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State Government Fully Endorses Goals of Smart Growth Program

By Leonard Bierbrier

As the commonwealth of Massachusetts, through the leadership of Gov. Romney, takes the initiative to support “smart growth” development, Boston and other dense urban and suburban communities will be the true benefactors.

Communities throughout the Bay State are wisely beginning to understand the far-reaching benefits and making plans for such development.

While smart growth development does result in greater business and profits for community-conscious, forward-thinking developers and their retail and service industry tenants, it will prove equally beneficial for the cities and suburban communities that take the steps to ensure such well-planned developments can have a future in their communities. For densely populated areas, these progressive smart growth developments will add revenue streams for the community and increased job opportunities and housing for residents.

Over time, communities that embrace smart growth principles in their local zoning will enhance real estate values within the community, which is the foundation to funding public services. Plus, the existing infrastructure will be leveraged cost effectively. By centralizing development, a synergy between housing and urban development is created. And, the downside impact of suburban sprawl on the community is therefore substantially moderated.

Because of the instinctively sound, community-oriented principles on which smart growth is founded, communities are beginning to take a close, open-minded look at smart growth development projects for their downtown areas.

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Montello Plaza in Brockton, developed by Bierbrier Development, is a recent example of a “smart growth” development project. The center is located in the heart of Brockton on North Montello Street, directly across from a commuter rail station. The developer improved existing infrastructure by adding a new bus stop and new sidewalks.

The basic principles of smart growth that have been endorsed by the Massachusetts Office of Commonwealth Development, and to which the real estate development community and communities throughout the state must remain true and committed, include:

- Redevelop First – Support the revitalization of town centers and neighborhoods. Encourage reuse and rehabilitation of existing infrastructure rather than the construction of new infrastructure in undeveloped areas. Give preference to redevelopment of “brownfields,” preservation and reuse of historic structures, and rehabilitation of existing housing and schools.

- Concentrate Development – Support development that is compact, conserves land, integrates uses, and fosters a sense of place. Create walkable districts mixing commercial, civic, cultural, educational and recreational activities with open space and housing – with a goal of promoting diverse communities.

- Be Fair – Promote equitable sharing of the benefits and burdens of development. Provide technical and strategic support for inclusive community planning to ensure

social, economic and environmental justice. Make regulatory and permitting processes for development clear, transparent, cost-effective and oriented to encourage smart growth and regional equity.

- Restore and Enhance the Environment – Expand land and water conservation. Protect and restore environmentally-sensitive lands, natural resources, wildlife habitats, and cultural and historic landscapes. Increase the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space. Preserve critical habitat and bio-diversity. Promote developments that respect and enhance the state’s natural resources.

- Conserve Natural Resources – Increase the supply of renewable energy and reduce waste of water, energy and materials. Lead by example and support conservation strategies, clean power and innovative industries. Construct and promote buildings and infrastructure that use land, energy, water and materials efficiently.

- Expand Housing Opportunities – Support the construction and rehabilitation of housing to meet the needs of people of all abilities, income levels and household types.

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Coordinate the provision of housing with the location of jobs, transit and services. Foster the development of housing, particularly multifamily, that is compatible with a community's character and vision.

- **Provide Transportation Choice** – Increase access to transportation options, in all communities, including land- and water-based public transit, bicycling and walking. Invest strategically in transportation infrastructure to encourage smart growth. Locate new development where a variety of transportation modes can be made available.

- **Increase Job Opportunities** – Attract businesses to locations near housing, infrastructure, water and transportation options. Expand access to educational and entrepreneurial opportunities. Support the growth of new and existing local businesses.

- **Foster Sustainable Businesses** – Strengthen sustainable natural resource-based businesses, including agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Strengthen sustainable businesses. Support economic development in industry clusters consistent with regional and local character. Maintain reliable and affordable energy sources and reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels.

- **Plan Regionally** – Support the development and implementation of local and regional plans that have broad public support and are consistent with these principles.

Foster development projects, land and water conservation, transportation and housing that have a regional or multi-community benefit. Consider the long-term costs and benefits to the larger commonwealth.

Smart growth is indeed at the center of the Massachusetts' Office of

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Commonwealth Development mission, which is: "Caring for the natural and built environment of Massachusetts by promoting smart growth through the integration of energy, environmental, housing and transportation policies, programs and regulations." Smart growth is a planning approach, which can integrate the sometimes conflicting demands of economic vitality, natural resource management, and population growth. Smart growth can promote econom-

ic prosperity and enhance the quality of life through measures that respect the importance of freedom of choice, flexible land uses, and the environment.

The Office of Commonwealth Development has joined with the MBTA in a partnership that endeavors to use land near transit stops for smart growth development; the concept being that great opportunities for well-planned development exist in urban and suburban hubs at areas of public transportation. This transit-oriented development program has recently announced four pilot locations: Wonderland, Revere; Malden Center, Malden; Mishawum Station, Woburn; and Waverly Station, Belmont.

Within the many challenges that must be met for retail and commercial smart growth development, the Office of Commonwealth Development recommends such logical ideas as developing vertically, above and below ground, and integrating mixed-uses so that retail, commercial and housing use the same vehicle and pedestrian infrastructure to create a new, pedestrian-friendly town center.

Smart growth is indeed aptly named. It is crucial for business growth in Massachusetts, and for the communities that have the opportunity to take advantage of well-planned development to revitalize their downtown and transportation hubs. ■