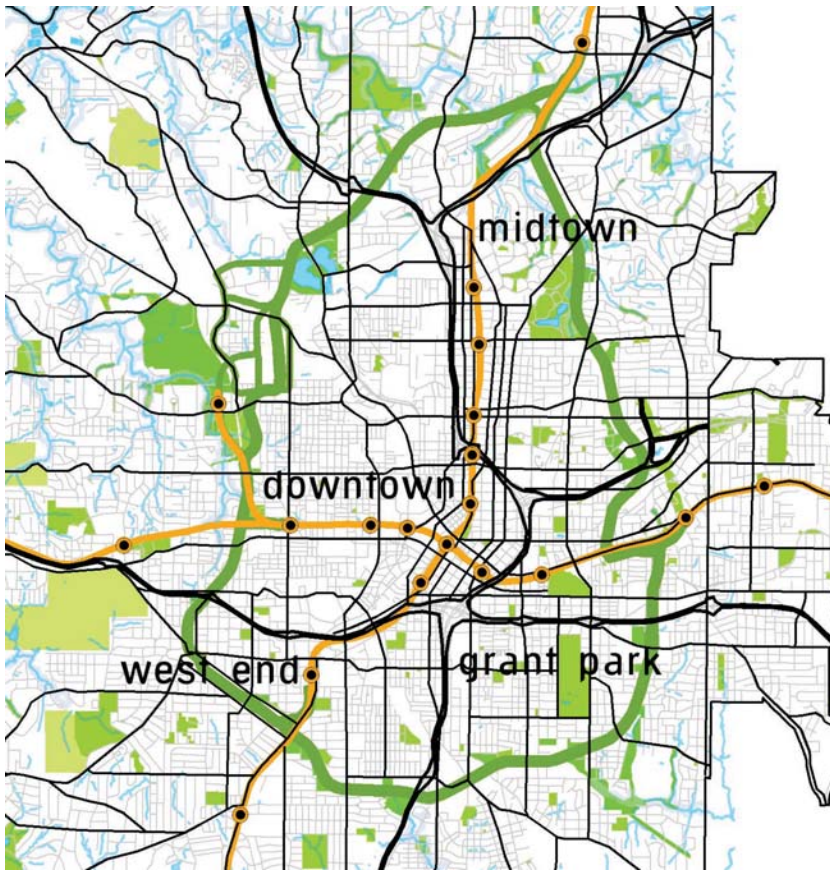
2. Compact development offers opportunities to maximize public infrastructure investment.

The impact of many of the investments that federal, state, and local governments make in transportation and other infrastructure projects, to the tune of millions of taxpayer dollars, can be maximized by encouraging compact development around these projects. Appropriate accessible development not only supports transit and other public facilities, but also helps create additional property tax revenues that can offset the costs of public investment.

Locating multifamily housing or compact mixed-use development around mass transit access points—rail or bus—allows residents, workers, and shoppers to travel to and from many destinations without a car, while also providing built-in ridership for the transit service. For transit agencies, concentrated clusters of housing near stops and stations can mean a critical mass of riders (and revenue). In addition, compact development that incorporates options to walk, bicycle, or ride public transportation reduces the number of drivers who are on the road spewing exhaust and contributing to traffic congestion.

In fact, in major metropolitan areas, the availability of transportation choices other than clogged roadways can be seen as an important element of quality of life—and effective public investment in expanding choices really hinges on development patterns. How many miles is your commute to work? How many hours a week do you spend fighting traffic congestion? How easy is it for you to get to where you can buy a quart of milk, a cup of coffee, a scoop of ice cream? For most people, quality of life is in large part defined by the answers to questions like these. And the answers are a function of the transportation network, which is a function of land use patterns. Cost-effective investments in expanding transportation choices require more compact development (and mixing of land uses) on a local level throughout metropolitan areas.

The 22-mile-long BeltLine is only two or three miles from downtown Atlanta in every direction.



In well-designed compact, mixed-use neighborhoods, such as Victoria Gardens in Rancho Cucamonga, California, residents have choices. They can, for example, walk to a town center to carry out some of their everyday errands.

Workers at a single-use office park that is accessible only by driving, on the other hand, lack choices. They are dependent on their cars. Many essentially built-out communities are addressing the problem of single-use office neighborhoods by encouraging the addition of some mixed-use development and more pedestrian connections, thereby giving workers walkable options for lunch and lunchtime errands. For example, the extension of the Metrorail system through Tysons Corner in northern Virginia—an auto-dependent, office-oriented edge city—is being planned to lead the area's transformation to a more vibrant, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly community. The community's leaders understand that this huge public investment should be leveraged, and transportation planners are working with them to plan for the development of housing as well as retail and entertainment uses near new Metro stops.

Victoria Gardens in Rancho Cucamonga, California, has created a compact town center in an area known for sprawling low-density development.

ALTOON + PORTER ARCHITECT

3. Compact development makes fiscal sense and helps achieve other public goals.

The elected and public officials who are entrusted with investing taxpayers' money must fully understand the fiscal impact of new development. It is more efficient to provide infrastructure (roads, water, sewers) and local government services (police, fire protection, schools) to residents of compact projects in already built-up areas than to residents of low-density projects in sprawling suburbs. Therefore, compact development costs jurisdictions less per housing unit than sprawl development. Furthermore, compact development yields more tax revenue. These fiscal benefits of compact development have been well documented.

"Currently, South Florida ranks number eight among the top sprawling economic areas of the country. By 2025, South Florida is expected to have the eighth-highest household growth among the nation's economic areas. It is also expected that South Floridians will pay $194 billion (or $36,336 per person) over 25 years (2000 to 2025) to live in sprawling communities. If just a quarter of low-density growth is shifted to higher-density growth, residents could save $18 billion (or $3,277 per person)."

—Anthony J. Catanese Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions, Florida Atlantic University, *Charting the Course: Where Is South Florida Heading? 2006*

(available at: http://www.soflo.org/course/report.pdf)

For the nation as a whole, the potential fiscal savings of compact growth versus traditional development patterns may be as much as $125 billion between 2000 and 2025.[1] Elected and public officials who are asked to juggle competing and often conflicting public demands should welcome the concept of compact development as a rare example of a policy initiative that can achieve several public objectives at once. At the same time that compact development provides opportunities to control public spending on infrastructure and services, it also can help efforts to protect natural resources, alleviate traffic congestion, and achieve a better regional jobs/housing balance. For example, by reducing the footprint of buildings, building up rather than out can provide opportunities for more open-space preservation on site (see discussion under forum theme #5 on page 11). Public officials must explain the communitywide benefits of more compact development to their constituents; such an educational process can be difficult, but it is a crucial component of obtaining public acceptance for more concentrated land uses.

In explaining the benefits of compact development, advocates must offer a close, specific look at the costs of the alternatives—and focus on the high relative costs of providing schools, roads, police and fire service, gas lines, and water and sewer facilities across a broad area to a widely dispersed population.[2]

Very low-density communities cannot support mass transit. It is not financially feasible to operate buses serving a scattered population. It is more expensive to deploy police and fire departments over a sprawling area. Even public school spending—usually the largest expense for local governments—is generally lower per housing unit in compact development because the typical apartment household has fewer children than the typical single-family household, thus creating less need for new school construction.

In addition to requiring smaller public expenditures per capita, compact development yields more tax revenue. A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency report finds that the less than 7 percent of U.S. land that contains high-density development generates fully one-third of the country's real estate taxes.[3] On a per-square-foot basis, moreover, apartment owners pay more in property taxes than do owners of single-family houses, because apartments are taxed at higher commercial real estate tax rates.

Despite the evidence, misperceptions about the fiscal benefits of compact development and the costs of sprawl stubbornly persist. Usually, the community members who oppose a proposed compact development attempt to reduce the density of the project, which ultimately reduces the community's return on the investment it has made in the infrastructure to support the development. While the input of community members is important to ensuring that proposed developments are designed appropriately to fit their surroundings, most of the general public needs to be better informed regarding the fiscal benefits of density.

Leaders who wish to help compact development happen will have to compile geographically specific data on differences in the cost of schools, water, sewers, and roads for compact development versus lower-density development. They can argue, for example, that the construction cost for 500 feet of road can be allocated to five housing units, 15 housing units, or 50 housing units.

Local leaders should remind residents and other community leaders that the savings from the efficiencies of compact development are passed along to businesses and residents and other competing demands on public resources, including parks, transportation, and school improvements. Most of all, they need to be convincing on the essential point: A decision to support compact development is a step in the direction of greater fiscal strength and more efficient use of the community's land and other resources. Such a step will also help a community meet other important public goals, such as alleviating traffic congestion, protecting natural resources, and creating a better jobs/housing balance.

4. Regulatory change should follow goal-setting, not precede it.

Once local leaders make the decision to encourage more compact development patterns, they often begin by examining the community's land use regulations to see what changes are necessary. But they should start by trying to achieve consensus within the community on what density is appropriate. After consensus is reached, appropriate new regulations can be formulated.

Participants in the ULI/NMHC compact development forums recommend that local leaders engage the public in consensus-building exercises before they tackle regulatory reform. Too often, communities go about this backwards, creating regulations first and seeking community consensus afterward. Soliciting resident input early in the process allows communities to tailor their land use regulations to reflect specific needs and desires. And obtaining community buy-in for compact development at the start of the planning process can minimize opposition to compact development proposals down the road—and thus shorten the entitlement process.

The goal-setting process should involve a broad range of residents, community groups, community officials, and professionals—including elected officials, representatives of local agencies and boards involved in land use and planning, business leaders, developers, people with relevant expertise (transportation engineers, architects, planners, environmentalists, economists), commuters, historic preservationists, and so forth. All these different facets of a community should be convened to share perspectives. Each peer or interest group will have different needs and concerns. Residents may have concerns about traffic congestion, parking, school crowding, or property values. Institutions and businesses may have concerns about workforce housing. Environmentalists may have concerns about open space or stormwater runoff. Local leaders should address the various concerns thoughtfully and seek to engage

> *"By almost every measurable indicator,* Reality Check *participants said they want the Washington region to offer more households and jobs close to public transportation, more mixed-use development, a better balance of jobs and housing, and more compact development within or adjacent to existing cities and towns. For the most part, participants would keep most of the new development that is headed to the region away from the lightly developed suburban fringe—a shift that would be sharply contrary to the current trend throughout the region."*
>
> **ULI Washington and the Smart Growth Alliance,**
> ***ULI Reality Check: Envisioning Our Region's Growth* (2005)**
> (available at http://washington.uli.org/Content/NavigationMenu30/Outreach/RealityCheck/RCfinalLR.pdf)

the community throughout the process of formulating policies to support compact development.

Because the community's goal-setting should be based on a realistic assessment of future growth, it is important to be specific about prospects for growth and development in the community, and to make these prospects clear to all stakeholders. Reaching consensus on how many new residents will have to be accommodated moves the orientation of the process from the problem to the solution.

The goal-setting process should be designed to educate stakeholders about the planning and development process. And it should aim to provide criteria for where compact development should be located and what it should look like—criteria that will later be translated into development regulations.

Myths about the economic, environmental, and aesthetic impacts of density versus sprawl—the kinds of myths that undermine compact development—should not be allowed to stand as truths. A community goal-setting exercise offers a great opportunity to publicize the community benefits of transit-oriented and compact development. At every point in the process, community leaders should seek to emphasize the positives—walkability, transportation choices, housing choices, economic growth—that can come from encouraging compact development.

5. Visioning exercises can catalyze community support for compact development.

Referred to variously in the ULI/NMHC forums as "a four-letter word," the "800-pound gorilla at the dinner table," and the "elephant in the room," density gets a bum rap. While some very bad development happens to be high-density development, some of the highest-quality and most valued real estate in America is also high-density development. Conversely, some low-density developments are awful; others are spectacular. So is the "800-pound gorilla" really density? Or is it just bad design?

Density, of course, is but one aspect of the many diverse elements that come together to create a development. Getting the density right for a particular development can be as complicated as getting the architecture right. This complexity is part of the reason that the process of development is so contentious. Consider this example: The infamous Pruitt-Igoe public housing project in St. Louis and New York City's Greenwich Village neighborhood were equivalent in density. After only two decades of service, Pruitt-Igoe was deemed a complete failure and demolished in 1972; while Greenwich Village continued (and continues) to evolve as one of the most sought-after and valuable (very high-density) real estate markets in the United States. Many factors contribute to the creation of a great place. To focus simply on density is rash and irresponsible.

Visioning exercises can help a community "get it right." Education is an important part of the visioning process. Everyone seems to go for that quaint corner coffee shop with outdoor seating, but few seem to realize that the financial feasibility of the coffee shop requires a lot of customers living or working within a relatively small radius. The reality that low-density development does not generate the market needed to make many of the most popular amenities possible needs to be explained to people.

Knowing the densities that are required to make various amenities feasible is important for effective visioning. For example, according to various studies, a minimum density of 12 dwelling units per acre is needed to support rail transit; and a minimum density of seven dwelling units per acre is required to support local bus service.

While the preservation of open space is often high on people's lists of features for a livable community, many participants in visioning exercises do not fully understand the relationship between density and open-space preservation. Compact development creates opportunities to preserve open space on and off site. In most zoning codes, open-space requirements increase with density, and providing greater amounts of open space is made possible by building up rather than out.

Take a 40,000-square-foot site zoned for a floor/area ratio (FAR) of 1, meaning that one square foot of building can be developed for every square foot of land area. You can design a 40,000-square-foot building in various configurations, for example: 1) as a two-story building (20,000 square feet per floor) with a footprint

ONTARIO, CALIFORNIA: FOLLOWING THE COMPASS BLUEPRINT

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), working with the planning firm of Fregonese Calthorpe Associates, has embarked on a regional growth management project it calls the Compass Blueprint. In order to prepare for an additional 5 million residents by the year 2030, SCAG is working with local communities on enacting a plan that will guide the region toward building workable, attractive, inclusive communities.

The so-called "2 percent strategy" is a key tool of the Compass Blueprint. A guideline for how and where the region's "growth vision" can be implemented, the strategy calls for modest changes to current land use and transportation trends on only 2 percent of the region's land area. It is projected that such modest changes can accommodate the region's anticipated population growth and, at the same time, improve mobility, livability, prosperity, and sustainability.

Compass Blueprint features strategy opportunity areas, which are areas with a high potential to implement projects, plans, or policies that can serve to further one or more of seven priority regional functions—including rail transit stops; bus rapid-transit corridors; airports, ports, and industrial centers; and residential infill.

The city of Ontario's New Model Colony represents a prime example of the kind of locally planned growth solutions that the Compass Blueprint is trying to encourage. Located in the San Bernardino Valley, Ontario is known as the gateway to southern California and the economic engine of the Inland Empire. It boasts a growing population of 158,000, which is expected to increase by 100,000 in coming years, and 90,000 jobs.

City officials and planners realized that Ontario could not accommodate anticipated population growth if it continued to follow its traditional low-density, mostly single-family residential development pattern. Furthermore, sprawl was causing quality-of-life problems for current residents and requiring the expenditure of significant tax dollars on infrastructure that supports relatively few housing units.

These problems led the city to approve a general plan for an 8,200-acre area—a portion of a former agricultural preserve annexed by the city in 1999—with compact development as a major component. The New Model Colony is being developed on one of the last significant underdeveloped areas in the San Bernardino Valley. More than half the site will be preserved for open space and agricultural use, while the remaining land will be developed in an urban village style.

FREGONESE CALTHORPE ASSOCIATES

As part of the Compass Blueprint process, community participants were asked to accommodate the region's anticipated 5 million additional residents.

The overall vision calls for mixed-density residential neighborhoods with a series of mixed-density retail and employment centers and a public square (common green space) in the middle. Each neighborhood and each center will be unique. A network of greenways and trails, open space, amenities, and infrastructure will connect adjoining neighborhoods. The general plan anticipates New Model Colony's buildout in 30 years.

that covers half of the site; or 2) as a four-story building (10,000 square feet per floor) that covers one-quarter of the site, leaving three-quarters in open space. Furthermore, the extent of rooftop (impervious surface area) is lessened by building up rather than out. Of course, parking has to be located on a portion of the remaining land area. Here too, going up (structured parking) rather than out (surface parking) saves open space and reduces impervious surface area.

Viewed from a broader regional perspective, compact development can reduce development pressure in outlying areas, and thus preserve agricultural land and open space. It accomplishes this by accommodating a significant portion of the overall regional demand for residential and commercial development in areas designated for higher density. Put simply, if opportunities for compact residential and commercial development exist, developers will be less likely to seek developable land in outlying areas; and with options available in areas of compact development, households will be less likely to seek housing far from their jobs. (The market for lower-density housing is unlikely to disappear, but compact development provides additional housing options.)

With growth projections in hand and a solid understanding of density, the participants in a visioning exercise can map out what they want their community to look like. Planning should move from general considerations (for example, the location and density of new development, use mixes, a parks and open-space program, and a recreational and cultural facilities program) to specifics (for example, capitalizing on transit opportunities, providing pedestrian connectivity, achieving a mix of housing, and establishing design guidelines, including building massing and setbacks).

Participants should be exposed to images of many examples of well-designed compact developments, including town centers and urban villages. Good compact development is walkable. It mixes homes, work, entertainment, schools, and other land uses in single neighborhoods. It offers a variety of housing options. It can be accessed by car, foot, public transportation, and bicycle. While its density might be higher than that of surrounding neighborhoods, it is carefully designed to blend harmoniously with the character of the area. Parks and other green spaces are carefully placed to meet the social and recreational needs of residents and landscaped to create private spaces without engendering security problems.

The visualization exercises should involve community officials, business leaders, citizen representatives, and others. They should leave participants with the sense that compact development can improve the quality of life within the community.[4] Visualization is a tool that has been successfully used already by some communities. For instance, regionally specific visualization tools that help the public envision proposed changes in the built environment have been a key component of southern California's Compass Blueprint program to guide the region toward sustainable growth (see sidebar on page 12).

People who become knowledgeable about compact development and its attributes generally come around to favoring it. Not long ago, prospective homebuyers were asked if they would prefer to live in an entirely automobile-oriented, large-lot suburb or a more compact neighborhood with schools, shops, and restaurants nearby. Sixty percent said they would prefer the compact neighborhood.[5] Education that demonstrates that compact development creates welcoming places is the key to the implementation of compact development.

6. The focus of regulations should be on the form of buildings more than on their uses.

Many building codes in force today are carryovers from an earlier industrial era when, in many urban areas, dense concentrations of industry and housing were located cheek by jowl, sanitation was lacking, and living conditions were poor. While most people today would say that separating housing from the slaughterhouse was a good idea, Euclidean zoning codes usually fail to create the kinds of communities 21st-century households are demanding.

America's greatest neighborhoods—such as Washington, D.C.'s Georgetown, Philadelphia's Society Hill, or Boston's Beacon Hill—are characterized by a fine-grained mix of uses; narrow, pedestrian-friendly streets; and a variety of housing types and lot sizes. However, the land use codes that are in force in many places simply would not permit similar neighborhoods to evolve today.

Thus, some communities are looking to form-based codes as a development regulation tool that can capture the best development practices from these neighborhoods while adapting to the realities of today's lifestyles and markets. Form-based codes turn traditional building codes on their head. First, the community states what it wants an area to look like; next, simple regulations are created to make sure that development fits the community's vision. Whereas traditional zoning emphasizes the segregation of land uses, form-based codes focus on the physical form and massing of buildings—on scale, block size, and the relationship between building edges and the public realm. They regulate building heights, setbacks, and the placement of windows and doors that face streets and other public spaces.

It is important not to confuse form-based codes with design guidelines that control certain aesthetic characteristics. Many form-based codes visually depict in just a few pages what older codes need hundreds of pages to convey. Form-based codes can be applied to entire towns or counties or restricted to special districts. The best form-based codes are simple and clear; they give developers a good sense of what types of development are permissible in a community.

Market demand for more livable neighborhoods is on the rise, and developers are eager to provide them. But they often are stymied by outdated zoning codes that force them to invest significant time and money to obtain waivers and special permits. As a result, many developers simply decide that it is easier to build conventional projects despite the market's preference for alternatives.

Among the few places that have successfully implemented form-based codes are Fort Myers Beach and Fort Pierce, both in Florida. In addition, Arlington County in northern Virginia has implemented a form-based code for a 3.5-mile stretch along Columbia Pike, a major commercial road.

FORM-BASED CODES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The Opportunities

Much more user friendly than conventional zoning, form-based codes are written in plain English and use matrices, diagrams, and other illustrations liberally.

Form-based codes are written to fulfill a specific physical vision for a place. Which neighborhood patterns should be retained and protected? Which are obsolete and should be replaced? These decisions need to be based on a broad public consensus.

This up-front agreement on the desired future, often reached through a public participation charrette or some other visioning method, allows for the creation of precise and objective codes that can remove much of the politics and uncertainty from the approval process.

A code with clear and concise rules can deliver predictability for both the developer and the community. For fundamental issues about the creation of public spaces, such as avoiding blank walls or parking lots along sidewalks, the rules are very strict. Other issues are truly less important for urban form, such as micromanagement of parking or of what uses can take place in each building over time; those rules are much more lenient than in today's zoning codes.

Working with a well-written form-based code, developers are less likely to have to go through the following typical, frustrating entitlement scenarios:

• wasting time and money on a concept that ends up being unacceptable to the community;

• fearing to propose something desirable because too many variances or discretionary approvals would be required; or

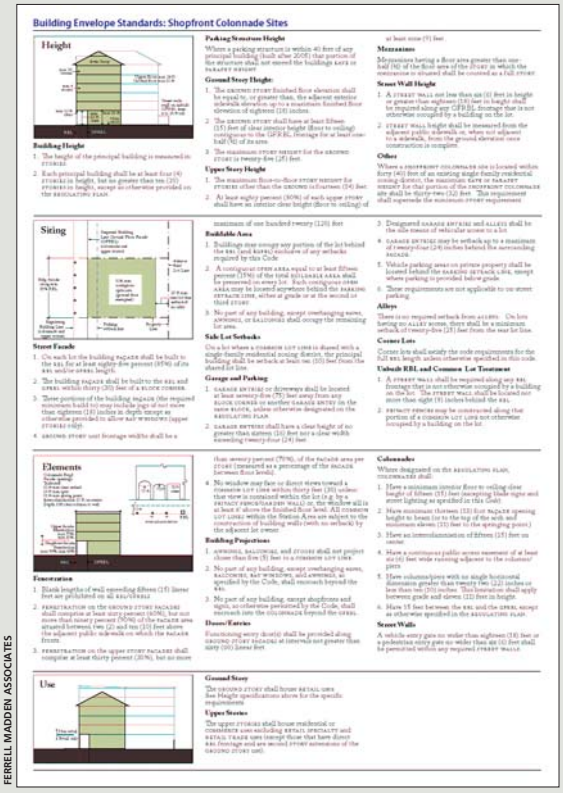
• being told to come back with a proposal in response to their inquiries as to desirable uses on a site.

When a community writes what is desired into its codes, these guessing games are removed. The new process can replace grueling public hearings in which each proposal is picked apart, redesigned from the dais, or sent back to the drawing board, only to end up with unexpected special conditions or outright denial influenced by whoever shows up at the final public hearing.

When consensus is built at the beginning of the planning and coding process, and the rules are clear and concise, the approval process can be much quicker. As Peter Park, Denver's planning director, observed, "Why shouldn't Denver streamline permitting of development that matches what the city wants?"

The Challenges

For all of their advantages, form-based codes come with certain costs. Building consensus on a physical vision takes time, patience, and resources—and there is no guarantee of success.



FERRELL MADDEN ASSOCIATES

Once a shared vision has been reached, it must be converted into objective code provisions that replace contradictory provisions in the existing ordinances. Without this step, a visionary plan stands little chance of influencing the future of a community.

It is a true test of patience and perseverance for elected officials to stay the course when the inevitable naysayers appear at the last minute and want to rethink the shared vision they did not participate in formulating. Developers, who stand to benefit from the new system, often remain silent or even block the new code's path if they are focused only on their current development.

Developers who are locked into old development patterns may also object to form-based codes. Change can be difficult; developers of conventional strip centers may admire more intense, mixed-use buildings, but fear the risk of a different development pattern or fear out-of-town competitors with more experience with mixed-use buildings or traditional neighborhood development techniques.

—Excerpted from
Mary E. Madden and Bill Spikowski,
"Place Making with Form-Based Codes," Urban Land*,*
September 2006.

7. How dense? The answer depends on the context.

To get a sense of the relative nature of the concept of density, ask someone from Manhattan and someone from Kansas to define "high-density development." The idea that appropriate density is contextual was expressed at all four compact development forums. Attendees stressed that this does not preclude locating compact development in lower-density communities. However, care should be taken to integrate such development into a lower-density community and planners should try, where possible, to effectively transition from the higher to lower densities.

The density of compact development can range from moderate to very high. While the form and density of compact development will vary depending on the community context, all communities can benefit from it. It may take the form of intensified land uses along transit corridors or around other nodes of activity—like the transit-oriented district created around a rapid-transit station by the city of Montclair, a sprawling community in southern California's Inland Empire.

In fast-growing suburban areas, compact development may take various forms—perhaps a neotraditional neighborhood development, or a lifestyle retail center with upper-level housing, or just a denser-than-average subdivision with a mix of housing types. In rural areas, compact development may take the form of development clustered on a portion of a residential site so that the remainder of the site can be preserved as public open space. Even simply including granny flats—accessory units, often located over a garage—in single-family developments qualifies as a form of compact development.

Reduced land consumption is one of the great benefits of compact development. The land that is left undeveloped because housing and other space demands are met by development forms that use less land can be thought of as part of the context for compact development. It is fortunate that compact development, in effect, preserves undeveloped land and can facilitate the preservation of ecologically important features, such as wetlands or forest habitats—because its higher densities also make more open space necessary. Open-space planning is a vital part of planning for compact development. Conversely, the contribution that compact development makes to the preservation of open space should be maximized through proper planning and environmental sensitivity. In that intensified land use reduces demand on land consumption throughout a region, it should justify the preservation of open space in areas outside development corridors as well.

Exemplifying that approach is Montgomery County, Maryland's "wedges and corridors" concept that since the early 1960s has helped guide development in the fast-growing county located just outside Washington, D.C. The county has used various techniques to strategically concentrate compact development along major transportation corridors, which has helped it to maintain and preserve wedges of other favored land uses such as farmland, lower-density neighborhoods, and open space.

8. Upfront community planning improves the climate for compact development and avoids surprises in the entitlement process.

The right climate for compact development consists of an atmosphere of trust, a process of community engagement, and the existence of clear and well-defined regulations. In such a climate, the production of progressive compact development is speeded up, development hurdles are lowered, NIMBY (not in my backyard) type objections are obviated, and the likelihood of tumultuous public hearings at the project approval stage is lessened. With extensive upfront community planning, the community and the developer can both get what they want.

Hyattsville, Maryland, is a community that in many ways figured out how to make the development process work for all parties, as reported at the Washington, D.C., compact development forum. Based on a detailed plan that clearly spelled out the kind of development that the community wanted for a transit station area, EYA, a regional developer, put together a plan. Though several issues required some additional discussion, most differences were ironed out and the entitlement process went smoothly. According to all parties, the credit goes to the upfront planning done by the community. (See "Arts District Hyattsville" sidebar on page 18 for more details.)

Unfortunately for compact development, tension, disagreement, mistrust, incivility, and risk characterize the climate for project approvals in too many communities. Primary reasons as noted by forum attendees are 1) an aversion to change on the part of the general public, and 2) a sense among residents that they have no meaningful role in the planning of their community. For too many residents, involvement in the planning and entitlement process is limited to the public hearing considering the approval of projects proposed in their neighborhoods.

When community members are engaged in effective planning for the community's future, the submission of a development proposal that addresses their wants and needs as expressed in the plan(s) they helped formulate comes as no surprise. While differences between a developer and neighborhood residents are almost inevitable, the chances that the process for working out those differences will be productive and civilized are significantly greater when residents are informed about growth trends and engaged in the planning of their community.

In northern Virginia, Arlington County involved nearly 60 neighborhood civic associations in the formulation of plans for development in the Rosslyn-Ballston Metrorail corridor. The extensive planning and education process for corridor development showed residents of adjacent neighborhoods that compact development in their neighborhoods would have positive economic and lifestyle impacts. As a result, specific compact development proposals were able to navigate the approval process with little difficulty, and the vast majority of development in the county since the 1970s has been concentrated along the rail-transit corridor (see discussion under forum theme #10 on page 21).

ARTS DISTRICT HYATTSVILLE: A TRANSIT-ORIENTED REDEVELOPMENT OF DOWNTOWN

In 1989, when the Prince George's, Maryland, county council recommended designating the West Hyattsville (then proposed) Metrorail station area as a transit district overlay zone (TDOZ), the area was characterized by strip retail, a concentration of car dealerships, and low-density housing. In order to maximize use of the extended rail service, the county was seeking to intensify land uses within half a mile of the station. At the same time, the municipality was seeking to expand its ailing tax base.

An initial land use plan for the station area, known as the Transit District Development Plan (TDDP), was completed in 1992. Intended to guide the community visioning process, this plan illustrated possibilities for streetscape improvements, pedestrian-friendly retail, and higher-density housing. In 1998, a revised, more flexible TDDP was issued, removing many land use restrictions and creating a redevelopment framework based on choice and a mix of uses. Compared with the 1992 plan, which spelled out land uses down to specific parcels, the far more flexible 1998 update allowed for the TDDP's desired mix of uses to be achieved in a range of configurations.

EYA

The TDDP plan includes parking management tools designed to encourage the use of public transportation and enhance the pedestrian orientation of the district. Within one-half mile of the station, the maximum ratio of surface parking per 1,000 square feet of space is two spaces for office uses and 1.1 spaces for residential uses. These ratios are approximately one-third lower than the parking ratios outside the designated TDOZ. On-street parking is limited. Together, the plan achieves a 20 to 25 percent reduction in parking in the TDOZ compared with standards outside the district.

In 2002, the state of Maryland hired Parsons Brinckerhoff—a national planning, engineering, and program and construction management firm—to study the feasibility of repositioning the 126-acre West Hyattsville Metrorail station area as a transit-oriented development. The resulting plan—the West Village (later renamed Arts District) plan—contemplates 1 million square feet of office and retail space, 3,600 residential units, and 4,000 jobs (for a jobs/housing ratio of 1:1) in buildings ranging from three to six stories (for increased density). A significant number of artists have been attracted to the Hyattsville area, which is in one of the more affordable counties in the Washington metropolitan area and offers some urban amenities—including Metrorail access—that are uncommon for a suburban area.

The Arts District development plan proposed by EYA, a residential community developer in the Washington metropolitan area, was approved by the county commission in 2005. Having broken ground in spring 2006, the first phase of the proposed $120 million redevelopment of downtown Hyattsville will include 124 rowhouses and 13 live/work units. As the result of a deal struck with the community, EYA will rehabilitate a local landmark, the Lustine auto showroom built in the 1950s, to serve as a community center for the district. It will include a gallery to display the work of local artists. When the project is completed, the Arts District will boast more than 450 housing units—rowhouses, live/work units, and condominiums—as well as an abundance of neighborhood-serving retail space. House prices are expected to start in the high $300,000s.

9. Compact development relies on a transparent and predictable development process.

In an effective planning, zoning, and development approval process, it should be presumed that a good development proposal will receive an expeditious approval. What makes the process effective? First, the community's vision for future growth and development is consistent with its comprehensive plan. Second, the comprehensive plan drives the creation of more detailed community plans, zoning regulations, and development regulations. Third, development proposals are reviewed for consistency with the comprehensive plan and detailed community plans, the zoning code, and development codes.

Unfortunately, few jurisdictions offer a clear and predictable entitlement process. Forum participants reported that the entitlement process in too many communities is lengthy, unclear, unpredictable, fragmented, and uncoordinated. A two- to three-year approval process is not uncommon, and some take even longer. Developers need more certainty. Long delays cost a lot of money, and these costs are passed on to the end user.

Good proposals that meet the stated needs of the community should get quick and easy approval. An expedited planning and approval process can greatly reduce carrying costs for the developer, which makes the developer more likely to undertake complicated compact development projects. Reduced costs will also make the developments more affordable. It is important to remember that countless excellent projects have died in the approval process, at a cost to the community of lost property tax revenues, lost jobs, and unmet demand for housing and for retail and office space.

In addition to creating concise and detailed community plans, municipalities can help by enacting clear and updated regulations and by streamlining the approval process for new development. Jurisdictions can fast-track approvals for compact development projects in various ways, for example by appointing city or county development coordinators to shepherd them through the process, cross-training staff to be able to handle several parts of the process and to fill in for absent staff, and establishing one-stop shops so that developers can avoid having to go from official to official. One streamlining technique with promise is a commitment to approve proposals that meet a community's priority needs—based on a quick scorecard evaluation—in an expeditious manner. To introduce certainty into the process, jurisdictions should enact specific time limits for reviews and approvals.

In communities where compact development is strongly desired, the government can offer incentives to encourage developers to submit proposals. The biggest potential incentive is free or discounted land. Jurisdictions offering land may want to go through a request-for-proposals (RFP) or request-for-qualifications (RFQ) process and establish a public/private partnership with the selected developer to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome. Other common incentives include:

- reduced parking requirements;
- density bonuses;
- tax abatements;

- infrastructure subsidies;
- brownfield remediation;
- infrastructure upgrades, including not only water and sewer pipes, but also sidewalks, lighting, and bicycle trails;
- establishment or extension of a business improvement district (BID);
- upgrades to public spaces;
- tax-increment financing;
- waivers of application and service fees; and
- easement purchases.

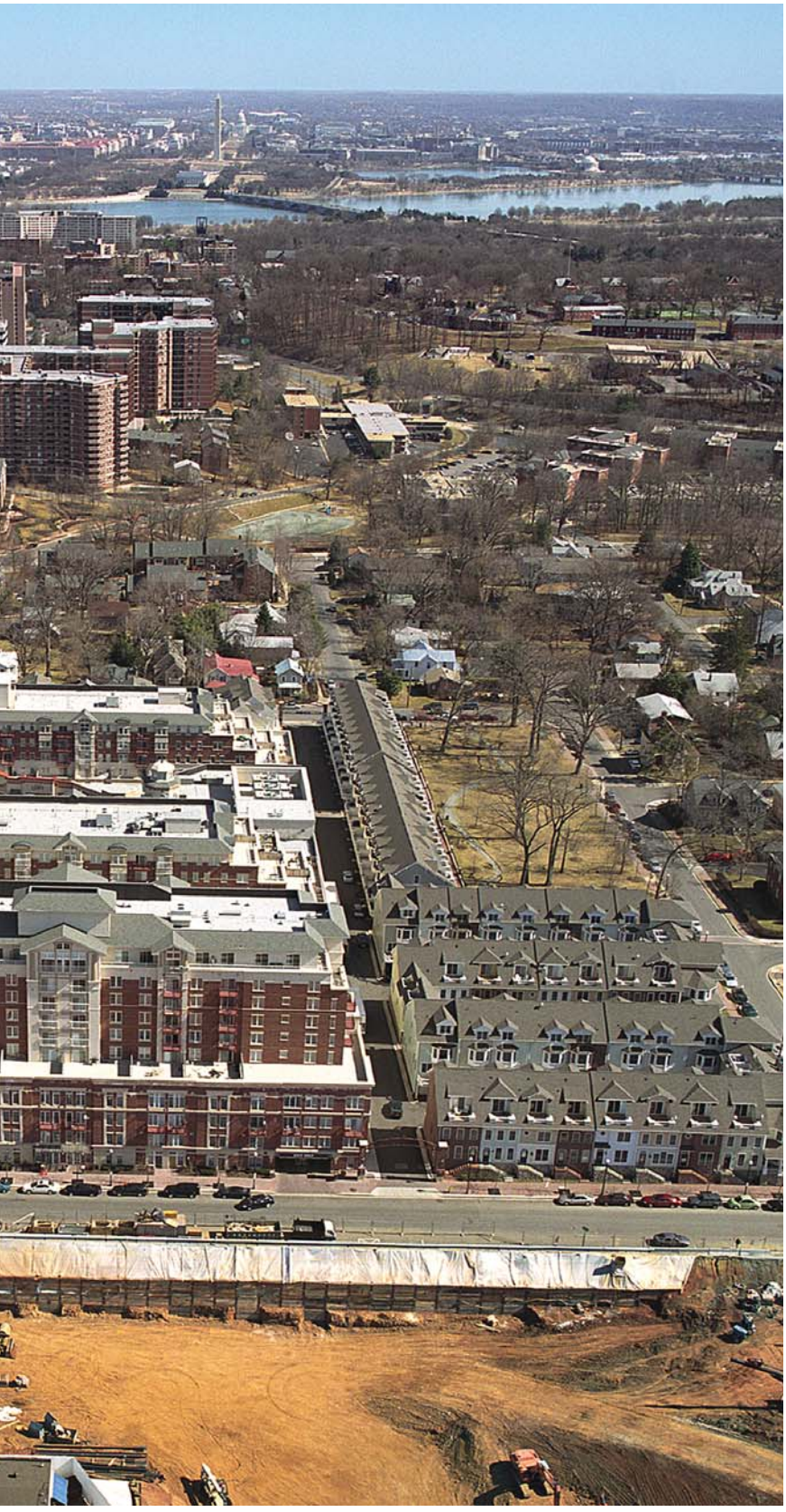
Miami-based Zyscovich Inc. created the Midtown Miami Master Plan for the redevelopment of midtown Miami as a high-density, mixed-use urban village. Community, political, and private sector interests worked together to establish a rapid entitlement process for development proposals within the master plan area.

10. Certain sites lend themselves particularly to compact development.

Compact development can help any community address growth pressures and create vibrant, livable places. But it can be especially beneficial for various regional, economic, and environmental purposes when implemented on certain types of sites. Compact development on underused and infill parcels that are already urbanized—that is, served by existing or planned infrastructure—makes fiscal sense, as does compact development on the sites of vacant buildings and surface parking lots located in downtowns or near commercial corridors. Regions benefit when compact development is located close to existing employment nodes; public transportation systems benefit when it is located near access to public transit; and older suburbs benefit when compact development is configured around their mixed-use town centers.

Arlington County, Virginia's policy of encouraging compact development along the Rosslyn-Ballston Metrorail corridor not only rests on an exemplary planning and education process (see discussion under forum theme #8 on page 17), but also punches all the right buttons in terms of sites—infill and underused transit corridor sites near existing development and infrastructure. Arlington's successful mixed-use redevelopment of its rail corridor is considered a classic example of the integration of concentrated land uses into an existing suburban community. The result is a series of walkable urban villages where people live, work, and play—and enjoy a variety of transportation options. The Rosslyn-

> *"The Atlanta region's town centers, employment centers, and transportation corridors make up only about 10 percent of the 13-county region's land area, but these areas can accommodate a large amount of the region's future population growth. These areas have existing infrastructure and are ripe for both new development and the redevelopment of failing strip retail centers, old apartment stock, and other underutilized and deteriorating structures.*
>
> *"Recycling the development in these areas will increase the tax base, leverage overall public infrastructure investment, and provide more choices for new housing closer to jobs. It will also ease the growth pressures on the remainder of the region. In order to allow these areas to attract and handle new development and redevelopment at greater densities, transportation enhancements will likely be needed, including improved pedestrian access."*
>
> **Metro Atlanta Quality Growth Task Force, Final Recommendations, May 7, 2004**
> (available at http://www.beltline.org/media/docs/pdf_newsGrowthTaskForce.pdf)



Ballston corridor now contains more than 21 million square feet of office and retail space, more than 3,000 hotel rooms and 22,500 residential units, and miles of bicycle trails.

Arlington County's compact development policies are admirable for their success in both encouraging more intensive land uses along an existing corridor and in preserving stable older neighborhoods that lack the infrastructure to support higher-density development. The high density of development along the mixed-use corridor tapers down as new development approaches these quiet, single-family neighborhoods. A similar approach would serve many other communities extremely well.

Arlington County's policy of concentrating density around Metro stations is exemplary. The county has succeeded in creating a series of urban villages interspersed with lower-density development between stations.

PLANTATION MIDTOWN: A PLANNED URBAN VILLAGE

The city of Plantation, Florida, which is ten miles west of Fort Lauderdale, has embarked on a project to transform the 860-acre area where the city's office and retail uses—including regional shopping centers and a medical complex—are currently concentrated in a mixed-use urban village that includes housing. The rezoning to implement the transformation refers to the new district as Plantation Midtown, and envisions the creation of a compact town center containing housing, office, retail, and entertainment uses. The redeveloped town center will be enlivened by pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, smaller blocks, and a more interconnected street network. Parking requirements have been reduced, and all parking will be located internally so that buildings can face the street.

Plantation Midtown is planned to take shape in three phases, each defined by a specified number and type of residential units and amount of new office and commercial/retail space. At completion in 2025, Plantation Midtown will have an additional 3,010 dwelling units, 1.8 million square feet of office space, and 400,000 square feet of commercial space.

The city adopted the conceptual plan in 2002 and enacted supporting zoning changes and a roadway and greenway improvement plan in 2004. The idea is to attract compact development by making streetscapes more pedestrian friendly and visually appealing. Major planning concerns have included walkability, mobility within the Midtown district, and connections from outside the district. A loop-transit system is being planned, with various types of vehicles and technologies now under consideration; a modified rubber-tire vehicle, similar to a tram, is the likely choice.

The city has been successful in attracting new development to the area. Developers mention the increased permitted density as one of the main draws. One such development is the Residences at the Fountains, which is being constructed on the parking lots of an existing shopping center and will include 478 residential units.

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BY VATHAUER STUDIOS, DESIGNED BY ADD INC FOR AMERICAN LAND VENTURES

Under construction on eight acres of parking lots at the rear of the Fountains Mall, the Residences at the Fountains will contribute to an expanding mix of land uses in the Plantation Midtown district. Its two towers will contain 478 residential units.

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Washington, D.C., Forum
June 6, 2006

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NOTES

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2 For specific information on the fiscal impacts of spread-out development, see Robert Burchell, Anthony Downs, Sahan Mukherji, and Barbara McCann, *Sprawl Costs* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2005).

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