

Integrating Sustainability and Smart Growth Principles into the General Plan

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The update of the General Plan will be Tucson's guide for future course of action for the current and future urban area, integrating sustainability and smart growth elements.

What is Sustainability?

As applied to the human community, *sustainability* has been expressed as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs¹.

At its core, sustainability is concerned with the maintenance of natural and human capital:

- **Natural capital** includes sun, rain, plants and animals, soil, minerals, and other physical elements of our planet.
- **Human capital** at the most basic level refers to people themselves.

There are two essential components to maintaining this natural and human capital: **health** – of ecosystems and people – and **efficiency** of resource use. Beyond human and natural system health and resource efficiency, the concept of sustainability becomes more complicated because the efficiency of resource use is concerned with the appropriate **allocation of resources**; issues which are defined by social/community values and economic and governance systems.

What is a Sustainable Urban Development?

Sustainable urban development, in simple words, means the application of the principle of sustainability to the planning and development of cities. This includes the improvement of the quality of life in a city, including ecological, cultural, political, institutional, social and economic components without leaving a burden on the future generations; a burden which is the result of a reduced natural capital and an excessive local debt².

Sustainable urban development is the ability to make development choices based on the close evaluation of the interrelationship between the following components:

- **Economic Prosperity** – Economic activity should serve the common good, be self-renewing, and build local assets and self-reliance.
- **Environmental Integrity** – Human are part of nature, nature has limits, and communities are responsible for protecting and building natural capital.
- **Social Equity** – The opportunity for full participation in all activities, benefits, and decision-making in a society.

¹ This definition is used by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It is derived from an earlier, widely disseminated definition by the Brundtland Commission in its report *Our Common Future*. This earlier definition was a definition of "sustainable development", but has been widely adopted as a definition of sustainability.

² This is the definition of sustainable urban development reached during the preparatory meetings for the URBAN21 Conference (Berlin, July 2000).

What is Smart Growth?

Smart growth is a set of principles that guide decisions about *where* and *how* growth and development occur. This urban planning and transportation theory concentrates growth towards the center of a city to avoid **urban sprawl**, and advocates compact, transit-oriented, walkable, land uses and roads. Smart growth values long-range, regional considerations of **sustainability**.

Smart growth focuses on the patterns in which cities are built; it encourages the **efficient use of land**. By using land efficiently, smart growth minimizes infrastructure development and maintenance costs for cities, as well as land development costs for developers. Sensitive use of land ensures water resources, prime agricultural land, habitat, and unique landscapes are conserved for future generations.

Smart growth reduces dependence on the automobile by **providing a range of transportation choices**. Multi-modal transportation systems protect air quality, make communities more livable, create more affordable living situations, and curb future expenses on road construction and maintenance.

Smart growth eliminates incentives for sprawling development and promotes the long-term vitality and viability of neighborhoods. Smart growth communities **include design elements** with a local flavor that identify a unique sense of place for their residents.

The features that distinguish smart growth in a community vary from place to place. In general, smart growth includes the following fundamental themes:

- Mix of land uses
- Variety of transportation choices
- A range of housing opportunities and choices
- Preservation of open space, natural beauty, critical environments
- Direct development towards existing communities
- Compact building designs
- Walkable neighborhoods
- Distinctive, attractive communities with a sense of place
- Development decisions that are fair, predictable, cost effective
- Community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

What is Arizona's Growing Smarter Legislation?

In 1998 and 2000, the Arizona State Legislature adopted the first significant planning legislation to be enacted in the state in over 20 years: the **Growing Smarter and Growing Smarter Plus Acts**. These laws require communities to identify growth areas, and to establish strategies and policies so that new growth will pay its fair share of the public facilities needed to serve it. Through its General Plan, the City of Tucson is required to meet Growing Smarter statutes.

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