

# Way to Grow Essex County!

*A Celebration of Smart Growth in Massachusetts*



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Prepared by

# Essex County Forum

Smart Growth for Livable Communities

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ESSEX NATIONAL  
HERITAGE AREA

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## **ABOUT THIS GUIDEBOOK**

This guidebook showcases the diversity of smart growth efforts in Essex County, MA. There is a wide range, from affordable housing, to historic preservation and open space conservation. A variety of strategies that leverage scarce resources, involve a myriad of partners, and tap into local creativity are making smart growth happen in both large cities and small towns. We hope they inspire new efforts that will continue to make Essex County a great place to live, work, and play.

## **ABOUT THE ESSEX COUNTY FORUM**

The Essex County Forum, a program of the Essex County Community Foundation, works to enhance the quality of life in Essex County, MA while preserving its natural beauty for the future. Since 1999 the Forum has been a place to convene, collaborate, and facilitate a sharing of ideas and innovation that balance human use with natural systems. Through the Forum communities work together to reconcile current needs with their efforts to preserve natural resources, historic character, and offer healthy places to live that people can afford. For more information, visit [www.essexcountyforum.org](http://www.essexcountyforum.org) or call (978) 621-2830.

## **ABOUT THE ESSEX NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA**

Established in 1997, the Essex National Heritage Commission (ENHC) is the non-profit management entity of the federally designated Essex National Heritage Area. The ENHC's goal is to bring together resources to focus on regional initiatives that relate to the thousands of nationally significant historic, cultural and natural resources located throughout the 34 cities and towns that fall within the Area. Working in collaboration with the National Park Service, the ENHC develops and implements programs and promotes public/private partnerships that enhance, preserve and encourage regional awareness of the Area's unique resources. For more information, visit the ENHC web site at [www.essexheritage.org](http://www.essexheritage.org) or call (978) 740-0444.

# WHAT IS SMART GROWTH?

Ecological health, neighborhood livability, transportation choices and thriving downtowns are the result of smart growth planning. While growth and sprawl can be synonymous, sprawl connotes poorly planned, residential and commercial development that does not take advantage of pre-existing transportation or physical infrastructures that are critical aspects of smart growth.

Since 1999, the Essex County Forum has brought together different stakeholders, such as environmental and affordable housing advocates, to collaboratively work on local smart growth issues. The Forum Steering Committee adopted the following smart growth principles to guide and shape its work:

Involvement of state policies and spending that direct development to areas of existing infrastructure and away from environmentally sensitive areas.

Protection, to the maximum extent possible, of natural resources, wildlife habitats, farmland, and cultural, scenic and historic landscapes.

Inclusion of social equity criteria as cornerstones to statewide policy.

Support of revitalization and reinvestment in urban areas and older suburbs.

Promotion of regional planning and solutions to issues such as water supply, affordable housing and transportation.

Support of a range of convenient and affordable transportation choices.

Provision of an adequate supply of affordable housing in both urban and suburban communities.

Respect for the connections between a healthy environment and protected open space to the region's economic future.

Promotion of water resource protection and management that incorporates natural watershed boundaries, is comprehensive and integrated, and aims to "keep water local".

Assistance for municipalities in planning for growth, and providing education and technical assistance to local boards.

Encouragement of a clear, transparent, and regionally consistent development approval process.

Promotion of coordination and cooperation among all levels of government.

# Smart Growth Case Studies

Whipple Riverview Place – Ipswich	Adaptive reuse and low impact development of historic mill building for affordable senior housing.
Locally Grown – Regional	Promotion of locally grown food and protection of agricultural landscapes.
Zoning for Density – Haverhill	Historic preservation, mixed reuse of former mill, brownfield cleanup, affordable housing, recreation, and transportation options.
Conservation – Danvers	Energy and water conservation, resource protection, and recycling in a fast-growing community
Preserving History – Andover	Adoption of zoning to promote preservation of threatened historic buildings.
Common Pasture – Newbury and Newburyport	Multi-partner effort to preserve historically important open space and agricultural land.
Bradstreet Farm – Rowley	Open space protection, affordable housing, historic preservation, and active recreation.
Border to Boston Trail – Regional	Grassroots, regional planning for non-motorized transportation options.
Take the Train – Gloucester	Transit oriented development with mixed-use and transportation options.
The Tannery – Newburyport	Mixed reuse, renewable energy, and low impact landscaping.
Block by Block – Lawrence	Adaptive reuse, brownfield cleanup, urban open space, affordable housing, low impact development, and community empowerment.

# Achieving Smart Growth in Your Community

This guidebook showcases a wide array of smart growth projects and programs. They each incorporate important elements for success that can help guide smart growth initiatives in other communities.

- Be visionary. Do not let conventional thinking get in the way of pursuing new ideas and approaches. Think beyond the mission of a single agency or group to how the project might best serve the community at large. Look for solutions to roadblocks rather than throwing in the towel.
- Be flexible. As new ideas emerge during planning and development, be open to incorporating them into your project. Giving concessions does not mean selling out, sometimes they are necessary to achieve overall goals.
- Seek out non-traditional partnerships. Each partner brings his or her own expertise to the table. Unconventional partners can also help us understand different points of view. They also help broaden project constituencies and can position a project for a broader set of funding sources.
- Leadership is essential. All of the projects documented here had one or two project leaders who kept the projects on track, worked through potential roadblocks, and kept the project teams focused and engaged. The leader may be a paid staff person or a volunteer, but must have a long-term commitment to the project.
- Do not take no for an answer. Push funders, regulators, government agencies, and land owners to look at the benefits of the project as a whole, not just single, isolated project components.
- Leverage resources. This can be done by broadening the scope of the project, by engaging alternative partners, by seeking out materials that have already been produced, by looking for opportunities to incorporate recycled or used products in construction, and in many other ways. Leveraging resources will not only save the project money, but may also help gain support from potential funders and the public.
- Take risks. Smart growth projects, particularly those involving the reuse of historic buildings, often involve risk. Project costs can escalate because site contamination is greater than expected, and markets can change during the development process. Vision often means creating a project that has not been done before, something that always involves risks, particularly from the point of view of lenders. New ideas are often perceived as risky, but they also often result in the most interesting, successful projects.
- Involve the community. Public support is critical to moving projects through the approval process. Residents and business owners are also important resources for providing design ideas and construction manpower. An involved community can also provide long-term commitment to keeping a project functioning long after construction is complete or a program is implemented.
- Communicate clearly and openly. Invite discussion about your project, and work to educate a wide audience about its benefits. Be honest about potential impacts and seek input about solutions to these impacts.
- Seek out regional alliances. A lot has been written about the importance of thinking and acting regionally to achieve smart growth goals. However, our parochial government structure, and limited municipal budgets often get in the way of efforts to undertake regional smart growth initiatives. Several of the case studies included in this document demonstrate that successful regional initiatives are possible and can serve to bind our communities together.
- Build on the power of volunteers. Many of the case studies would not have been possible without the ongoing involvement of volunteers. Some of the projects were spearheaded by volunteers, while others adeptly used volunteers for a wide range of roles. Current budget realities make it nearly impossible to undertake these smart growth projects without some level of volunteer activity. Make the most of those willing to give their time for free. Look for the unique contributions that each participant can make, and do your best to utilize the talents of everyone involved.