



FAQs on Smart Growth

1. What is Smart Growth?

Smart Growth is development that preserves and enhances quality of life and promotes a sense of community. It is based on four principles:

- greater densities and mixed uses in appropriate areas
- integrate transportation investment with appropriate land use
- increase housing choices
- preserve greenspace

2. How does Smart Growth help improve quality of life?

Smart Growth:

- Increases high-density, mixed use development near corridors and job centers
- Reduces traffic
- Recycles underutilized and blighted properties
- Makes use of public infrastructure more efficient
- Meets increasing market demand for mixed use housing

3. What are some examples of Smart Growth initiatives?

Atlantic Station in Midtown Atlanta is a perfect example of Smart Growth. It combines various housing, business and transportation options in a dense, livable community. Other local examples include Atlantic Station, Glenwood Park, and Vickery.

Smart Growth in Atlanta

4. Why does Atlanta need to adopt Smart Growth principles?

Many experts predict a population increase of 2.5 million (the size of greater Denver) in the Atlanta area by the year 2030. Currently, Atlanta is the least densely developed region in the top 15 U.S. metro areas and one of the nation's leaders in traffic congestion.

If Atlanta continues in its current growth pattern, there will be a lack of affordable housing near jobs, increased traffic congestion, increased demands on the transportation system and reduced air and water quality, among other negative effects.



5. What is Atlanta's current smart pattern?

Atlanta's current landscape is the very definition of "sprawl." Local governments often use zoning laws to push growth out of their jurisdictions. By mandating big lots and large houses, apartments, condos and town homes are restricted.

Since Atlanta has no natural boundaries (i.e. oceans, rivers, mountains) to hinder sprawl, it appears that the city has plenty of room to grow. However, this thinking does not take into account the cost of serving this growth – unchecked growth puts tremendous pressure on local citizens and infrastructure.

6. What are some of the negative impacts of population growth?

Population growth itself is not bad. On the contrary, it generates jobs, incomes and property values rise, and tax revenues increase.

However, uncontrolled and reactive growth can cause negative effects, such as traffic congestion, environmental degradation and infrastructure stress.

7. How else is Atlanta expected to change in the next 25 years?

In addition to population increase, the demographics of Atlanta's population and the development of its land will change dramatically. Half of the built environment will be new construction or the result of redevelopment, the number of residents over 65 will triple, the number of residents over 45 will double, and households with minor children will shrink by one-third.

Housing

8. What is density?

Housing density, or residential density, refers to the number of homes per unit of land, reported in dwelling units per acre (du/ac). High-density areas have more homes per unit of land than low-density areas. Different levels of housing density include:

- Single-family homes, estate lots (4-10 du/ac)
- Town homes, cluster homes, row houses (20-40 du/ac)
- Stack plans, condos, apartment (40-60 du/ac, 60-80 du/ac, 80-100 du/ac)

9. How does Smart Growth provide more housing options?

Currently, developers cannot easily create innovative housing solutions due to zoning rules and regulations. Smart Growth seeks to increase housing choices by removing barriers that artificially restrict the market, allowing a variety of housing including small and big apartments, condominiums, townhomes, senior and special needs housing, and single-family residences ranging from cluster homes to estate lots.



10. Does affordable housing reduce nearby property values?

Market factors such as location, architecture and property maintenance are the primary drivers of property value growth.

There are many examples in Atlanta of affordable housing developments that maintained and/or increased in value. Redevelopment of declining areas offering communities choices in housing types, new parks with recreational trails and entertainment options, can increase the property values in neighborhoods.

Transportation

11. Will new higher density housing development increase traffic?

Higher density development, combined with access to public transit, service, stores and in close proximity to jobs, actually helps reduce traffic.

12. What are the benefits of integrating transportation and land-use decisions?

A recent study by the Surface Transportation Authority found that the main factor (37 percent) contributing to increased traffic congestion was the increasing number of car trips.

Through experts retained by the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Quality Task Force, growth scenarios for the future of the Metro area were provided. The conclusions indicated by integrating transportation and land-use decisions, Atlanta can actually decrease congested travel time to 33 minutes (less traffic delay than today) and leave undeveloped more than 100,000 acres of land (an area the size of Clayton County).

The integration of mass transit is also a vital part of any major metropolitan area's balanced transportation system. The benefits of Smart Growth cannot truly be felt without appropriate transportation options running to and surrounding higher-density developments.

13. Is Atlanta currently integrating transportation and land-use?

Atlanta's current transportation infrastructure has not kept pace with its "sprawl" growth pattern, and simply building more roads will not solve these problems. As Atlanta continues to grow, natural resources, such as air and water, are being strained – the pace of current land consumption is not sustainable.

To combat this problem, ARC as Atlanta's MPO created "Mobility 2030," a long-range blueprint for the region's transportation system. It includes:

- A \$53 billion slate of investments that will add capacity to Atlanta roadways, HOV lanes and transit systems
- New technology systems for changeable message signs, ramp metering and timing traffic signals
- Regional Institutional Analysis to address operational issues and introduce conformity between the several transit providers of today – each with different fares, fare collection system and schedules



Infrastructure

14. How does Smart Growth impact public services?

Currently, the Atlanta region doesn't have enough land, water, or money to absorb the next 20 years of population growth in the spread-out, sprawl pattern of the last 20 years. Building low density housing creates the need to build new infrastructure, and spreads limited tax dollars over a wider area.

New higher density development in established communities requires less public infrastructure investment because the infrastructure is already there. The higher density allows economies of scale for both the public infrastructure and the private developer.

15. How does the Atlanta area accommodate the needs of its growing baby boomer population?

Studies show that the majority of people in this demographic segment want to live in their existing neighborhoods and intown near the city's entertainment and other attractions. Estimates show that only five percent of the elderly live in nursing homes, and approximately 21 percent of those 65 and older no longer drive.

The neighborhoods of tomorrow will need to provide high-amenity, low maintenance, walkable communities within a short distance of stores, pharmacies, health-related services, restaurants, other businesses and transit.

Greenspace

16. How does Smart Growth help preserve greenspace?

Through planned and designed methods tailored to specific community needs, Smart Growth helps preserve greenspace and enhance quality of life.

Smart Growth helps:

- Conserve natural resources by integrating open space with necessary development
- Encourage energy-efficient design, water conservation and storm water management
- Build with pervious materials, which allow for natural groundwater recharge, filtration of pollutants, and reduced erosion and flooding
- The planting of shade trees to reduce ground temperatures in the summer



Livable Communities Coalition

17. What is the goal of the Livable Communities Coalition?

The goal of the Coalition is to establish a coordinated framework for working together to achieve its four guiding principles. Adhering to principles of quality growth can provide better choices for local citizens and businesses, reduce traffic, recycle underutilized and blighted properties, be more efficient in use of public infrastructure, and save green space.

The Coalition focuses on three areas:

1. **Projects:** Provides technical, political and other support to areas that implement the principles; encourages and facilitates private actions and investment consistent with the principles
2. **Public Policy:** Works to put in place policies, ordinances and regulations that forward quality growth; supports local government and regional agency actions that embrace the principles
3. **Communicate and Educate:** Promotes an informed public discussion of growth issues facing the region

18. Who are the Coalition members?

[More than 42 organizations](#), businesses and institutes currently participate in the Coalition.