

# Achieving Economic Vitality through Smart Growth in Rural Communities and Small Towns



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**May 21, 2012**



Farm in Washington State



Port Washington, Wisconsin



Edwards, Colorado

# Objectives for this Workshop



- What does smart growth mean in a rural context?
- What are some examples of places that have enhanced their economic viability using smart growth/sustainable communities approaches?
- How do/can Extension Professionals play a role in helping communities use smart growth approaches to achieve the outcomes they are seeking?



# EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities



**EPA's mission:  
Protect human health and the environment.**

**Where and how we build our communities  
impacts public health and our land, air, and water.**



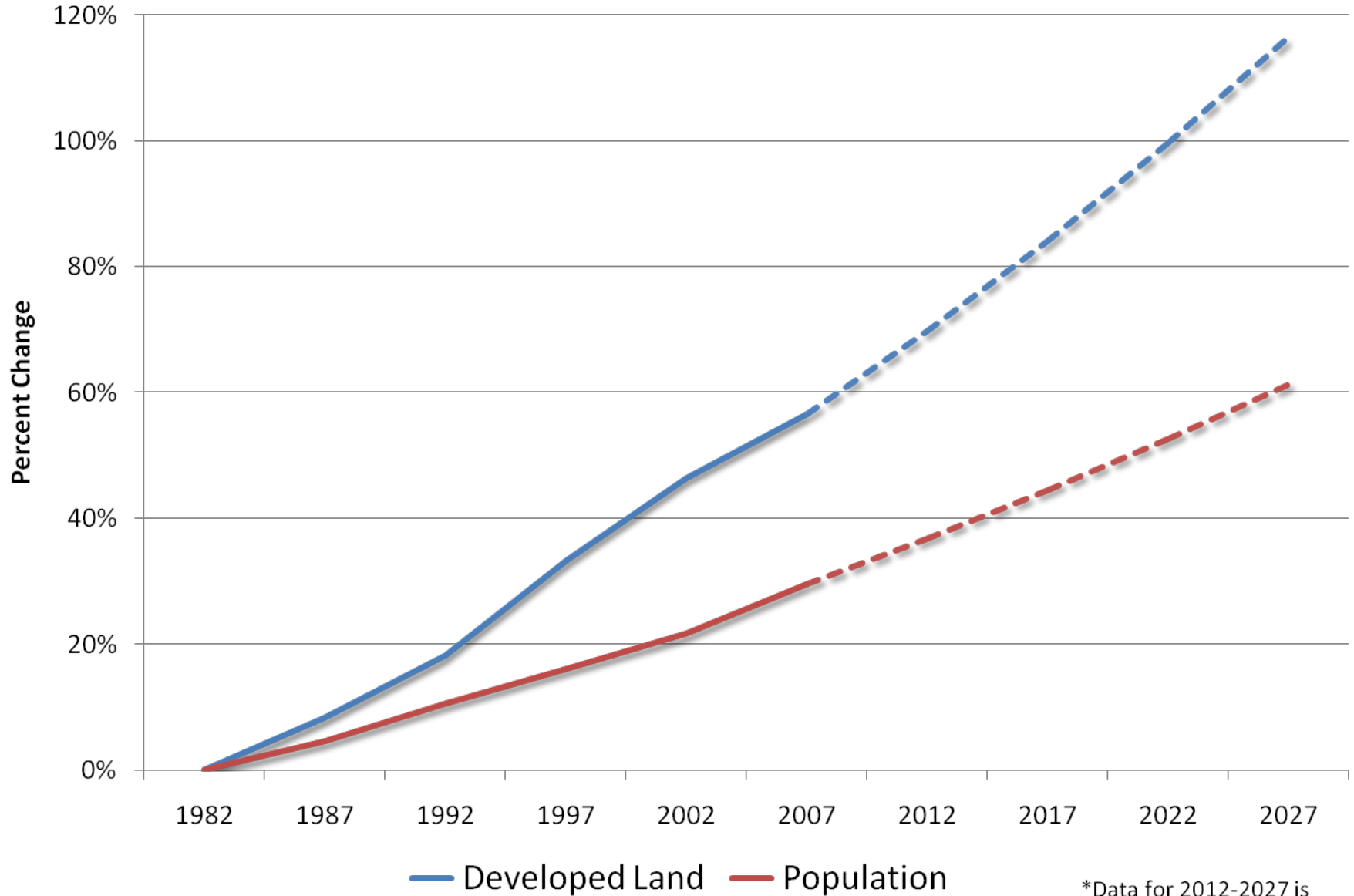


# Last 50 years of development...

An aerial photograph showing a vast, sprawling suburban development. The landscape is dominated by a dense grid of residential houses with light-colored roofs, interspersed with green lawns and trees. A prominent road with multiple lanes and a median runs through the center of the development. To the right, a canal or irrigation ditch winds through the area. In the background, the development extends towards a range of low mountains under a clear blue sky. The overall scene illustrates the extent of human-made infrastructure and land consumption in a suburban setting.

- Air and water pollution
- Land consumption
- Contribution to climate change
- A health crisis... even among children
- More money spent on infrastructure, bankrupting our cities and towns

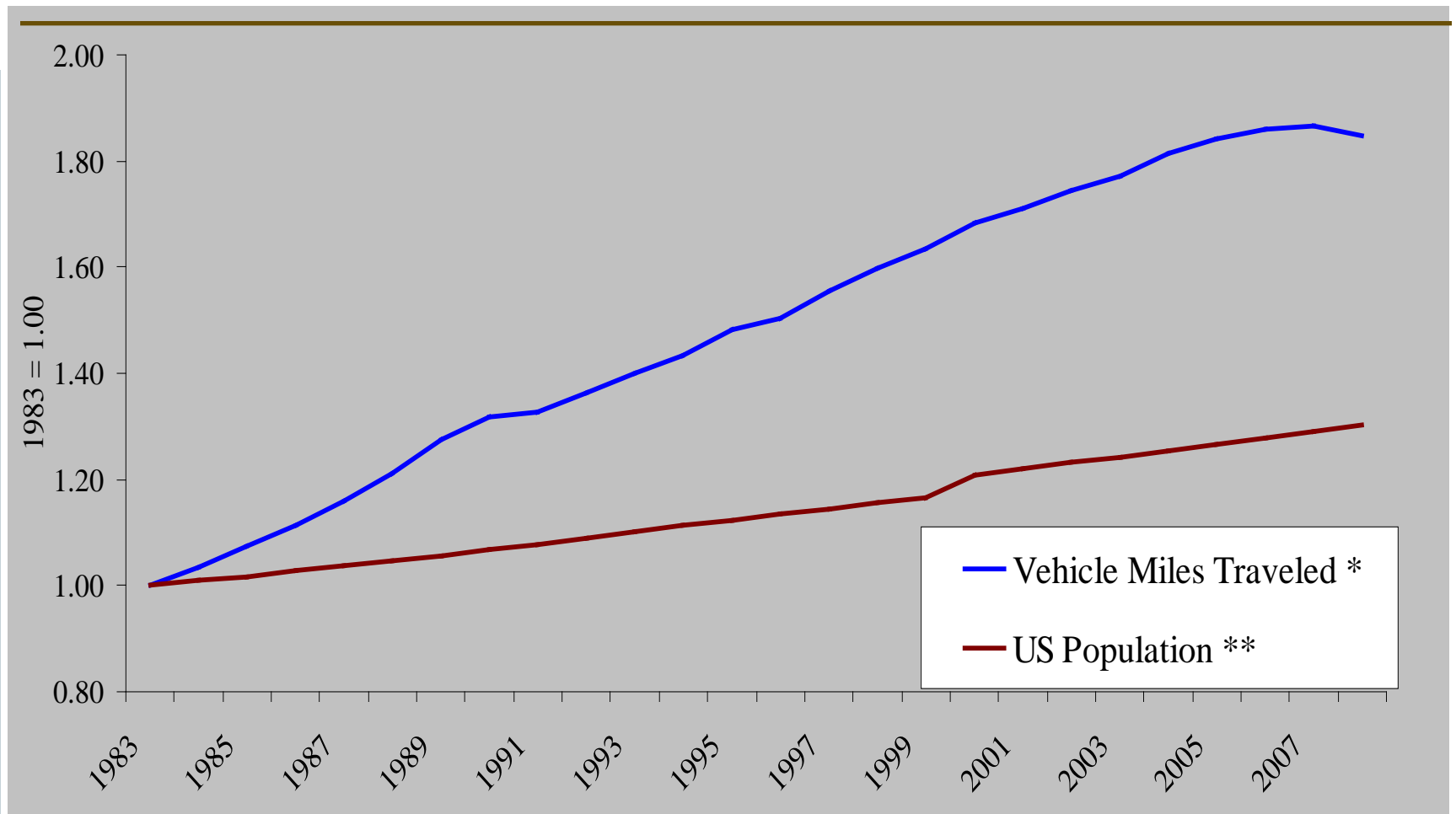
# U.S. Population Growth and Land Consumption



\*Data for 2012-2027 is extrapolated.



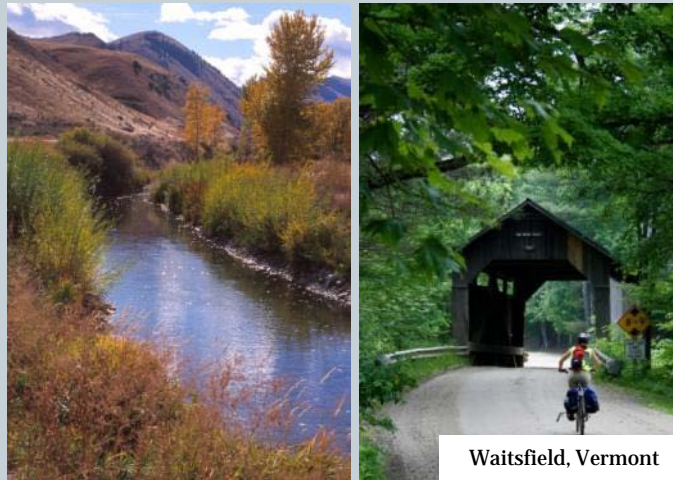
# Vehicle travel has grown faster than population



\* Source – US DOT, Traffic Volume Trends, (12 Month Moving Average, April 1983 to April 2008)

\*\* Source – US Census Bureau, Annual Population Estimates

# Smart Growth: A Response to Development Challenges



- **Development that provides:**
  - Choices for where to live and how to get around
  - A stronger, more resilient economy
  - A safer, healthier place to live
  - Opportunities to protect the things that you love about the place you live (farmland and open space, natural beauty, sense of community, etc.)

# Sustainable Communities



- *A Sustainable Community is an urban, suburban or rural community that has more housing and transportation choices, is closer to jobs, shops or schools, is more energy independent and helps protect clean air and water.*



**“We’re working to change the way government works, and that means investing tax dollars wisely and well. We want to make sure that when we’re building infrastructure, we’re considering how housing, transportation, and the environment all impact each other.”**

-- President Barack Obama, October 21, 2010



# EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities: Working in Rural America

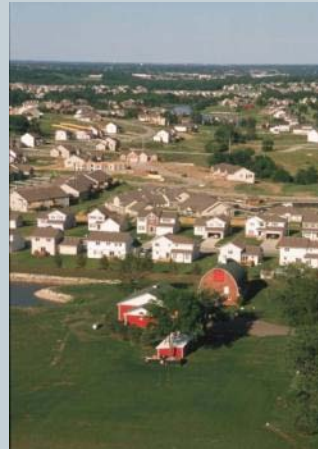


- Provide technical assistance to communities and states
- Rural guidebooks
  - *Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities*
  - *Essential Smart Growth Fixes for Rural Planning, Zoning, and Development Codes*
- Smart Growth Achievement Awards
- Work with NGOs (NADO, NACo, etc.) and other rural stakeholders
- Partnering with HUD, DOT, USDA, ARC



# Challenges Facing Rural Communities

- **Changing economies**
  - Decline of traditional economic base, questions about what's next
- **Fewer farms and farmers**
  - Although there is a growing interest in farming
- **Loss of forest and other natural and working land**
- **Some communities are growing, some are shrinking**
  - Rapid growth at metro edges
  - Shrinking population in some communities
- **Limited access to jobs, services, and transportation**
- **Limited planning capacity**



# So what does smart growth mean for a rural community?



When you've seen one rural community...  
you've seen one rural community.







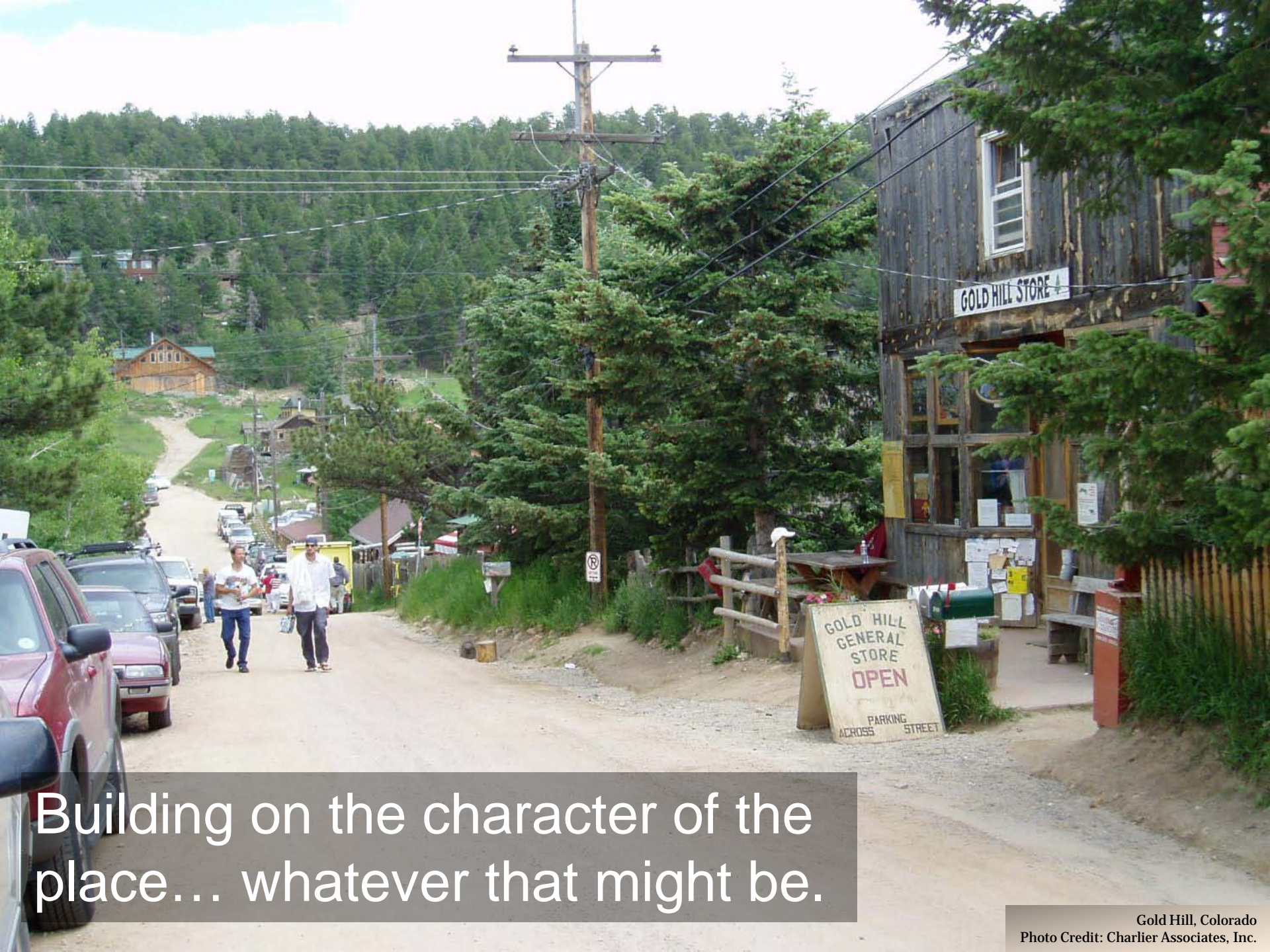
Smart growth means  
choices for where to live...





...and how to get around.





Building on the character of the place... whatever that might be.





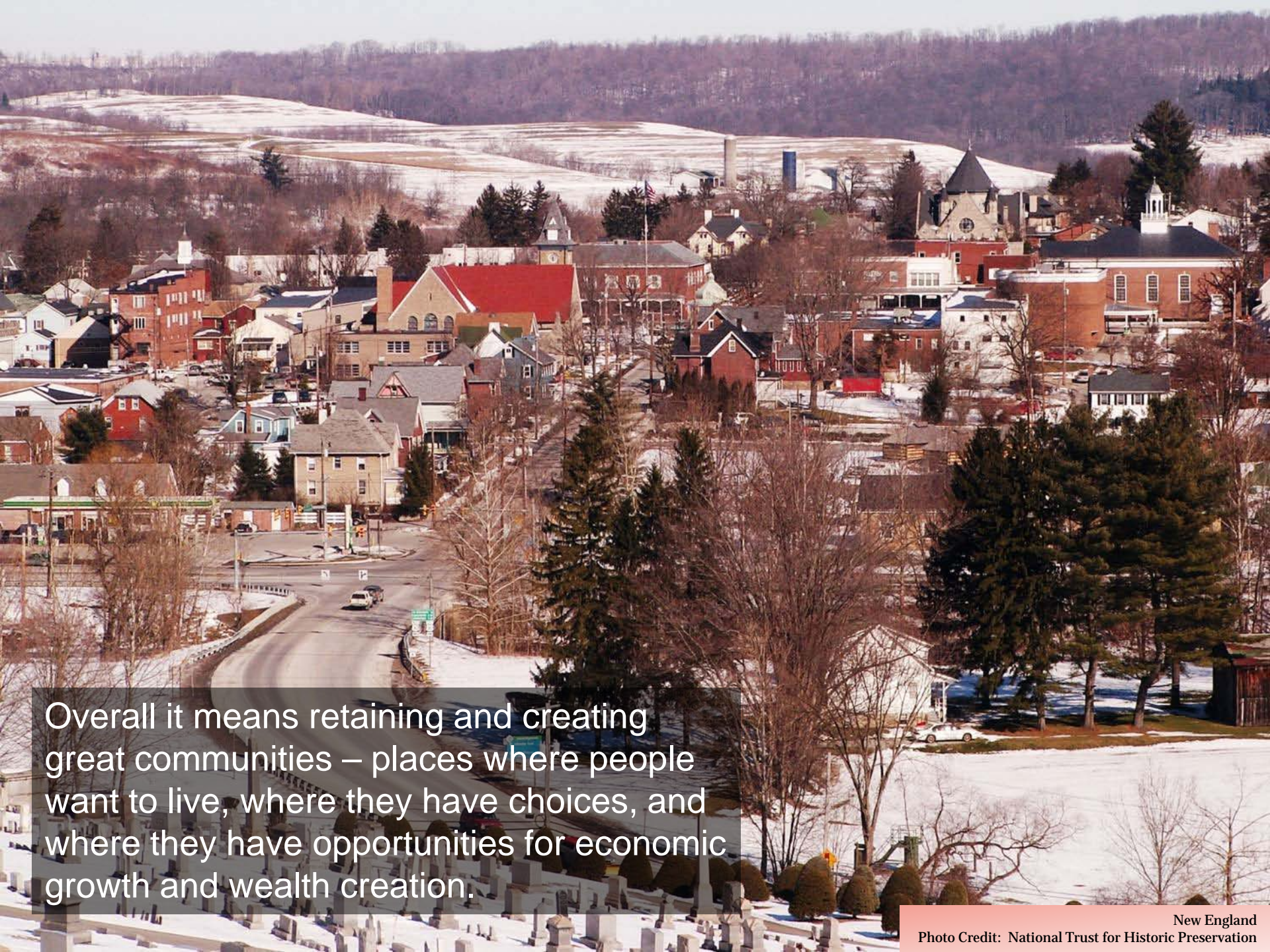
And preserving what's  
great about the community.





Smart growth also means developing a strong economy through economic development strategies that take advantage of a community's best assets.





Overall it means retaining and creating great communities – places where people want to live, where they have choices, and where they have opportunities for economic growth and wealth creation.





Smart growth looks different depending on where you are, but in every case it means building on a community's strengths.



# How to Grow and Maintain Rural Character: Three Broad Goals

- 1. Support the rural landscape** by creating an economic climate that enhances the viability of working lands and conserves natural lands.
- 2. Help existing places thrive** by taking care of assets and investments such as downtowns, Main Streets, existing infrastructure, and places that the community values.
- 3. Create great new places** by building vibrant, enduring neighborhoods and communities that people, especially young people, don't want to leave.



Staunton, Virginia



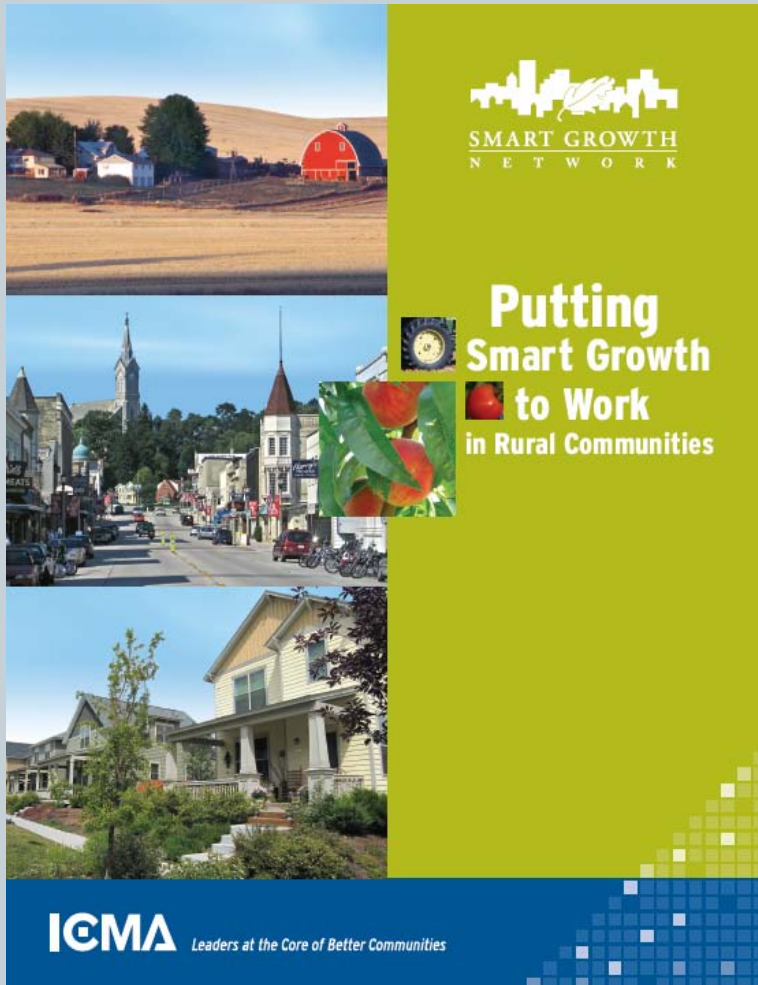
National Forest in Colorado



Smart growth in a rural community: How could it work in the landscape?



# Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities



- Partnership between the U.S. EPA and ICMA – a Smart Growth Network publication
- Lays out a framework for rural communities and small towns seeking to implement smart growth
- Set of tools, case studies, and resources

# *Essential Smart Growth Fixes*



- Outlines ten essential fixes to help rural communities amend their codes, ordinances, and development requirements
- Includes tools for:
  - right-sizing rural roads
  - using cluster development
  - implementing wastewater infrastructure practices
  - protecting agricultural and sensitive areas
  - many other “fixes” for planning, zoning, and development codes



**Essential Smart  
Growth Fixes  
for Rural  
Planning,  
Zoning, and  
Development  
Codes**

# Partnership for Sustainable Communities

- Began in June 2009: EPA, HUD, DOT
- Also partnering with USDA to think through how the Partnership's activities can best serve rural America
- Two reports:
  - **Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities** -- How the Partnership principles support rural communities , sample case studies, and rural performance measures
  - **Federal Resources for Sustainable Rural Communities** – a summary of EPA, HUD, DOT, and USDA programs that rural communities can use (*coming this summer*)

Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities

Partnership for Sustainable Communities



In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture

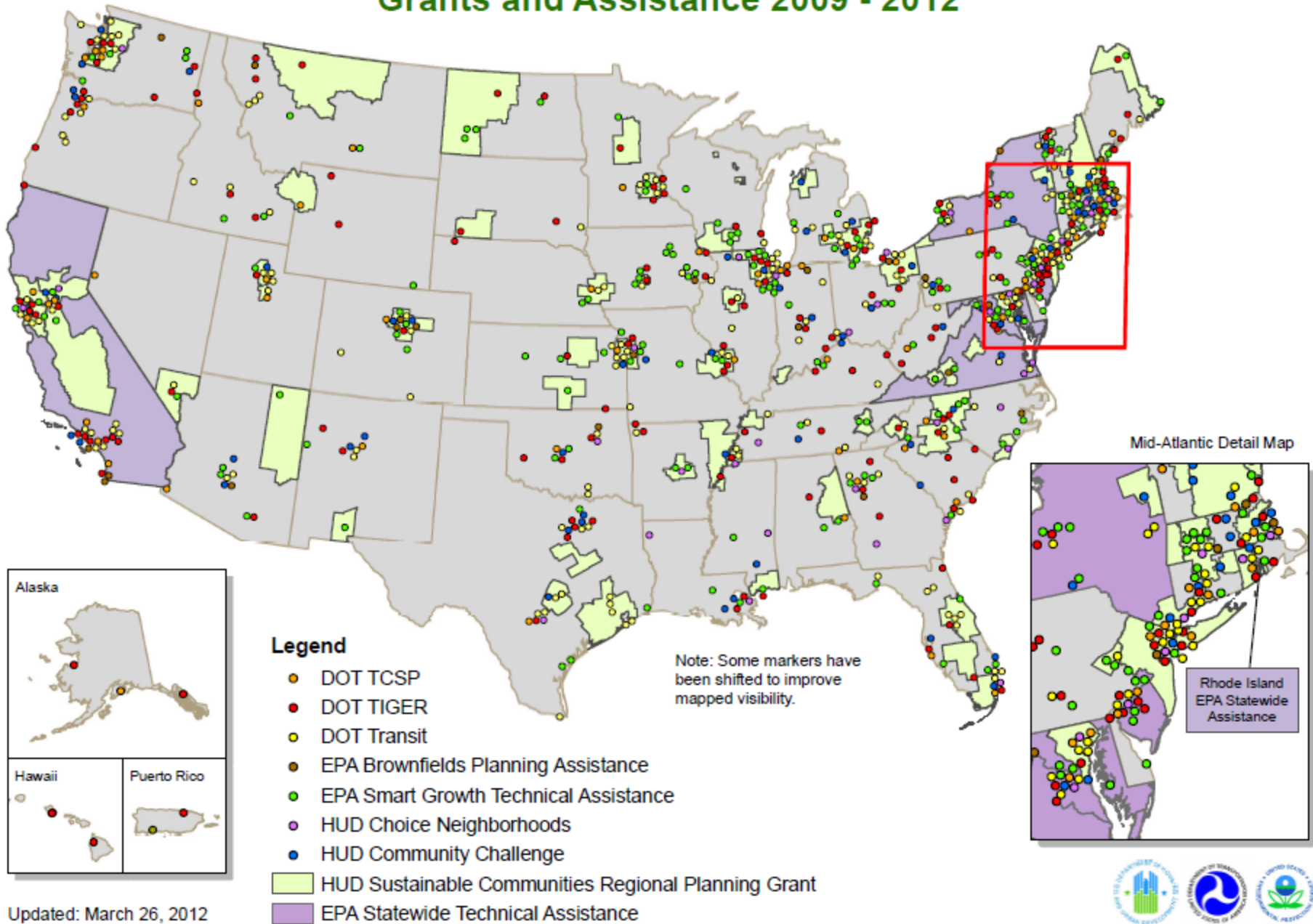


Fall 2011





# HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities Grants and Assistance 2009 - 2012



# Smart Growth and Economic Development



- Industrial recruitment model isn't working for many communities
- Smart Growth = Economic Development
  - *Where you put your economic development investments matters*
- Quality of place impacts economic opportunity
  - *Attract and retain residents, visitors*
- Need for integrated land use and economic development planning

# Finding Your Competitive Advantage: Belfast, ME

- Belfast was once a major shipbuilding hub
- Assets include deep water, access to suppliers, proximity to nearby cities, labor force
- Now developing the Front Street Shipyard
- High-end boatbuilding & repair will boost economy, tourism, and opportunities for small businesses downtown
  - Connecting shipyard to downtown for easy pedestrian access





# Supportive Federal Investments: Howard, SD

- With decline in agriculture, county decided to focus on renewable energy
- Rural Learning Center: conference and workforce training center
- Turned down free site on outskirts to locate on Main Street
- Over \$4 M in USDA loans and grants
- Project contributes to new economic future while reinforcing existing assets



# Streetscape Improvements: Victor, ID



**Before**



**After**



**Future Scenario**

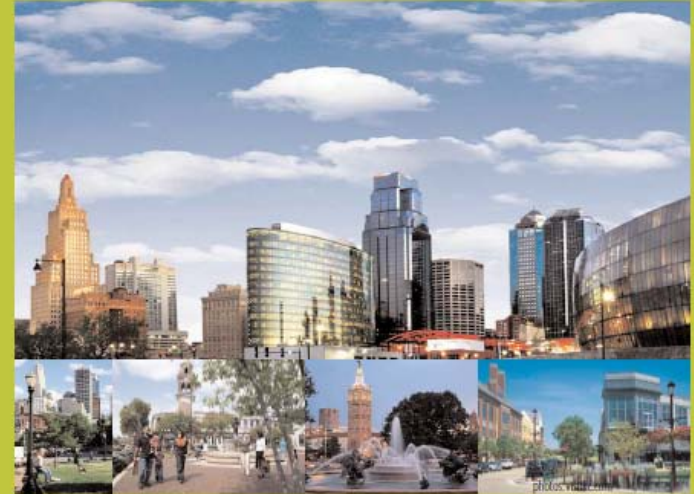




# Upcoming Training Opportunities



- USDA's Stronger Economies Together (SET) Program – creating an optional Smart Growth module
- Training module for local officials on how to implement smart growth approaches in a rural context
- Save the Date: New Partners for Smart Growth Conference February 7-9, 2013 in Kansas City



**12th Annual  
New Partners for Smart Growth:**  
*Building Safe, Healthy and Livable Communities*

**February 7-9, 2013**  
Kansas City Convention Center • Kansas City, MO

*Presented by the Local Government Commission.  
Look for more details about the 2013 event in the coming months: [NewPartners.org](http://NewPartners.org)*



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# Questions for Discussion



- What are the barriers that the communities you work with face when implementing sustainable communities approaches to development?
- What role can Extension Professionals play in planning and implementing these ideas?
  - Can you help build capacity in rural communities to plan for future development?
  - Can you connect with implementation funding (e.g., from federal sources like USDA Rural Development or private or philanthropic resources)?
- Do you work with any Partnership grantees? Can you help with implementing their plans?



# For More Information

[www.epa.gov/smartgrowth](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth)  
[www.sustainablecommunities.gov](http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov)  
[bertaina.stephanie@epa.gov](mailto:bertaina.stephanie@epa.gov)