



DESIGNING FOR SMART GROWTH

CREATING GREAT PLACES
IN THE SAN DIEGO REGION



June 2009

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The San Diego region's built environment is in a constant state of change. Every year, old buildings are renovated; functionally obsolete buildings are replaced with new ones; and vacant sites are developed. In some places, communities have decided that new development should use land more intensively than in the past, so the community can accommodate growth in developed areas rather than sprawling outward. This approach supports the basic principles of smart growth by taking advantage of existing infrastructure and strengthening existing neighborhoods. It also results in a more sustainable land use pattern that enables people to drive less.

SANDAG's *Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP)*, adopted in 2004, offers a vision for change in the San Diego region that strongly emphasizes sustainability and smart growth. It also underscores the importance of high-quality urban design, acknowledging that higher-intensity infill development can win acceptance with members of the public only if it is designed well. The RCP notes that good design "can be the difference between a sense of overcrowding and a feeling of vibrancy." To ensure that new infill development has high-quality design, the RCP calls for SANDAG to prepare a set of smart growth design guidelines. *Designing for Smart Growth* fulfills the RCP's vision.

1.1 Purpose of the Guidelines

This document provides design guidelines for infill development throughout the San Diego region. It is a key part of SANDAG's Smart Growth Tool Box, which includes both planning and financing tools. While this document focuses on guiding new development within the areas shown on SANDAG's Smart Growth Concept Map, many of the design guidelines can be applied in any part of the San Diego region.

The guidelines in this document are based on best practices from communities throughout the San Diego region, as well as other cities in California and throughout the United States. Many of these guidelines have been illustrated by showing examples from the San Diego region; however, this document also provides examples from cities outside of the region.

This document is not meant to dictate the scale or density of new development. Rather, it defines broad principles that can be applied to the many different types of communities in the San Diego region, from the low-rise buildings and lower densities found in rural towns to the higher-intensity development found in town centers. The principles in this document can also be applied to a wide variety of development projects, including small-scale infill development that includes only one or two buildings; new neighborhoods that are built on large infill sites; and public improvements, such as streetscape projects and civic buildings, that are completed by local jurisdictions.

1.2 Principles of Smart Growth

Smart growth development is guided by a set of principles that promote strong communities with a range of opportunities for all residents. These principles ensure a spectrum of housing, employment and transportation choices within walkable and livable neighborhoods.

The following sections explain smart growth's ten most basic principles, which shaped SANDAG's *Regional Comprehensive Plan*. The design guidelines in this document are intended to show how many of these principles can be put into practice as new development takes place in the San Diego region.

1.2.1 Mixed Land Uses

The availability of stores, offices and residences in close proximity allows residents to work and shop close to home. A mixture of land uses promotes job creation, encourages healthy lifestyles and reduces dependence on the automobile.

1.2.2 Compact Development

Building compactly minimizes the amount of land that is needed to accommodate new homes, offices and stores. As a result, more land can be preserved as open space and for recreation. Compact development also increases the viability of public transit by placing a larger number of potential riders near transit lines.

1.2.3 Range of Housing Opportunities

Great communities include a diverse range of residents. Communities with a variety of housing types, densities and levels of affordability meet the needs of families, singles, and households of all income levels, as well as residents with unique needs, such as the elderly and people with disabilities.

1.2.4 Open Space and Farmland Preservation

Open spaces, ecological resources and agricultural land are necessary parts of a community. Preservation of natural open space helps to maintain water quality and protects animal and plant habitats. Ready access to the natural environment and undeveloped land also enhances people's quality of life, which can lead to increased economic prosperity.

See Also

Regional Comprehensive Plan



The Uptown project in San Diego is an example of compact development.



San Elijo Lagoon is one of the region's many ecological resources.

1.2.5 Development in Existing Communities

Locating new development within existing communities reduces sprawl and conserves open space and agricultural land. In addition, infill development takes advantage of existing services and infrastructure while strengthening or revitalizing existing neighborhoods.



A bicycle path connects to San Diego's City Heights neighborhood.

1.2.6 Walkable and Bikeable Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods that are designed for pedestrians and bicyclists allow for less dependence on the automobile. In walkable, bikeable neighborhoods, difficult street crossings and dead-end streets are minimized, and pedestrians and bicyclists can use a network of well-connected streets, sidewalks and paths.

1.2.7 Distinctive, Attractive Communities

Communities with distinctive neighborhood character are desirable for residents, visitors and workers alike. They are designed with a careful understanding of their topographic and climatic contexts, and new development builds on the character of existing development.



Trolley lines and other transit routes connect the region's cities to one another.

1.2.8 Transportation Choices

Communities with a broad range of mobility options allow all residents to enjoy comfortable, independent lifestyles. Bicycle facilities and pedestrian-oriented streets are located throughout the community, and frequent, convenient public transit service provides a desirable alternative to the private automobile. These qualities can lead to improvements in community health and energy conservation, as well as reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.



A SANDAG grant helped fund the infrastructure for new development at the Grossmont Trolley Station in La Mesa.

1.2.9 Predictable Development Decisions

The successful implementation of smart growth depends upon investment from the private sector. Local governments can promote high-quality development by providing economic incentives for innovative projects, investing in the infrastructure improvements that are needed to support growth, and establishing efficient land use policies.

1.2.10 Community and Stakeholder Collaboration

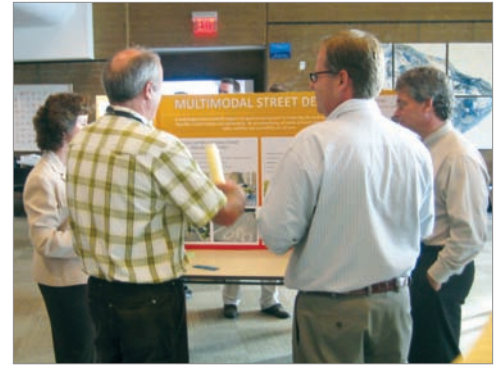
Development should respond to the desires of the community. Collaboration between residents, developers and civic leaders promotes development that fits the community's sense of how it wants to grow.

1.3 How the Guidelines Were Developed

To create this document, SANDAG convened a ten-person *ad hoc* working group, which included city planners and engineers from local jurisdictions; citizens who previously served on SANDAG's Stakeholders Working Group; and SANDAG staff. The working group held eight meetings between May 2008 and January 2009 to discuss the appropriate format for the document and provide detailed guidance on the topics addressed in the design guidelines. Group discussions were based on a document outline that was originally prepared by SANDAG staff. Each discussion was facilitated by an expert from SANDAG's consultant team, which was led by Design, Community & Environment (DC&E).

In October 2008, SANDAG held public outreach meetings in Encinitas and San Diego to solicit ideas and feedback about the project. Each meeting was a multi-hour open house that encouraged participation by the general public, with a special focus on planning and design professionals. The meetings featured multiple stations at which participants could learn more about basic principles of smart growth and urban design, as well as specific design issues that are addressed in this document. Participants were invited to submit comment cards at each station and to identify the design issues most important to smart growth. They also provided ideas about how this document can benefit their communities in the future.

SANDAG staff and the consultant team also met with SANDAG's Regional Planning Technical Working Group, Cities/County Transportation Advisory Committee and Regional Planning Committee to solicit their recommendations for the design guidelines. All three of these groups, as well as the general public, had the opportunity to review and comment on this document prior to its approval by SANDAG's Board of Directors.



Workshop participants in Encinitas discuss multimodal streets.



Participants at the San Diego outreach meeting discuss a variety of design issues.

1.4 Relationship to Other Policies

This section explains how *Designing for Smart Growth* relates to other SANDAG policy documents, as well as plans adopted by local jurisdictions throughout the region.

1.4.1 SANDAG Plans and Policies

This document fulfills the RCP's call for the creation of smart growth design guidelines for the San Diego region. It is intended to be consistent with the RCP and its Smart Growth Concept Map, along with other SANDAG plans and policies such as the *Regional Transportation Plan* and the *Regional Bicycle Plan*.

This document is also intended to be consistent with *Planning and Designing for Pedestrians*, which provides detailed recommendations for creating streets and neighborhoods that are pedestrian-friendly. This document builds on *Planning and Designing for Pedestrians* by addressing a broader range of issues related to the design of streets, neighborhoods and communities.

Finally, this document follows the principles described in *Designing for Transit*, which was published by the Metropolitan Transit Development Board, now called the Metropolitan Transit System. Unlike this document, *Designing for Transit* provides detailed engineering standards for new transit facilities.



This street in San Diego reflects the principles described in *Planning and Designing for Pedestrians*.



Chula Vista has adopted a variety of plans that regulate the design of new development, such as this neighborhood in Otay Ranch.

1.4.2 Local Plans and Policies

Designing for Smart Growth is intended to serve as an inspiration for developers, designers, local governments and citizens throughout the San Diego region. It does not replace the Specific Plans, design guidelines, engineering standards and zoning ordinances that local jurisdictions have already adopted to regulate design in their communities. However, local jurisdictions in the San Diego region are encouraged to use this document as a starting point for their own planning efforts, as well as a reference to help them understand the key principles of creating great places.

1.5 Overview of the Guidelines

This document is organized into the following chapters:

- ◆ **Chapter 2: Designing for the Region** identifies the fundamental components of great communities and highlights cultural and geographic qualities that make the San Diego region unique.
- ◆ **Chapter 3: Site Design** provides guidelines related to where buildings are located on a site, how they fit with their surroundings, and how landscaping can be integrated with the site.
- ◆ **Chapter 4: Building Design** explains how new buildings can be designed to enhance community character and reflect their local context.
- ◆ **Chapter 5: Multimodal Streets** describes how to create streets that balance the needs of all modes of transportation, including pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles and public transit.
- ◆ **Chapter 6: Transit Stations** discusses how off-street transit stations, such as commuter rail stations and bus depots, can be made safe, accessible and attractive.
- ◆ **Chapter 7: Civic Buildings** provides guidelines for designing civic buildings that contribute to a vibrant and active community.
- ◆ **Chapter 8: Parks and Civic Space** explains how to design different types of open spaces and integrate them with the neighborhood and community.
- ◆ **Chapter 9: Parking** recommends design and regulatory strategies to accommodate a reasonable amount of vehicle parking on a site, while also encouraging people to use other modes of travel and reduce vehicle trips.
- ◆ **Chapter 10: Smart Growth Scorecard** provides a series of questions to help local jurisdictions and community organizations determine whether a project incorporates the most fundamental principles in this document.

