

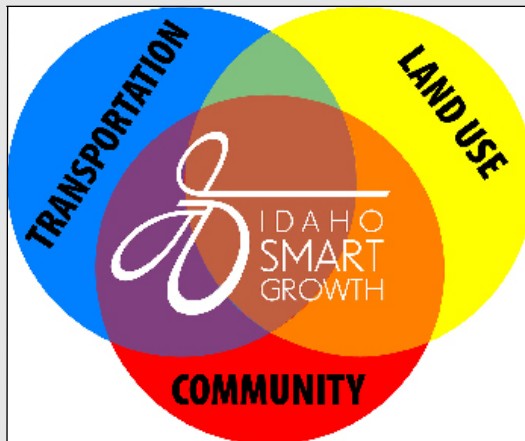
# IDAHO SMART GROWTH CITIZEN'S GUIDE

# Welcome!

*Idaho Smart Growth has developed this guide as a resource for citizens who are interested in helping shape the future of their community and for people who are concerned about a specific land use or transportation proposal. Our goal is to help you get started by sharing background information on land use and transportation planning in Idaho, suggesting some steps you can take to get more involved, and defining the basics of smart growth.*

## How to use this guide

On the right-hand (odd-numbered) pages, you will find an introduction to smart growth concepts followed by an overview of Idaho's land use/transportation planning history and current issues. On the left-hand (even-numbered) pages, you can quickly find tips and information to help you easily engage in the process. Please make use of them!



**Copies available by calling 208-333-8066,  
writing to P.O. Box 374, Boise, ID 83701,  
or going online to [www.IdahoSmartGrowth.org](http://www.IdahoSmartGrowth.org).**

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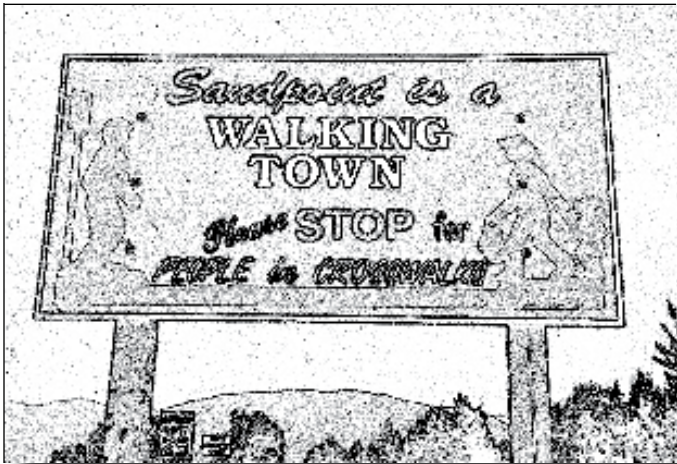
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From the Pan-handle to south-eastern Idaho, communities of all sizes are using smart growth principles to improve quality of life, save taxpayer dollars and build a sense of place.



# CITIZEN'S TOOLKIT

## KEY STEPS TO BECOMING FULLY ENGAGED

- Learn what public agencies make the decisions that affect you and your community. The alphabet soup of acronyms can be daunting. But ultimately, all public agencies answer to you, the citizen, which gives you the right and responsibility to be sure they are responsive to your concerns.
- Familiarize yourself with city and/or county comprehensive plans, zoning code and other plans, often available online at city and county websites.
- Identify key decision-makers; try to get to know them personally.
- For any given issue, find out who the stakeholders are (public and private) and what motivates them.
- Understand the rules of citizen engagement, especially when and how a citizen can effectively participate in the decision-making process.
- **Be involved early and often**—and that means getting involved when your community is updating its comprehensive land use plan and/or engaging in long-range transportation planning. These documents lay out the vision for your community's future. Contact your city, county or transportation planning agency to find out when these opportunities will happen.



# BACKGROUND BRIEFING

## WHAT'S SO “SMART” ABOUT SMART GROWTH?

Smart growth is about the nuts and bolts: the stuff most of us don't often think about that has a lot to do with our quality of life. Smart growth addresses the way we move from one place to another and what those places are like. Smart growth offers a framework, giving us tools to address social and environmental stresses and strains caused by growth. Smart growth is a way of seeing the world around us and the choices we have for making that world better—for ourselves, our families and our neighbors.

The term “smart growth” was coined in the mid-1990s, as people around the country sought to get a handle on escalating population growth and paying for its effects, such as new infrastructure (roads, public services and utilities) and far-flung suburbs dependent on motorized vehicles. In 1997, Maryland Gov. Parris Glendening signed into law what he called “Smart Growth and Conservation Initiatives” to “reverse the debilitating economic, social and environmental costs caused by years of government-supported sprawl development.”

Since then, government agencies, planners, nonprofits and citizens have identified, studied, discussed and taken action to support the 10 principles that generally define “smart growth:”

- *Direct development* toward existing communities.
- Adopt *compact building patterns* and efficient infrastructure design.
- Provide a variety of *transportation choices*.
- Create *walkable neighborhoods*.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong *sense of place*.
- *Mix land uses*.
- Create a range of *housing choices* and opportunities.
- Encourage community and stakeholder *collaboration*.
- Make development decisions *predictable, fair and cost-effective*.
- *Preserve open space*, farmland, natural beauty and critical environment.

Smart growth is a response to our increasing awareness that, in Idaho and elsewhere, the choices we make in designing, building and growing our communities have a direct effect on our personal quality of life and health and on the long-term well-being of our regional economy, environment and public health.

# HOW THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS WORKS (LAND USE PROJECT)

## 1. PROPOSAL

by private developer or public agency to a city or, if outside city limits, to a county

## 2. INPUT

from city/county planning staff, neighborhood group(s), community members, possibly from a historic district or other design review committee, school district, water/sewer district, gas/electric utilities, fire/police, highway district, irrigation district, library, Idaho Fish and Game, U.S. Postal Service or other entities. **In general, the earlier citizens have input, the more effective it will be.**

## 3. INITIAL DETERMINATION

by the city or county Planning and Zoning Commission

## 4. FINAL DETERMINATION

by the City Council or County Commission

## 5. APPEAL

to District Court if the decision is contested



# HOW DOES SMART GROWTH DIFFER FROM OTHER GROWTH?

Growth issues are as diverse as Idaho's geography. At any given time, some communities are stagnating, unable to attract job-generating businesses. Others are stretching along their urban-rural edges while their older downtowns, where investment already has been made in roads and other infrastructure, languish. And in places where too many people arrive too fast, growth booms overwhelm everyone's ability to cope, quality of life declines and the environment suffers.

Smart growth is applicable in all these situations. It doesn't mean "no growth." Smart growth recognizes growth's benefits, while addressing its liabilities through dialogue between private developers, government agencies, policy makers and citizens. Smart growth gives everyone a shared frame of reference for moving ahead in a non-confrontational, results-oriented manner.

# HOW CAN SMART GROWTH IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNITY?

Smart growth seeks to use tax revenue, infrastructure and land efficiently; respect the environment; protect public health; provide a variety of transportation and housing choices; and strengthen residents' feelings of community.

**Greater Fiscal Responsibility.** Growth expands the tax base and creates more demands on existing services and infrastructure. By considering the cumulative costs of growth, we can be smarter about where and how we invest in roads, sewers, police, fire and the other services citizens expect tax dollars to support, and long-term operation will be affordable.

**Economic Development.** In addition to a community's fiscal responsibility, "livability factors" play an important role in attracting new businesses and keeping established ones. They include easy access

# **12 STEPS TO ADDRESS ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS THAT AFFECT YOU**

1. Identify the jurisdiction with authority over this proposal. There may be more than one, if a development is proposed for a city's area of impact.
2. Get a copy of the application from the jurisdiction.
3. Seek help from the planning staff or the developer about any procedural or technical questions.
4. Look up the applicable law: comprehensive plan and ordinances.
5. Discuss specific issues of concern with the planning staff and ask staff to clarify the approval process and timeline.
6. Talk to the applicant, as early in the process as possible.
7. Submit written comments on the proposal before the deadline.
8. Testify in person at public hearings
9. Cite specific sections of the pertinent law. (i.e. Goal 2, Objective 4c says "x." This proposal does not meet it because of "y.")
10. Cite existing neighborhood characteristics the proposal supports or endangers; illustrate with sharp, well-exposed photos.
11. Offer recommendations to make the proposal acceptable/better.
12. Ask for specific conditions/changes you want adopted.



to goods and services, recreational opportunities and open space; a positive sense of community; clean air and water; and a variety of safe, affordable housing options. That's why many companies and business associations in Idaho and nationwide engage in smart growth practices and uphold its principles.

**Transportation.** People move safely, efficiently and sustainably to the degree that smart growth principles are applied in a community. Three strategies that reduce vehicle travel, thus resulting in cleaner air and less traffic congestion, are mixing land uses, increasing population density and creating walkable neighborhoods connected to destinations with a network of roads, sidewalks and paths.

**Public Health.** Smart growth illuminates the connections between our built environment and our ability to be active. In addition to improving air quality, smart growth strategies make it easier, safer and more enjoyable to walk and bicycle for both pleasure and travel—to work, school or shopping—thus helping citizens remain healthy. Communities throughout America have seen a steady decline in daily physical activities like these, while at the same time obesity rates, heart disease, diabetes and other chronic diseases are steadily increasing.

Public health experts have connected the dots between the built en-

vironment, lower physical activity levels and poor health. For more than 50 years, cities and towns have been designed more for the automobile and less for the person, resulting in communities where walking to daily activities is increasingly difficult and often dangerous.



# TIPS FOR MEETING WITH AN APPLICANT

- Before a formal public hearing, it often is helpful to meet with the applicant to try to address your concerns and learn more about the project “from the horse’s mouth.” The applicant’s contact information is on the development application.
- If possible, take time to read the application before your meeting.
- Be as knowledgeable as possible about the site and its surroundings, including roadways, adjacent land uses and ownership, and any official current or long-range plans (land use or transportation) for the area.
- At the meeting, be respectful. Remember that the applicant has invested in this property with an idea for how to use it and the expectation that it will be profitable.
- Listen to the applicant describe the proposal and ask questions about anything you don’t understand.
- Let the applicant know you want to cooperate in a way that benefits everyone. For example, instead of asking “Why are you doing this here,” share your neighborhood’s vision for the area and ask how the applicant sees this project fitting into it.
- Talk about amenities you would like to have that could also benefit the applicant’s project. For instance, you may want a park on that property, but if the City has not designated that site as a park, it won’t happen. So you ask if the development will provide public open space or trails, sidewalks, etc. Or, if you want commercial or retail closer to your neighborhood, you describe the types of businesses and level of vehicle use that would be acceptable.
- After meeting with the applicant, feel free to contact the planning staff with any additional questions.

Nationwide, public health experts have joined the smart growth conversation because they see that “it is unreasonable to expect that people will change their behavior easily when so many forces in the social, cultural, and physical environment conspire against such change.” (Institute of Medicine; Smedly and Syme, 2000)

Evidence validates that infrastructure supporting walking and bicycling, schools and businesses sited near public transportation, mixed-use development, improved personal and traffic safety, and access to outdoor recreational facilities are effective in increasing physical activity for adults and children.

**Creating a Sense of Place.** The most successful cities and close-knit neighborhoods always have a sense of their own unique identity, boosted by vibrant public gathering spaces, a thriving central core and walkability. Smart growth encourages investment in downtown and neighborhood elements that will create communities with a strong sense of place, where residents feel connected to each other .

Achieving these goals requires addressing the “Five Ds:” density, design, destination, distance and diversity. How they work together creates smart growth.

**Density.** Compact development is key to making the tax dollars spent for roads, sewer, police and fire protection go farther. It makes mass transit possible, while simultaneously preserving farmlands, natural areas and open space. With smart growth, higher density is targeted



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*Bown Crossing, Boise, combines mixed-use and higher density to encourage walking and use infrastructure efficiently. The older, single-family homes on large parcels in the foothills above promote driving.*

# **PUBLIC HEARINGS AND PUBLIC MEETINGS**

While formal public hearings can provide an opportunity to affect a project, they are not intended to encourage conversation or interaction between the parties. Such interaction should take place before the hearing (see “Tips for Meeting with an Applicant,” page 10).

Most public hearings follow this format:

1. Staff presentation of the proposal, citing relevant Comprehensive Plan and code sections and identifying any issues these decision-makers should be aware of.
2. Developer presentation.
3. Public comment by agency representatives, individuals representing themselves, and/or a neighborhood association representing its members.
4. Staff rebuttal.
5. Developer rebuttal.
6. Testimony is closed.
7. Discussion by the decision-makers about the proposal, followed by their vote on it.

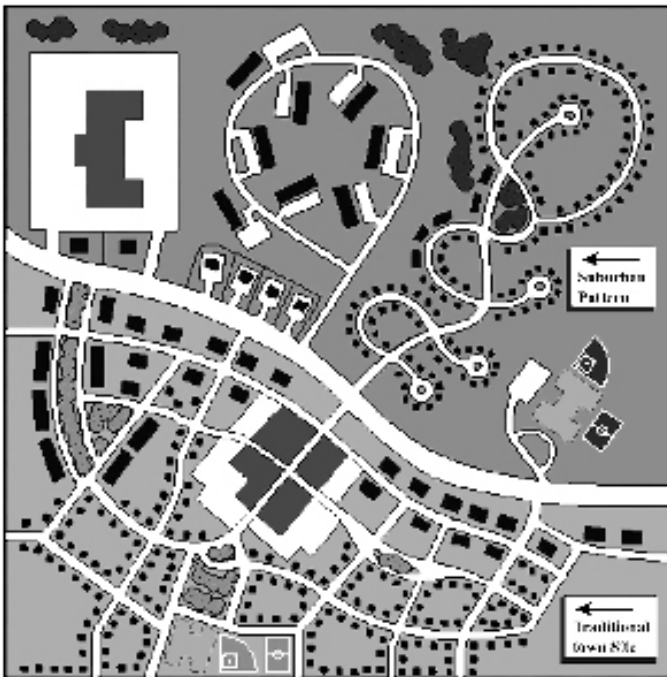
Usually, several items of business are on the agenda for a given meeting date. You can call the city or county clerk’s office to get an approximate time they think your item will be discussed, but it is safest to plan to be present from the beginning of the meeting until your project is heard.

If a public meeting is advertised as an “information open house,” it is intended to encourage conversation among those interested in the project. You may drop in any time during the scheduled meeting hours, view displays, confer with planning staff and comment in writing at that time. Your comments will go into the public record for decision-makers to see. You may also ask to receive notification of the future public hearings or meetings on the matter.

for locations where it will produce specific benefits, such as near mass transit lines or downtown, and enhance economic viability. Promoting density does not mean banning large-lot homes or mandating high-rise condos everywhere. It does mean that the overall density of a community increases and expensive suburban sprawl decreases. Density effectively reduces the miles residents travel annually; differences are quite notable between densities of 1 house/acre and 100 houses/acre.

**Destination / Distance.** For us to have transportation choices, some of our destinations must be within walking or biking distance. Smart growth strategies—mixing land uses, encouraging development inside existing communities through infill and re-development, and adopting compact building patterns—play a role in achieving this.

**Diversity.** Mixing land uses produces many benefits. When residential, work, shopping, recreation and school uses are relatively close to each other, we can choose to get out of our cars and walk, bike or take public transit. Adding residential uses to downtowns increases their economic viability and social activity. Having public gathering places enhances a neighborhood’s sense of itself as a community. Encour-



*Traditional, or smart growth, design includes a street grid system, a mix of uses located near each other, and walkable neighborhoods. Typical suburbs separate uses, divide open space and are automobile-dependent.*



# TIPS FOR TESTIFYING AT A PUBLIC HEARING

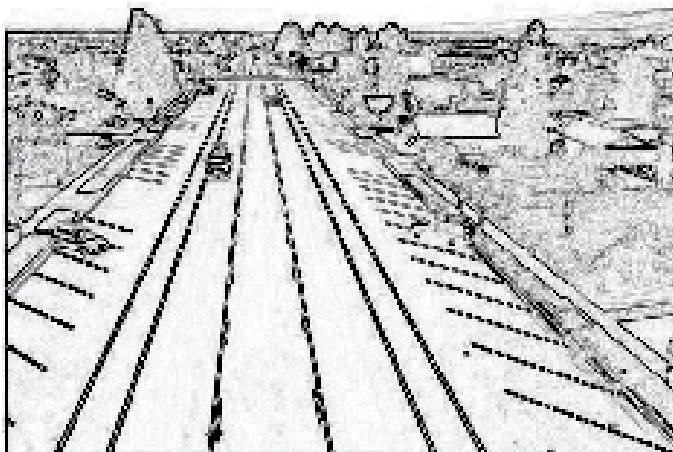
You may — indeed, you are encouraged to — testify in person at public hearings. Idaho law (ID 67-6534) requires that everyone be given an opportunity to be heard. Here are some tips for success.

- Know the presentation guidelines, including any time limits.
- Write your comments and turn in a copy at the hearing — or beforehand, if possible — along with any supporting material, such as photographs.
- Provide concise, constructive comments and testimony that addresses specific aspects of the proposal; do not make sweeping generalities.
- Avoid “NIMBY” (Not In My BackYard) reasoning. Decisionmakers must base their ruling on whether or not the proposal complies with the comprehensive plan and its ordinances, so stick to those points.
- If there is a time limit for testimony, one strategy is for the neighborhood association representative to give an overview of its members’ concerns, followed by individuals who each address a specific issue or relevant code section.
- If you see a solution to your concerns, by all means state it.



aging a variety of housing in a neighborhood broadens the range of residents' ages, income levels and other demographics.

**Design.** “Form follows function.” Thoughtful design applies smart growth principles in an aesthetically pleasing, fiscally efficient, socially enhancing way. When applied to transportation, design refers to how the network connects places. Designs with many dead-ends (cul-de-sacs) and widely separated connections make it hard to walk or bike by increasing travel distance. When networks are designed with many close connections and nearby destinations, people often choose to walk. A “complete streets” roadway network offers good facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders as well as drivers.



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*Main Street, Victor, accommodates the needs of drivers, bicyclists and walkers safely. Such “complete streets” offer welcome choices in transportation.*

## **Land Use and Transportation Planning in Idaho - An Overview**

In the early 1970s, concerns about the loss of productive farmland led to passage in 1975 of the Local Land Use Planning Act (Idaho Code, Title 67, Chapter 65 - LLUPA). The Act requires counties and cities to prepare and implement comprehensive plans and enables them to enact ordinances to carry out the goals and policies of those plans. Citizen advice is required, and citizens who engage in their local planning efforts will ensure that the comprehensive plans reflect and will create the community they desire.

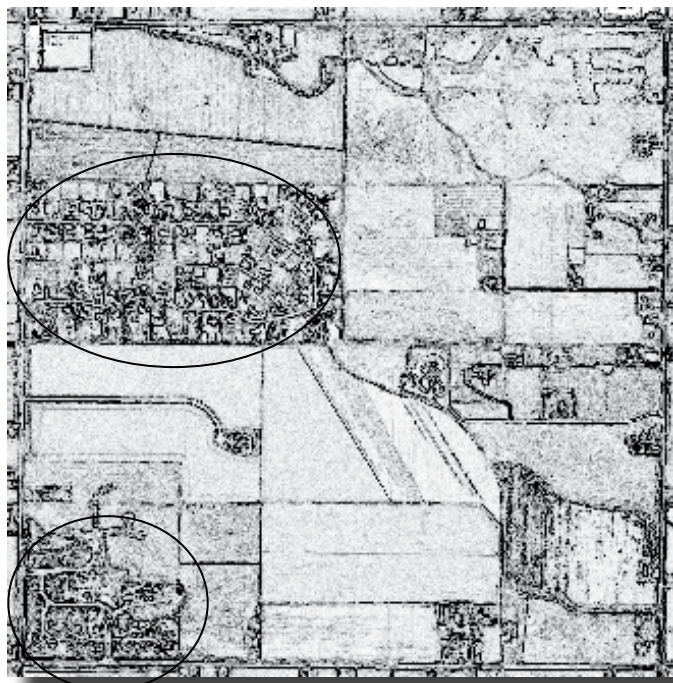
# Questions to Consider When Reviewing a Proposal

- What is the vision for this area in the comprehensive plan and does it call for the type of development being proposed? Does this proposal align with your vision? What changes would help align it with these visions?
- How is the property currently zoned? Does the proposal require a zoning change and if it does, will it enhance the area or not? Does it meet all requirements of local ordinances?
- Is the current infrastructure — roads, sidewalks, sewer, schools, parks/open space, transit stop, pathways, etc. — adequate to support the proposal? How will any gaps be met? How much of this cost will the developer pay and when? Will these costs be covered by the tax revenue the project generates and how soon?
- Geographically, how does the proposed development relate to jobs, restaurants, shopping, schools, etc.? Will its users have transportation choices (sidewalks, paths, bike lanes, proximity to a bus stop)? Is access to the property adequate, safe and convenient? Evaluate the walkability of the location at [www.walkscore.com](http://www.walkscore.com).
- Does the proposal improve the mix of uses or the mix of housing types in the area? Will any new amenities (i.e. transit stop, open space) be available to existing neighbors?
- Does the proposal use “green” building standards and techniques?
- How does the project score on the Smart Growth scorecard ([www.idahosmartgrowth.org/index.php/resources/resource/scorecards/](http://www.idahosmartgrowth.org/index.php/resources/resource/scorecards/))?

In 2010, Idaho Smart Growth published a report on the status of land use planning in Idaho. As part of that project, Boise State University conducted focus groups of more than 200 planners, developers and officials, and the University of Idaho created an online resource analyzing 40 county and 61 city comprehensive plans in Idaho. ([www.idahosmartgrowth.org/images/uploads/files/idaho\\_land\\_use\\_analysis\\_final\\_summary.pdf](http://www.idahosmartgrowth.org/images/uploads/files/idaho_land_use_analysis_final_summary.pdf)).

This report points out that land use planning is just one part of the growth management equation. Transportation planning is equally important, and the two must be integrated. When that happens, growth enhances economic development, air and water quality are protected and open spaces remain for agriculture, recreation and wildlife. To create a plan that truly reflects the entire community's vision, all decision-makers (cities, counties), stakeholders (highway districts, schools, utility companies, etc), and citizens need to be at the table.

Transportation authority is complex. Cities usually have authority over the roads within their boundaries. However, some cities' streets—and all counties' roadways—are under the jurisdiction of highway districts. The Idaho Department of Transportation maintains and controls state highways, even when they pass through a city or town. Public trans-



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*When pockets of development “leapfrog” through farmland, these transition areas are expensive to serve with police and fire, often don’t pay their way in tax revenues, and require residents to drive to any destination. Eventually, adjacent agricultural uses are jeopardized, as well.*

# HOW TO HAVE EFFECTIVE INPUT IN REVISING YOUR LOCAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

1. If it is early in the process, sign up with your county or city planning office to receive notice of public meetings.
2. Get a copy of the plan and its proposed changes.
3. Talk to city/county planning staff. Ask them any questions you have and clarify the planning process and timeline.
4. Prepare your comments. Consider these questions: What do you want your community to look like in the future? What amenities would you like to have? Where would you like to see commercial or retail uses, and what types? Where would infill development make sense? How can land uses and transportation choices help your community be walkable, healthy and prosperous?
5. Participate in any public outreach activities, such as information open houses or online surveys. Submit comments on time; testify in person, if possible.

## PUBLICATIONS

***Recommended community strategies and measurements to prevent obesity in the United States: Implementation and measurement guide.*** Keener, D., Goodman, K., Lowry, A., Zaro, S., & Kettel Kahn, L. (2009). Atlanta, GA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

***Idaho Local Land Use Planning Act.*** <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/idstat/Title67/T67CH65.htm>

***A Citizen's Guide for LEED for Neighborhood Development: How to Tell if Development is Smart and Green.*** [www.nrdc.org/cities/smartgrowth/files/citizens\\_guide\\_LEED-ND.pdf](http://www.nrdc.org/cities/smartgrowth/files/citizens_guide_LEED-ND.pdf)

***The Healthy Urban Development Checklist, a guide for health services, is useful for comments on development policies, plans and proposals.*** [http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2010/pdf/hud\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2010/pdf/hud_checklist.pdf)

***The Center for Disease Control "Designing and Building Healthy Places" Project.*** <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/>. Integrates evidence-based health strategies into community planning, transportation and land-use decisions.

In addition to information and links on our website, Idaho Smart Growth also has an extensive lending library; please contact us for more information: 208.333.8066 or [www.idahosmartgrowth.org](http://www.idahosmartgrowth.org).



portation planning and services may be governed by transit authorities (where they exist), cities or counties.

Idaho is one of only three states without dedicated local or state funding for public transportation. What public transportation exists is mostly funded by federal formula grants or local property taxes. A few Idaho resort areas have local-option (i.e. voter approved) local taxes, such as a hotel or sales tax, that pays for public transit. The Idaho legislature has consistently refused to allow citizens to vote to fund public transit services through a local-option sales tax, even though such a tax would be levied only if a certain percentage of voters approved it and revenue from it would be used solely to pay for the purpose put before the voters, such as public transportation.

In areas of Idaho with more than 50,000 people, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are responsible for transportation planning at the regional level, while transit authorities are responsible for public transit planning, coordination and service delivery. MPOs are established by federal law, and the planning they do is mostly funded by the federal government.

Disconnects between land use and transportation authorities often result in dysfunctional planning that frustrates everyone involved. Idaho Smart Growth encourages these entities to coordinate their planning efforts and work closely together on implementation. An example in southwestern Idaho is Communities in Motion 2035, a joint land use/transportation planning effort that engaged more than 2,000 citizens, stakeholders, elected officials and planning professionals.

At the end of the day, transportation and/or land use plans, however well conceived, must be well executed if they are to accomplish their aims. Appointed and elected officials must follow them—and be held accountable if they don't. Citizens must care enough about their communities to pay attention and get involved in the incremental issues that determine how Idaho will look, feel and operate in the future. Idaho Smart Growth is here to assist all of these entities.

For smart growth to work, active citizen participation is vital. Even though finding time can be difficult for many people, it is possible, and Idaho Smart Growth has tools and tips to help.

# Resources

## ORGANIZATIONS, AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS

Most cities and counties have a website. Information is also on the **Association of Idaho Cities** and **Idaho Association of Counties** websites: [www.idahocities.org](http://www.idahocities.org) and [www.idcounties.org](http://www.idcounties.org).

**Idaho Dept. of Transportation** bicycle and pedestrian program: [www.itd.idaho.gov/bike\\_ped/](http://www.itd.idaho.gov/bike_ped/).

**I-way**, coordinated by the Community Transportation Association of Idaho, facilitates transportation choices and local multi-modal planning and education: <http://i-way.org/register>.

**Idaho Association of Highway Districts**, a non-partisan non-profit, is a unified voice promoting the interests of all highway districts: <http://www.iahd.com/>.

**Local Highway Technical Assistance Council** assists local jurisdictions (cities, counties and highway districts) in efficiently using resources to maintain and construct local road systems: <http://lhtac.org/>

**Idaho Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance** connects member organizations across Idaho offering education, advocacy and techni-

cal assistance: [www.idahopedbike.org](http://www.idahopedbike.org).

**The National Complete Streets Coalition** seeks to fundamentally transform the look, feel and function of communities' roads and streets by changing the way most roads are planned, designed, and constructed: <http://www.completestreets.org/>.

**ULI Idaho**, a nonprofit research and education group, serves professionals in the real estate and land use industry in Idaho and Montana: <http://idaho.uli.org>.

**Project for Public Spaces**, a non-profit planning, design and educational organization, helps citizens transform their public spaces to highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation and serve common needs: [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org).

**American Planning Association** collaborates with the **National Association of County and City Health Officials** to integrate public health into land use planning: [www.planning.org/research/healthy](http://www.planning.org/research/healthy); American Public Health Association: [www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org); Idaho Chapter of the American Planning Association: [http://www.idahoapa.org/APA\\_IDAHO/Home\\_.html](http://www.idahoapa.org/APA_IDAHO/Home_.html).

## IDAHO METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

**Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho** consists of the Northern Ada County Metropolitan Planning Area (the cities of Boise, Garden City, Eagle, Meridian, Kuna, and Star) and Nampa Metropolitan Planning Area (the cities of Nampa, Caldwell and Middleton). <http://www.compassidaho.org/index.html>.

**Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization** consists of all communities in Kootenai County. <http://www.kmpo.net/>.

**Lewis-Clark Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization** con-

sists of the cities of Lewiston and Clarkston. <http://lewisclarkmpo.org/>.

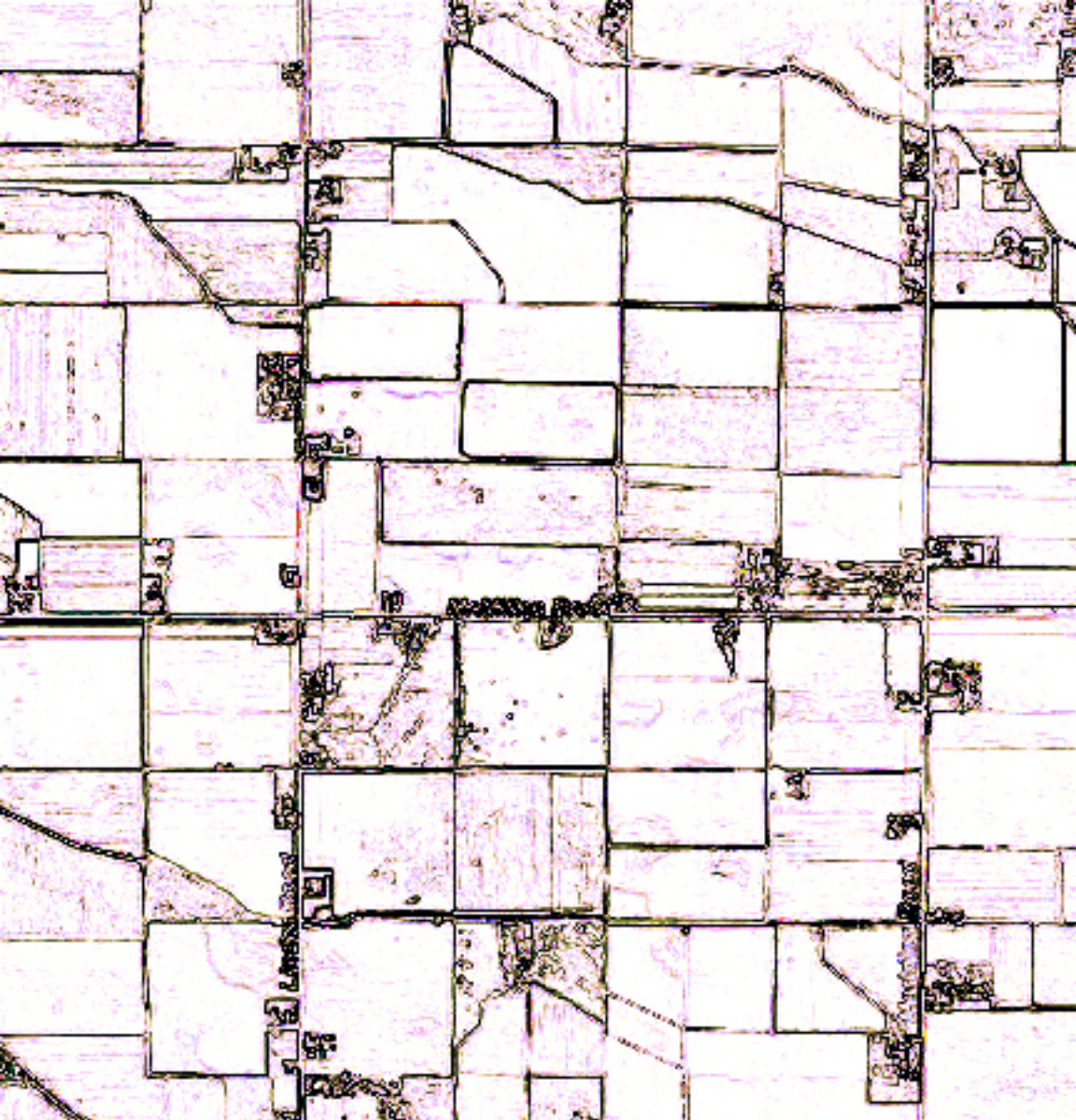
**Bannock Transportation Planning Organization** consists of the cities of Pocatello and Chubbuck and the urbanized area of Bannock County. <http://www.bannockplanning.org/>.

**Bonneville Metropolitan Planning Organization** consists of the cities of Idaho Falls, Ammon and Iona and the urbanized area of Bonneville County. <http://192.251.183.3/main/index2.asp?PageId=267>.



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# Notes



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