Community and Neighborhood Livability Best Practices

OVERVIEW

The best practice case studies in this section focus on issues related to development and land uses, community transformation, code reform, and affordable housing. The community and neighborhood livability best practice case studies are:

### Development, Land Use, and Planning
- **Corridor Development** – Twin Cities, Minnesota
- **Development Patterns and Urban Design** – Austin, Texas
- **Growth Management and Mixed-Use Development** – Eugene, Oregon
- **Infill and Redevelopment** – Palo Alto, California
- **Transit Oriented Development** – Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, Cleveland, Ohio

### Codes and Regulations
- **Building Rehabilitation Code** – State of New Jersey
- **Zoning Code** – Denver, Colorado

### Affordable Housing
- **Affordable Housing Acquisition Fund** – Denver, Colorado
- **Affordable Housing Tax Increment Financing** – Portland, Oregon

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

Additional research of the following community and neighborhood livability-related best practice suggestions or other new ideas may be conducted as the planning process progresses:

#### Innovative Practices
- Riverwalk development (e.g., San Antonio, Estes Park);
- Community transformation (e.g., Plano, Texas);
- Incentives for infill development (e.g., reduced fees, revised standards, etc.);
- Transformation of vacant commercial space into affordable housing units (such as Boston, Massachusetts);
- Integrating high performing/"green" practices and affordable housing;
- Developing purchasing co-operatives for affordable housing development (for materials such as insulation, windows, etc.);
- Accessory dwelling units to meet changing household and affordable housing needs;
- Assisting mobile home residents with relocation or other options as redevelopment occurs;
- Providing housing opportunities for those with criminal backgrounds, mental health issues, and problems with financial stability; and
- Long-term funding options for future affordable housing development.
CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT

Innovative Community: Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, Minnesota
Population: 2.85 million

The Twin Cities area’s focus on redevelopment and densities along corridors is relevant as Fort Collins matures and faces redevelopment-related opportunities and challenges, even if the demographics are different.

Innovative Practice

Corridor Development Initiative
The initiative emerged from the need for communities and cities in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul) metropolitan area to work more effectively together to guide future development. The initiative offers an educational forum on development and design that helps to link city goals with market realities. It also helps to create awareness around how a local area fits within a larger regional context, and helps to better connect housing, jobs and transportation.

In particular, the initiative aims to assist in the planning and development of higher density affordable housing. To achieve its goal, the initiative set out to teach local people why density can be a good thing. The core of the initiative is a SimCity-like exercise in which residents could play the entrepreneur — creating a development plan and seeing what happens if a proposed infill project gets snipped down to a density neighbors prefer.

Corridor Development Initiative (CDI) is a non-profit organization that helps to resolve conflicts by engaging all interested parties from the outset of a development proposal. The result is that development opportunities move more efficiently through the public review system. Neighborhoods have the chance to make sure proposed projects meet their community vision, and developers reduce the amount of time between making a proposal and breaking ground. As one developer put it, “What would have taken two years was done in four months.”

In addition to facilitating an engagement process, the CDI provides resources in the form of educational materials on topics such as mixed-use developments, density fact sheets, PowerPoint presentations, and videos.

The Initiative has a proven track record and has successfully helped 16 communities deal with development and neighborhood issues. It won a National American Planning Association Excellence Award for a Grassroots Initiative in 2007.

Background and Details
A typical initiative lasts six months and is overseen by an advisory group of city staff and elected officials, community and business associations, and volunteer committees. The advisory group works with initiative technical team to identify key issues, aggregate current planning reports and studies, and propose specific opportunity sites to be explored for development opportunities. The group is also responsible for:

- Designing and guiding a series of community workshops,
- Developing an outreach and communication strategy to recruit participation, and
- Reviewing the materials and recommendations provided through the Corridor Development Initiative process.

Such a process is particularly relevant to Fort Collins as it increases its emphasis on infill and redevelopment strategies. The challenge of redevelopment projects is to address neighborhood concerns while still meeting the overall community goals.

For More information
Corridor Development Initiative website: www.corridordevelopment.org

Related Sections
- Transportation
- High Performing Community
DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS AND URBAN DESIGN

Leading Community: Austin, Texas
Population: 757,680

Austin is the capital of Texas, located in central Texas and fourth largest city in Texas. Austin is the cultural and economic center of the Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos metropolitan area. Like Fort Collins and the Northern Colorado region, Austin and the surrounding Central Texas region are experiencing rapid growth in population, employment, and land area affected by development.

Innovative Practice

Development Patterns and Land Use Planning Programs
As mentioned, above, Austin and the surrounding central Texas region are experiencing rapid growth in population, employment, and land area affected by development. Regional projections are even more dramatic. This increase in population will inevitably change Austin and central Texas; however, the City has taken steps to guide and shape this future growth. Through the adoption of a Smart Growth Initiative, urban design standards, and formation of the Great Streets Development Program, and other efforts, the City has made great strides in minimizing the negative environmental, economic, and social impacts and preserving the best aspects of life in the region.

Background and Details

Smart Growth Initiative
In the late 1990’s the Austin City Council adopted a Smart Growth Initiative to modernize the City’s long-range plan for growth, managing and directing growth that minimized damage to the environment and helped build a more livable community. The tenets of the City’s Smart Growth initiative were consistent with the general policies of Austin Tomorrow (the City’s Comprehensive Plan), discouraging growth in the west to protect Austin’s water supply and growing the City’s boundaries in the east, taking into account geographical and utility constraints.

The goals of the Smart Growth Initiative and the Smart Growth Map still provide a long-range framework today--determining how and where to grow, improving quality of life, and enhancing the tax base. A major effort is currently underway in 2010 to update the City’s Smart Growth Plan.

Standards for Urban Design
As part of their 1997 Downtown Initiative to guide the revitalization of downtown, the City Council requested that the Austin Design Commission prepare a set of design guidelines for new construction in the city center. The purpose of the Downtown Austin Design Guidelines is to coordinate and orchestrate the overall development of the city core so that projects help each other succeed and result in a better, livable downtown. In May 2000, the City Council adopted the Downtown Austin Design Guidelines as "recommendations for all downtown development and redevelopment projects, by both the public and private sector."

In August 2006, the Austin City Council approved a major amendment to the City of Austin’s Land Development Code referred to as the Design Standards and Mixed Use Subchapter, or “Commercial Design Standards”.
Great Streets Development Program
The Great Streets Development Program provides a mechanism to improve the quality of downtown streets and sidewalks, aiming ultimately to transform the public right-of-ways into great public spaces. It provides financial assistance to private developers with the cost of implementing streetscape standards that go above and beyond the City’s minimum requirements. The program allows the City to leverage needed above and below ground streetscape improvements from private developments by sharing the cost of implementing Great Streets enhancements. The program establishes criteria for the City’s financial participation in a project based on the following reimbursement criteria:

- Location of the project and its impact on pedestrian activity;
- Location along a Capital Metro transit route;
- Implementation of underground utility improvements;
- Implementation of streetscape improvements;
- Introduction of active uses such as sidewalk cafes; and
- Incorporation of place-making/public art/special features.

For More information
City of Austin website:
www.ci.austin.tx.us

Related Sections
- Environmental Resources
- Transportation
- High Performing Community
GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

Innovative Community: Eugene, Oregon
Population: 154,620

The City of Eugene, Oregon is the second largest city in the state of Oregon. Like Fort Collins, Eugene is a university town and deals with many of the land use and built environment issues that Fort Collins faces, including, downtown revitalization, mixed-use development, and growth management.

Innovative Practices

Growth Management and Mixed-Use Development
Regional planning in the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area stresses the interdependence between development patterns and efficient, effective transportation. With the adoption of the Growth Management Study, in 1998, and the regional transportation master plan (TransPlan), in 2001, the concept of mixed-use development became the official growth management policy for the City of Eugene. TransPlan identifies dozens of potential "mixed-use centers" in Eugene and Springfield. If properly planned and developed, these centers will mature into quality neighborhoods that enjoy higher densities, a mix of activities, more transportation options, convenient shopping and services, and amenities. When combined with improved transit, mixed-use centers will reduce the reliance on automobile travel and the need for costly street improvements; slow sprawl onto nearby agricultural and forest lands; and provide a greater variety of housing types inside the urban growth boundary. A few of the factors contributing to implementation of the growth management policy are discussed in the next section.

Background and Details

Metro and Community Planning Division
The Metro and Community Planning division of the Planning Department focuses on major, multi-year projects that will yield information and policies to help guide economically, socially and environmentally sustainable growth and development patterns over the longer term. These projects explore how and where the City will grow and develop, how to balance compact growth with protection of neighborhood character, how to create walkable neighborhoods with good transit access, what additional natural character need protection, and how to address neighborhood needs in a neighborhood-based planning context.

House Bill 3337
The 2007 Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 3337, which required Eugene and Springfield to each establish separate Urban Growth Boundaries, by dividing the metropolitan boundary that Eugene and Springfield had shared for more than 25 years. The new law also required that the cities of Eugene and Springfield complete a study of the sufficiency of residential buildable land within their respective Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs) by December 31, 2009.

In establishing separate UGBs, the cities must address all of the state’s applicable planning goals and administrative rules. Each city must make estimates of its residential and employment land in store and needs. This work also addresses a desire for agreement on how to manage growth (e.g., whether the UGB should be expanded and, if so, where). Such agreement has been elusive, in part because there has not been agreement on the amount or location of vacant land available for development or the amount of land that future growth is likely to consume. For both legal and practical reasons, the cities both want an accurate, current, and well-documented assessment of land supply and demand.

Eugene Comprehensive Lands Study
In January 2008, the Eugene City Council directed staff to conduct an assessment of residential, industrial and commercial lands, as well as non-employment lands (e.g., parks, open space). The comprehensive lands assessment has six primary technical tasks: (1) buildable lands inventory, (2) inventory of non-economic lands, (3) economic
opportunities analysis, (4) housing needs analysis, (5) analysis of needs for non-economic lands, and (6) determination of the sufficiency of land within Eugene’s UGB.

**Infill Compatibility Standards Adopted**

In December 2009, the Eugene City Council adopted three ordinances related to improving the compatibility and design of infill development. The City recognized that while well-designed infill can help prevent urban sprawl, poorly designed infill can be counter-productive. Incompatible infill is not only undesirable in itself, but it can actually make urban sprawl worse if residents prefer to escape to outlying areas. Eugene adopted the infill compatibility standards to prevent the negative impacts of infill so that the City can focus on increasing density and enhancing the character of existing neighborhoods. These standards address parking strategies, building heights, and establish a special area zone.

**For More information**

City of Eugene website:
www.eugene-or.gov

**Related Sections**

- Economic Health
- Safety and Wellness
- Transportation
INFILL AND REDEVELOPMENT

Innovative Community: Palo Alto, CA
Population: 64,484

The City of Palo is situated in the South San Francisco Bay Area in Santa Clara County, encompassing about 26 square miles of land. The City includes portions of Stanford University and is headquarters to a number of Silicon Valley high-technology companies, including Hewlett-Packard, Box.net, BMW, Xerox, and Facebook. Like Fort Collins, it has highly rated public schools, a high quality of life, and a vibrant downtown.

Innovative Practices

Infill and Redevelopment
Similar to the City of Fort Collins, Palo Alto’s Growth Management Area boundary is essentially fixed, resulting in greater emphasis on infill and redevelopment. Less than one percent of the City’s land area consists of vacant, developable land. Therefore, the amount of urban land in Palo Alto in 2010 was projected to remain essentially the same as it was in 1998, with growth occurring through infill and redevelopment. Most of the new infill development activity has been directed within the urban service area, particularly along transit corridors and near employment centers, or redevelopment of existing areas.

Some of the most significant opportunities for growth and change in the Palo Alto area are on Stanford University lands. In general, the University supports the concept of compact development on campus. Recent joint planning efforts between the City and University include the University Avenue Multi-modal Transit Station, Stanford Medical Center and hospital, and Stanford Shopping Center redevelopment projects. The latter two projects will represent the largest single redevelopment in the history of Palo Alto.

The value of focusing on infill and redevelopment include creation of a more compact urban pattern, greater support for transit, and protection of important natural resources, especially the Bay Shore and foothills. Lower intensity development is located adjacent to these natural open lands.

Background and Details

A few of the factors contributing to the success of the City’s infill and redevelopment efforts are discussed below.

City/University Collaboration
In 1985 a three-party interjurisdictional agreement was created with the City, Santa Clara County, and Stanford University to guide infill and redevelopment projects on campus.

Based on a shared vision and agreements between the City and University, much headway has been accomplished to create innovative and sustainable solutions for campus redevelopment.

One such example of this successful collaboration is the Stanford Hospital redevelopment project, which is projected to include 1,100,000 gross feet of new construction, demolition of a portion of the existing building and 700 car parking garage, and reuse and renovation of existing facilities.

Policy and Land Use Code Changes
The City has revised many of its policies and provisions in the Land Use Code to support infill and redevelopment. These revisions include:

- New policy language to encourage any new development within the Stanford Shopping Center occur through infill, including development on existing parking lots.
- New language to strengthen compatibility policies to avoid abrupt changes in scale and density between residential and non-residential areas and between residential areas of different densities. Zoning District boundaries are placed at mid-block locations rather than along streets, to promote enhanced compatibility and gradual transitions between land uses.
- Consideration of a more design-oriented approach to regulations resulting in a “form-
based” code (during the Zoning Code update).

- New mixed-use zoning standards to permit live/work designations by allowing housing and other uses such as office, retail and light industrial to co-exist in the same building space, or site.
- New design standards for all mixed-use designations providing for buildings with one to three stories, rear parking or underground parking, street-facing windows and entries, and zero setback along the street, except that front gardens may be provided for ground floor residential uses.
- New transportation implementation strategies to encourage infill, redevelopment, and re-use of vacant or underutilized parcels employing minimum density requirements that are appropriate to support transit, bicycling, and walking.
- Promoting mixed-use development to provide housing and commercial services near employment centers, thereby reducing the necessity of driving. Locating higher density development along transit corridors and near intermodal transit stations.

For More information

City of Palo Alto website:
http://www.cityofpaloalto.org

Related Sections

- Transportation
- High Performing Community
TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Innovative Organization: Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority – Cleveland, Ohio

In 2007, the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) developed a best practices report on transit oriented development, with several of the communities and their practices. While land use and transportation are inherently linked, this case study focuses on land use and urban design strategies to support transit corridor implementation success.

Innovative Practices

Transit Oriented Development
Most of the examples in the GCRTA Study coordinated rail transit projects; the examples listed below can also be used for high frequency bus transit corridors as well. The case studies discussed in the following section are likely applicable to potential new Transit Oriented Development (TOD) in Fort Collins, especially in Downtown and along or adjacent to the City’s future Enhanced Travel Corridors.

Background and details

Dallas, TX – Dallas Area Rapid Transit
Dallas is an example of a place where market factors, rather than supportive public policy, are leading the push for TOD. Since the opening of the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) system, more than $800 million in new commercial and residential investment within walking distance of the DART line either has been constructed or is being built. Most of this investment has occurred on outlying urban villages away from downtown Dallas. TOD in these smaller urban communities is helping to create unique downtowns designed to attract growth that would otherwise go to the sprawling regional fringe areas.

The Ashmont Station mixed-use development project includes first floor retail and 100 units of affordable housing on an under-utilized 30,000 square foot parking lot located at the terminus or the rapid transit line, trolley line, and regional bus station. Since this is a walk-in station, the existing barren parking lot was an eyesore and served to interrupt the streetscape. By developing ground floor retail with housing above, the streetscape will be reconnected and improve pedestrian connections to the station. New retail space will enhance and solidify the commercial aspects of the Square; while the much needed affordable housing will provide new riders to the transit system and customers for the retail space.

Portland, OR – Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District (TRI-Met)
TOD planning is linked inextricably in the Portland region. The Portland region’s sustained commitment to TOD is part of its well-documented and vigorous pursuit of Smart Growth development. The Center Commons project represents a very successful mixed-income and for-sale housing on a single site, and is the first infill TOD project in the city. Funding for the project included low-income housing tax credits, State of Oregon tax-exempt bonds, a PDC loan, a Fannie Mae loan, general partner equity, and a Federal Transit Authority TOD grant. Additionally the project received a 10-year property-tax exemption.

The market for TOD is continuing to expand nationally. Dallas area real-estate market data shows between 1997 and 2001, residential properties near high frequency transit lines appreciated 39 percent more than properties further away from rail. For office properties, land-value premiums were even higher at 53 percent. The key for successful TOD in the Dallas area is to implement “transit oriented” rather than “transit adjacent” development. A leading example is the Mockingbird Station Redevelopment Project, reflecting an urban-styled, mixed-use village. The project includes 211 loft residences, 140,000 square feet of office space, and 180,000 square feet of restaurants, entertainment, and destination shopping, situated on 7 acres.

Boston, MA – Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
Boston’s built form, characterized by a pedestrian orientation; an intertwining of business, retail, and residential buildings; and close access to public transportation, highlights successful TOD in the area. The City’s approach to TOD is unique as a result, with a focus on maintaining the City’s historically transit-oriented urban fabric. The City of Boston has sought to strengthen transit’s presence by using regulations, incentives, and other tools.

The Ashmont Station mixed-use development project includes first floor retail and 100 units of affordable housing on an under-utilized 30,000 square foot parking lot located at the terminus or the rapid transit line, trolley line, and regional bus station. Since this is a walk-in station, the existing barren parking lot was an eyesore and served to interrupt the streetscape. By developing ground floor retail with housing above, the streetscape will be reconnected and improve pedestrian connections to the station. New retail space will enhance and solidify the commercial aspects of the Square; while the much needed affordable housing will provide new riders to the transit system and customers for the retail space.

Portland, OR – Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District (TRI-Met)
TOD planning is linked inextricably in the Portland region. The Portland region’s sustained commitment to TOD is part of its well-documented and vigorous pursuit of Smart Growth development. The Center Commons project represents a very successful mixed-income and for-sale housing on a single site, and is the first infill TOD project in the city. Funding for the project included low-income housing tax credits, State of Oregon tax-exempt bonds, a PDC loan, a Fannie Mae loan, general partner equity, and a Federal Transit Authority TOD grant. Additionally the project received a 10-year property-tax exemption.
TOD Implementation Strategies
The following are strategies each community has taken to support TOD development.

- The City of Dallas created a TOD overlay zone and is considering additional incentives to support TOD.
- The City of Boston TOD strategies include: requiring transportation mitigation plans with approval; encouraging new developments to improve and incorporate adjacent transit access facilities and stations; using economic development funds to increase police presence around station areas, encouraging private investment in surrounding residential buildings, and consolidating and marketing foreclosed properties for TOD, especially in targeted redevelopment areas.
- The City of Portland's key TOD strategy calls for two-thirds of jobs and 40 percent of households to be located in and around transit-served centers and corridors by 2040. In addition, Portland's core station area objectives include: rezoning the influence area around stations to allow only transit-supporting uses; recognizing station areas as special places, whereas remaining community is available for traditional development; promoting TOD as part of broader growth management strategy; focusing public agency investment and planning at station areas having the greatest development opportunity; and building a broad-based core of support for TOD with elected officials, local government staff, land owners, and neighborhoods.

Establishing Roles
Successful TOD requires a team effort, involving municipal leadership that invests time, money, and political capital to achieve TOD, sophisticated, TOD-savvy developers, and extensive public outreach.

A significant role of leadership is helping to make projects work financially. This should include implementation of TOD policy by creating zoning that allows for more density and mixed-use; making infrastructure improvements (most notably in public transit); and providing predictability and transparency in the form of plans, guidelines, and permissible uses and densities.

TOD Development
Some lessons learned with respect to successful TOD development include:

- Pay more attention to the programming aspect of the project to ensure success of the retail and community uses. For example, identify local businesses that would be appropriate for the project, offer reduced rent for a period of time to assist them getting started.
- Place retail along the street front, with direct access to adjacent neighborhoods.
- Retailing follows rooftops, even in a transit corridor setting. Retailers and developers look at the amount and mix of housing nearby a TOD.
- The promotion of TOD on urban infill parcels creates an important opportunity for the revitalization of older existing development areas. If designed right, TOD can provide a sense of place, gathering places, open spaces, and community resources.

For More information
Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority website:
www.gcrta.org

Related Sections
- Transportation
- High Performing Community
BUILDING REHABILITATION CODE

Innovative Organization: State of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs

Like Fort Collins, many communities in New Jersey see the potential and advantages in re-using and adapting older buildings for new purposes. Yet New Jersey communities faced obstacles with bringing such buildings into compliance with state building codes.

Innovative Practice

New Jersey Uniform Construction Code – Rehabilitation Subcode

The most significant recent reform in the regulation of work in existing buildings happened in New Jersey with the adoption of the New Jersey Uniform Construction Code—Rehabilitation Subcode in January 1998. The new subcode was developed because it was recognized that the then current code was constraining the re-use of older buildings in New Jersey.

Three criteria were defined for the new system in New Jersey:

- Timeliness of processing and enforcement (i.e., most projects should be handled routinely rather than as special cases).
- Predictability (i.e., people should know the law applicable to them and be free from arbitrary treatment).
- Reasonableness (i.e., provide a reasonable level of safety without imposing excessive additional costs).

The Rehabilitation Subcode that was developed to meet these criteria reflected a true paradigm shift in the regulation of alteration work in existing buildings. It takes the rather broad building code definition of “alteration” and splits it into three well-defined categories of work in progressive increase of complexity:

- Renovation—defined in general as work involving no reconfiguration of spaces in the building.
- Alteration—defined in general as work involving reconfiguration of spaces.
- Reconstruction—defined as work so extensive that the work area cannot be occupied during the work.

Another element of the paradigm shift was the creation and definition of the term “work area.” Both innovations go a long way toward achieving predictability and reasonableness. Progressively more complex rehabilitation work entails progressively more extensive additional required life safety improvements. Reasonableness is achieved by establishing proportionality between the voluntary work proposed by the owner and the additional work imposed by the regulatory system.

The Rehabilitation Subcode’s approach to change of occupancy in an existing building parallels that of the UCBC. Multiple hazard scales are established, and a change of occupancy that involves an increase in hazard on one or more of the scales triggers specific additional requirements to address the added hazard.

The Rehabilitation Subcode is serving its purpose. The State reports that investment in building rehabilitation in cities such as Trenton, Newark, and Elizabeth has increased substantially from 1997-1998 due to the new code.

Background and Details

New Jersey’s Rehabilitation Subcode was developed by the Department of Community Affairs with guidance from a 30-member committee under the coordination of the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University. The committee was composed of code officials, fire officials, architects, historic preservationists, advocates for people with disabilities, and government representatives. The committee met over two years and approved the draft document at its final meeting on January 31, 1997. Department staff then made the draft a proposal, which was published in the New Jersey Register on August 18, 1997. Two public hearings
were held. Comments were received and discussed, and some clarifications and improvements to the proposed documents were made. Signed on December 8, 1997, the Rehabilitation Subcode was published as a rule adoption in the New Jersey Register on January 5, 1998.

The Department of Community Affairs made this extraordinary effort to provide training for code officials in advance of the promulgation of the rule because of a strong belief that code knowledge leads to effective enforcement. However, the Rehabilitation Subcode, with its categories of work and specific requirements, provides the code user with guidelines that are easily followed. There is virtually no guesswork involved in applying the code.

New Jersey’s Rehabilitation Subcode is an example of government reassessing its regulations and actually improving the effectiveness of the regulations by imposing fewer and more sensible requirements on the public. Building departments win because buildings are improved and made safer. Building owners win because they are able to improve their properties, increase their value, and produce buildings in which people want to live and work. But, most importantly, the public wins because urban areas are revitalized, open space is preserved, resources are conserved and, in general, quality of life is improved.

**For More information**

State of New Jersey Rehabilitation Subcode website:  
http://www.state.nj.us/dca/codes/rehab/pioneerart.shtml

A Guide to Smart Codes in Your Community:  

HousingPolicy.Org Toolbox:  
http://www.housingpolicy.org/toolbox/strategy/policies/rehab_codes.html?tierid=70

**Related Sections**

- Economic Health
- High Performing Community
ZONING CODE REFORM

Innovative Community: Denver, Colorado
Population: 600,000

Denver is not similar to Fort Collins in terms of its demographics, but as a mature community it is also wrestling with how to address redevelopment in established neighborhoods and corridors.

Innovative Practice

Revised Zoning Code

Denver is undertaking major revisions to its 53-year-old zoning code with a focus on supporting a growing economy, sustainable environment, diverse mix of housing, strong neighborhoods, and a high quality of life. The project is applicable to Fort Collins as the community debates infill and redevelopment policies in the Plan Fort Collins project. The focus on form of buildings and layout are important in redeveloping areas in order to address the context established by existing development and street patterns.

Background and Details

The zoning code update process is taking place in four phases:

1. Analysis and Problem Definition;
2. Alternative Approaches;
3. Drafting; and
4. Public Review.

The second phase is resulting in an innovative “context-based” approach to zoning, organized around six different contexts. These characteristics are derived from the existing and desirable characteristics of Denver’s diverse neighborhoods.

This context-based approach provides a broader range of zoning categories than is currently available and will guide more compatible future development. The new Zoning Code also uses a form-based approach that clearly explains what can be built in terms of such things as building height and placement using visuals.

The six contexts include Suburban, Urban Edge, Urban, General Urban, Urban Center and Downtown. Each of the contexts is described by specific block patterns, commercial and residential uses, and transportation characteristics.

The code revision has undergone extensive public review and modification. Code sections consist of general character, street/block/access patterns, building placement and location, building height, mobility, design standards and zone districts. While still containing permissible uses, the focus is on the form of the types of housing and non-residential buildings. The draft code contains extensive drawings of building dimensions and lot/block layouts along with design element text.

For More information

Denver New Zoning Code website: www.newcodedenver.org/rezoning

Related Sections

- Economic Health
- High Performing Community
AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACQUISITION FUND

Innovative Community: Denver, Colorado  
Population: 598,707

The City and County of Denver is located at the center of the largest metropolitan area in Colorado. Regionally, the introduction and expansion of light rail transit has led to major shifts in land use patterns, with development becoming more transit-oriented to take advantage of the transit service.

Innovative Practice

Transit-Oriented Development Acquisition Fund for Affordable Housing

The City and County of Denver has partnered with the Urban Land Conservancy, Enterprise Community Partners, and other investors to establish the first affordable housing Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) acquisition fund in the country. The purpose of the Denver TOD Fund is to support the creation and preservation of over 1,000 affordable housing units through strategic property acquisition in current and future transit corridors. As the Denver metropolitan area undergoes what is considered to be the largest expansion of a transit system in the nation, this new investment will help preserve and create affordable housing within one half mile of rail service and a quarter mile from frequent bus routes.

Background and Details

Benefits of the Fund

The current fund will revolve to make up to $25 million in capital available to purchase and hold sites for up to five years in anticipation of the opening of new transit stations. The investment of $25 million will leverage over $100 million in local economic development activity, serving many of Denver’s lowest income neighborhoods with construction and permanent job creation. The Fund will also directly benefit low-income households that on average spend 60 percent of their gross income on housing and transportation expenses combined. By controlling these expenses and providing access to quality, environmentally-sustainable housing, the TOD Fund will make it possible for families to build wealth, and access employment and educational opportunities; it will provide employers with access to an expanded workforce.

Partnerships

The partnership of government, quasi-governmental organizations, banks, nonprofits and foundations is a critical component of the Denver TOD Fund. Enterprise Community Partners, a national nonprofit, assembled the initial $15 million in capital that will allow the Fund to begin operations in mid-2009. The Urban Land Conservancy (ULC) committed the initial $1.5 million equity to the Fund and will lead real estate acquisition, management and disposition of assets for the Fund. ULC is a nonprofit organization formed in 2003 by local business leaders who understood the need to permanently secure real estate assets for community benefit in metro Denver’s urban neighborhoods.

Enterprise will serve as fund manager, responsible for managing and servicing the fund, and identifying all sources of funding to capitalize the fund. Currently, ULC is expected to be the sole borrower of the fund and will be responsible for property acquisition and establishing partnerships with local partners for site redevelopment. ULC will target three types of properties: existing federally-assisted rental properties; unsubsidized rental properties that are currently affordable for 60 percent area median income population; and vacant or commercial properties with desirable locations for the development of new affordable housing. The TOD Fund will enable the ULC to hold properties for up to five years, providing maximum flexibility to
secure long-term subsidies to preserve existing rental housing. ULC plans to increase density on many sites by adding affordable housing and commercial development.

As the administrator of the City’s affordable housing approach, the Denver Office of Economic Development (OED) will serve as the lead agency representing the City on the fund. The Denver Office of Strategic Partnerships (DOSP) played a lead role in managing the City financing for the fund and in initiating the application requests. Joining OED and DOSP to work on this effort are the Department of Community Planning and Development and Denver Human Services–Denver’s Road Home, the Mayor’s Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

City of Denver Role
The City of Denver has two sources of money capital that it is using as an investment. The Denver Office of Strategic Partnerships, through its Xcel Energy Franchise dollars, is investing $2 million in the fund. The Office of Economic Development is also contributing $500,000. The City’s dollars are in the top loss position within the fund. The investment of the Xcel Energy Franchise dollars will ensure that the housing units built will meet Enterprise Green Community Standards and around 15% of the units will be affordable at a 0 – 30% Area Median Income level (per an established goal). A representative from the Denver Office of Strategic Partnerships and a representative from the Office of Economic Development also serve on the TOD Fund Oversight Committee.

Investors
Current Fund Investors include the City of Denver, Colorado Housing and Finance Authority, Enterprise Community Partners, MacArthur Foundation, Mile High Community Loan Fund, and the Rose Community Foundation.

For More information
City of Denver website:

Denver Office of Economic Development website:

Related Sections
- Economic Health
- Transportation
- High Performing Community
AFFORDABLE HOUSING TAX INCREMENT FINANCING

Innovative Community: Portland, Oregon
Population: 582,130

The City of Portland is Oregon’s most populous city in the northwest. The City represents the heart of the larger metropolitan area of Portland/Vancouver Washington, with an estimated population of over two million people. As with many communities struggling to meet the housing needs of all segments of the population, the continued development of affordable housing is a key issue in Portland.

Innovative Practice

Affordable Housing Tax Increment Financing

The Affordable Housing Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Set Aside is a policy adopted by the Portland Development Commission (PDC) and Portland City Council that requires PDC to spend a minimum percentage of its total tax increment resources in urban renewal areas (URA) on eligible affordable housing activities. The TIF set aside ensures that a certain amount of funding will be available for housing as part of overall urban renewal efforts in 9 of Portland’s 11 URAs. There are guidelines for each URA about how this funding should be spent to meet the citywide housing priorities. Approximately $120 million was forecasted to be available from the program’s inception in 2007 through 2011, potentially resulting in 1,200 to 4,000 new and rehabilitated affordable housing units (both rental apartments and owner-occupied homes).

Background and Details

On April 26, 2006, the City Council expressed an interest in considering a policy “to dedicate a percentage of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) revenues from all Urban Renewal Districts citywide to an affordable housing set aside fund, or to create another mechanism to ensure predictable and adequate funding and prioritization of housing for individuals and families earning 80% Median Family Income (MFI) or less.” Council also requested the Portland Development Commission work in partnership with the Bureau of Housing and Community Development, the Office of Management and Finance, the Housing and Community Development Commission, Affordable Housing Now, and other interested stakeholders to develop and present to Council by September 2006 either an implementation plan to create such a set aside fund or other options.

The PDC Commission directed staff to create and implement a broad and inclusive public participation effort, consistent with PDC’s Public Participation Policy, which reflects perspectives from individuals and groups, including Urban Renewal Advisory Committees, involved in all aspects of tax increment financing, and other stakeholders who would benefit or would be impacted by a specific set or automatic allocation of urban renewal resources for affordable housing.

Tax Increment Expenditure Data Report

A Technical Advisory Committee was established to review PDC’s historic information on affordable housing expenditures in the existing URAs as well as developing projections regarding future expenditures. The Technical Advisory Committee was charged with assisting with the Data Report on Historical and Forecasted Urban Renewal Expenditures.

TIF Set Aside Implementation Plan

A Project Advisory Group was established to review the data report from the technical advisory committee and discuss implementation options. The Project Advisory Group was charged with assisting with the development of TIF Set Aside Implementation Recommendations. The Group met three times and provided input to PDC staff in the development of the Implementation Plan. A public forum cosponsored by PDC and HCDC was held to allow for broad community input into the development of the Implementation Plan.

In October both the PDC Board of Commissioners and the City Council adopted the TIF Set Aside Implementation Plan which established a 30% set aside in the new districts and South Park Blocks Urban Renewal Area, and includes separate percentages for Downtown Waterfront Urban Renewal Area, Oregon Convention Center Urban Renewal Area and the Central Eastside Urban Renewal Area.

TIF Set Aside Income Guidelines

The Implementation Plan included PDC’s intent to establish income guidelines that correspond to individual URA Housing Policies, current projects,
per unit subsidies, and forecasted budget availability. PDC met with urban renewal advisory committees and stakeholder groups, as well as citywide stakeholder and advocacy groups to get input on the Preliminary Staff Recommendation for Income Guidelines. PDC hosted a public forum in January 2007, which was attended by over 60 community representatives ranging from URA representatives, neighborhood representatives, affordable housing developers and advocacy groups, homeownership advocates, community organizations and real estate professionals. On February 28, 2007, the PDC Board of Commissioners formally adopted Income Guidelines for the TIF Set Aside.

**For More information**


**Related Sections**

- Economic Health
- High Performing Community