Infill and Redevelopment Tools for Comprehensive Planning and Zoning in Idaho

Introduction

Local governments across Idaho are increasingly looking for strategies to create communities that attract jobs, foster economic development, and are attractive places for people to live, work, and play. They are also searching for more cost-effective ways to install or maintain infrastructure, protect the environment, and manage mobility. Many are discovering that their adopted land development plans, codes and ordinances can get in the way of achieving these other goals.

Idaho Code §67-6508 requires that each city and county adopt a comprehensive plan. And statutes §67-6511 and §67-6513 require Idaho cities and counties to adopt zoning and subdivision ordinances.

Development follows the path of least resistance, so the development that is the most desirable should be the easiest to do. Projects that are consistent with the community's vision should have a simple and clear path to approval. Design and construction standards, review and approval processes should be clear for all types of projects because uncertainty creates misunderstanding, aggravates disagreements, costs the public and developers money and ultimately serves no one in the community. Communities should work to reduce barriers for developments that are consistent with the community's values and they should work to increase the transparency of the application approval process.

This compilation of zoning and comprehensive plan language is designed to help communities reach their goals. It is compiled in modules and the model comprehensive plan goals and objectives and zoning modules are intended to allow communities across Idaho to implement smart growth principles using the elements that make most sense in their locale.

Smart Growth Basics

Smart Growth is a set of principles that guides development into more compact, interconnected, mixed use patterns. This pattern produces more vibrant communities, places where people can walk and bike more easily and are healthier and it has proven to be more sustainable. Smart growth development has been shown to reduce the number of miles that people travel by vehicle every day. It can save money for the cities where it is built by being more efficient to serve and it has also proven to use less energy overall than more sprawling communities.

You can maximize your community's investments in public infrastructure (schools, roads, water, and sewer) and save tax money by directing development towards established places where infrastructure and services are already in place. By adopting these patterns, you reduce the amount of land consumed and leave more for future generations. This also minimizes the amount of new infrastructure needed – both to build and operate - to support your community. That translates into lower municipal costs, keeping tax rates down.

Smart Growth development is compact. It is not exclusively high-rise or even uniform high density; it does have higher average densities from a mix of housing types and uses. It features a mix of land uses, strong vibrant population and employment centers, interconnected streets, and design of both structures and public space at a comfortable human scale. Mixing land uses is critical to creating smart growth neighborhoods. Building stores, offices and residences to be close to (or in the same building with) each other in appropriate locations allows people to work, shop and enjoy recreation close to where they live. It makes driving trips shorter and transit, walking and biking more convenient.

Not everyone has the same housing wants or needs. Some singles prefer to rent small apartments, young couples need starter homes, families need room to grow, some empty nesters look to downsize close to services and elders may need a caring community. A communities residents should be able to live close to their families and friends through life-stages and changing needs. Neighborhoods can offer a range of housing options: single-family houses of various sizes, duplexes, and garden cottages, and condominiums, affordable homes for low or fixed-income families, “granny flats” and accommodations for dependent elders. Communities can create opportunities for this mix of housing with small changes to their policies and development regulations.

Walkable neighborhoods offer citizens of all ages and abilities the opportunity to actively engage their neighborhood by visiting the corner store, a park, the transit stop or school. They offer safe sidewalks where children can walk or bike to school or the local park without dodging high-speed traffic, and are healthier for seniors who can get daily exercise walking to friends' homes or a nearby restaurant. These walkable neighborhoods reduce transportation costs by offering choices to take some trips without using cars. In short – compact, walkable neighborhoods encourage healthier lifestyles (more walking!), improve air and water quality and save costs and energy by reducing the need to drive long distances or for every trip.

Everyone who lives in your community has a greater sense of belonging (and "*being home*") when you create distinctive places that celebrate natural settings and reflect the character and values of the people who live there. Contribute to a unique sense of place by intentionally providing welcoming comfortable public spaces, preserving vistas and defining well-designed focal points (such as an iconic building at the end of a boulevard) with appropriate architectural styles and human scaled spaces.

You can create these places, in part, by facilitating quality infill development that strengthens and revitalizes your neighborhoods through the redevelopment of vacant, underutilized or disinvested properties, the rehabilitation of contaminated (brownfield) sites, and the adaptive reuse of older structures. By reducing demand for outward growth this also helps to preserve agriculture as a valuable economic sector, and to preserve land for future generations.

Infill and redevelopment tools: The modules below are designed to encourage more efficient land use. They can be used by themselves or together. They are designed to be flexible so that you can adapt and adopt them in the way that best fits your community. The Comprehensive Plan modules are examples of how to address smart growth and infill in your comprehensive plan. The code modules contain model code language to implement mixed use and connectivity.

Comprehensive Plans

CP - 1. **Envision compact communities** – Adopt goals and objectives that support growth in a compact area.

CP - 2. **Set Goals and objectives for Priority Infill Areas or Activity Centers**. **Designate areas for Priority Infill Areas or Activity Centers** – The land use map that is required in Idaho Comprehensive plans allows the identification of places where you prefer to see new mixed use activity centers; neighborhood special uses areas or more intense housing. This creates certainty for everyone and encourages development within the existing community.

CP - 3. **Develop goals and objectives for a street system that serves all users well.** Often called ‘Complete Streets’ these include strategies for pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, drivers, and freight haulers. In addition it creates appropriates scale and size

of transportation facilities within communities, these can often serve economic development better.

Zoning Codes

Z - 1. **Mixed Uses Activity Centers –** Research on travel behavior shows that the number of destinations per square mile is the second biggest indicator of whether people walk or bike more often with a higher number of pedestrians and bicyclists where there are more nearby destinations. It makes sense – more people will walk and bike if there is something to walk and bike to. Those destinations can be closer to residences when they are located in mixed use areas and not sequestered in a separate area. Remove obstacles to mixing uses with zoning that allows mixed-use development by right (i.e., without the need for a rezoning or special discretionary approval process such as Planned Unit Development) in the locations you have prioritized (see CP-2) will encourage more mix of uses. This allows you to intensify development where you can serve it more efficiently and where the community has agreed it makes sense. Mixed Use Activity Centers have two categories; Community Activity Centers are designed to serve larger community areas while Neighborhood Activity Centers serve a small neighborhood market.

a. **Get the dimensions right** – The module defines how to use urban dimensions such as setbacks, heights, and building mass in mixed use places such as activity centers so that it fosters walkability and placemaking.

b. **Get the uses right** – The mix of uses needed for success may be different at different activity centers. The module is designed to be flexible and let you respond to local conditions in your community as to which uses make sense. The existing neighborhood character and market should drive the choice on the mix of uses, and the module provides for that through allowing flexibility in uses and coupling it with good standards.

c. **Get parking requirements right** – When more people arrive on foot or by bike parking needs can be less, when confronted by a sea of parking people respond by not walking or biking, and when there is no convenient bike parking it discourages biking. Get the requirements right by reducing parking minimums and setting maximums, allowing shared parking, counting on-street spaces, and requiring bike parking.

Z - 2. **Neighborhood Marketplace** – Neighborhood Marketplace Districts are designed to make the best use of transitional areas where there are skipped over or disinvested parcels by introducing the possibility of developing complimentary uses by right (i.e., without the need for a rezoning or special discretionary approval process such as Planned Unit Development) in locations where the community has agreed it makes sense. Allowing neighborhood serving commercial uses integrated into neighborhoods at appropriate locations and at the same scale as the existing residential uses makes more efficient use of existing infrastructure capacity and also improves walking and biking accessibility to these services by nearby residents.

Z - 3. **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU)** – Allowing ADUs in all single family residential zones can increase the availability of affordable rental housing and make more efficient use of existing housing stock and infrastructure. By establishing standards for these units the ordinance can ensure neighborhood stability.

Z - 4. **Connectivity measurements** – Get the street network right, a fine grained connected street network encourages more walking and biking. Research on travel behavior shows that the number of intersections per square mile is the biggest indicator of whether people walk or bike more often with a higher number of pedestrians and bicyclists where there are more intersections. It makes sense – a highly connected system offers more routes choice and shortens distances for walkers and bikes. As an added benefit, such systems have been shown to be safer for all users, including drivers.