NO PREP

Smart Growth & Urban Planning

Designing Better Cities

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

Smart Growth & Urban Planning: Designing Better Cities

Core Smart Growth Principles

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Core Smart Growth Principles

Smart growth is a planning approach that promotes compact development, mixed use, and walkability to create healthy, sustainable urban places. The idea is to concentrate growth where infrastructure already exists and to design neighborhoods that reduce dependence on cars. Key principles include prioritizing density to support transit, mixing housing with retail and services so daily needs are nearby, protecting open space and green corridors, and encouraging public participation so residents shape development. Smart growth recognizes that urban form affects daily life: when homes, jobs, schools, and shops are clustered, trips are shorter, walking and cycling become practical, and transit can run more frequent and efficiently. Importantly, smart growth is not one-size-fits-all; it looks different in small towns, suburbs, and big cities, but consistent features are compactness, diversity of uses, high-quality public spaces, and investments that prioritize people over cars.

Planning Tools: Zoning, Streets, and Green Infrastructure

Implementing smart growth relies on a toolkit of planning measures. Form-based codes regulate the form and design of buildings rather than only uses; they create predictable streetscapes and prioritize human-scale development. Complete streets policies require road design that safely accommodates pedestrians, cyclists, buses, and cars. Density bonuses allow developers to build a bit more if they include affordable units or public amenities. Green infrastructure (swales, rain gardens, permeable paving) handles stormwater while adding public amenity. Participatory planning processes are essential: meaningful public participation brings in diverse voices, helps reduce community resistance, and improves outcomes by reflecting local priorities. Implementation also means aligning financing (value-capture,

development charges, or public-private partnerships) with long-term management, ensuring projects are maintained.

Classroom Scenario: Redesign a Street Using Smart Growth

Imagine a two-block main street with one lane of traffic in each direction, wide parking lanes, single-story shops, and poor sidewalks. A smart-growth redesign might narrow travel lanes to slow car speeds and add protected bike lanes, widen sidewalks for dining and trees, and permit upper-floor housing above shops to increase density and ground-floor activity. The presence of affordable housing units and well-lit public spaces supports a diverse, 24-hour street life. Transit stops could be made more comfortable with shelters and real-time arrival info. This kind of redesign balances mobility (bus priority or curbside loading), safety (CPTED, crime prevention through environmental design), and place-making (trees, seating) while increasing economic vitality by concentrating customers near businesses. Students can sketch the street before/after and list trade-offs (parking loss vs. more customers; slower car speeds vs. safer walking).

Benefits, Challenges, and Equity Considerations

Smart growth yields co-benefits: greater walkability improves public health, reduced vehicle miles traveled cut emissions, mixed-use neighborhoods support local business, and denser development makes public services more affordable per capita. However, challenges include political resistance (NIMBYism), short-term costs of retrofitting infrastructure, and the risk that increased desirability raises property values and displaces lower-income residents if affordability is not deliberately protected. Equity must be central: combine density and infill with inclusionary zoning, community land trusts, and tenant protections to ensure displacement doesn't follow investment. Implementation requires patient public engagement, flexible design solutions, and funding strategies that reinvest land-value gains into affordable housing and public realm improvements.

Key Information: Table: Smart Growth Tools & Outcomes

Tool	What it does	Desired Outcome
Form-based code	Controls building form & frontage	Predictable walkable streets

Tool	What it does	Desired Outcome
Complete streets	Allocates space for all users	Safer multimodal access
Density bonus	Allows more units for public benefit	More housing + amenities
Green infrastructure	Manages stormwater, adds green space	Resilience & public amenity

Case Study Excerpt (hypothetical / representative)

Stonebridge was a postwar strip commercial corridor with large parking lots and disconnected sidewalks. City leaders launched a smart-growth pilot to transform a two-block stretch into a human-scale main street. They revised zoning to allow mixed-use mid-rise buildings, adopted a form-based code for storefronts, and introduced a complete-streets plan that narrowed car lanes, created protected bike lanes, widened sidewalks, and added street trees and bioswales to manage runoff. The city offered density bonuses for projects that included at least 15% permanently affordable units, and a community advisory committee guided design choices through public workshops. Within five years, developers replaced two surface parking lots with mixed-use buildings that housed ground-floor shops and 80 apartments above, including 12 affordable units held by a local community land trust. The new streetscape increased pedestrian counts, supported new cafes and a weekly market, and reduced local stormwater floods thanks to green infrastructure. Some long-term residents worried about rising rents in nearby blocks; the city responded by prioritizing long-term tenant assistance and expanding affordable-housing subsidies. Overall, the corridor became more active and resilient without wholesale displacement because the city paired compact growth with explicit affordability measures and deep public participation.

1. What two planning tools did Stonebridge use to create a walkable main street?

_____

_____

2. Name one measure the city took to reduce displacement concerns and explain briefly.

_____

_____

Multiple Choice

1. A primary goal of smart growth is to:
    a) Encourage low-density, car-dependent development
    b) Increase parking minimums
    c) Remove public participation from planning
    d) Promote compact, mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods

2. A form-based code primarily regulates:
    a) Building form and frontage to create consistent streetscapes
    b) Only what uses are allowed inside a building, and nothing else
    c) Transit timetables
    d) National trade tariffs

3. A key equity tool to pair with smart growth is:
    a) Exclusive luxury development zones
    b) Complete deregulation of housing markets
    c) Community land trusts and inclusionary zoning
    d) Mandatory parking minimums

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Form-based code	A) Street design for bikes, pedestrians, buses, cars
2. ___ Density bonus	B) Bioswales, permeable pavement, trees
3. ___ Complete streets	C) Extra units allowed in exchange for public benefits
4. ___ Green infrastructure	D) Community input in planning decisions
5. ___ Public participation	E) Predictable building frontage and street form

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. Designing streets that safely serve people walking, cycling, and using transit is called _____ _____.

2. Codes that regulate building form instead of only uses are called _____-based codes.

3. A nonprofit model that can secure permanently affordable units alongside smart growth is a _____ _____ _____.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Explain one reason form-based codes can improve street life.

_____

_____

_____

2. Describe one trade-off when converting parking lots into mixed-use buildings.

3. Suggest one funding approach to keep new smart-growth housing affordable.