

Smart growth around Massachusetts

Smart growth isn't a policy proposal – it's already happening. Cities and towns across the commonwealth are changing their zoning, revitalizing downtowns and town centers and smoothing the way for the construction of homes in the places that make the most sense – concentrated in centers, on under-utilized land and near transit. This roster provides a glimpse of efforts underway from the Berkshires to Cape Cod:

Abington-Rockland-Weymouth

The national development company LNR Property Corp. is set to build 2,855 townhouses, condominiums and apartments, all on lots less than 5,000 square feet, and 2 million square feet of commercial and retail space to create a new urban village on the 1,400-acre South Weymouth Naval Air Station. The redevelopment of the closed air base with concentrated, mixed-use, transit-oriented development is a showcase project for the US Environmental Protection Agency, the largest New Urbanist-style project in New England, and one of the premiere smart growth initiatives in the country, comparable to the redevelopment of the closed Stapleton airport in Denver, which is similarly being filled in with homes and stores and offices. The new development will have the look of a traditional New England village, thanks to the San Francisco design firm SMWM, along with Victor Kohl and Dover Associates. The project includes at least 500 homes that will be clustered alongside the Old Colony line commuter rail stop (South Weymouth, Trotter Road), plus a series of playing fields and an environmentally friendly golf course.

Amesbury

The Lower Millyard area is the focus of a sweeping redevelopment plan that includes the relocation of a public works facility to a cleaned-up Brownfields site, the funding for which is sought through the transportation bond bill. The Lower Millyard redevelopment plan includes a new transportation center for bus service, a senior center, residential and commercial development, a new park with historic museums, and expansion of the Powow Riverwalk into the downtown. The town is working on its parking needs and policy, after changing downtown parking requirements last November from 2 parking spaces per unit to 1.5.

Attleboro

A city of 42,000 on the Massachusetts-Rhode Island border, Attleboro is committed to revitalizing and renewing its downtown, host to a commuter rail station, a hospital, a branch of Bristol Community College and an impressive stock of older manufacturing buildings. The effort began in 2003, including plans for an inter-modal transportation center and streetscape improvements, and realizing the potential for up to 1,000 new homes in vacant or underutilized downtown buildings. The Office for Commonwealth Development worked with the mayor, city council, and redevelopment authority to design a District Improvement Financing (DIF) proposal to secure funding for improvements. The city used both a Priority Development Fund grant and a Smart Growth grant as it developed a master plan for downtown. Next steps include moving a public works facility to free up land for housing and mixed-use development near the train station and along the Ten Mile River, a riverfront brimming with potential. Development adjacent to the train station is set to include parking, a regional bus service

facility, 100 homes and 15,000 square feet of retail space. Like many smaller cities, Attleboro is finding that looking forward often means looking inward, to a downtown revival.

Barnstable

The revitalization of downtown Hyannis has drawn much attention, as Barnstable rezoned the area to promote multiple uses along and around Main Street, and designed enhancements to wastewater, roadway and sidewalk infrastructure to support the reinvention of this thriving town center. Barnstable is also committed to linking the downtown with the waterfront and harbor by enhancing pedestrian access and implementing a plan to move waterfront parking to better locations, and better using the land set aside for surface parking. Season artist work stations along the inner harbor enhance the cultural life of the area. The Office for Commonwealth Development is working with Barnstable and the Cape Cod Commission to identify solutions to the traffic problems that have tended to isolate Hyannis. Roadway improvements are underway as are additional studies to identify the most effective realignments.

Boston

The city continues to thrive in the neighborhoods all around downtown, and in the recapture of vacant and under-used parcels and industrial land, beginning with the South Boston Waterfront, where the Silver Line now runs from South Station to Courthouse station, World Trade Center station, Silver Line Way and on to Logan Airport. Fan Pier, the McCourt property, and some 30 acres controlled by Massport are set to join office and condominium development by Fidelity and Joseph Fallon and the new convention center on Summer Street. At the north end of the Big Dig, meanwhile, nearly 400 homes and 50,000 square feet of retail is planned at Bulfinch Triangle near the TD Banknorth Garden. In Jamaica Plain, 430 homes and 170,000 square feet of recreational, cultural, institutional, retail and office space is envisioned at the Jackson Square transit-oriented development project on the Orange Line. Other notable TOD projects include Bartlett Yard near Dudley Square in Roxbury, and up to 85 homes and 35,000 square feet of retail and community space at the Mattapan station serving the Red Line trolley spur. The establishment of new stations along the Fairmont Line in Dorchester also presents opportunities for transit-oriented development and revitalization along that corridor.

Brockton

The City of Champions is host to a minor league baseball team, the Brockton Rox, in a stadium that is a popular destination outside of downtown. In the downtown area, a new courthouse, state-supported park, and an improved inter-modal center have added vitality. In a sign of the improved climate for investing, one of the large mills on the east side of the commuter station has been converted to condominiums. The city is currently studying parking policy for additional redevelopment of mill buildings for housing within walking distance of downtown and the commuter rail station. The new mayor continues to direct planning work with the city planning department and Brockton 21st Century, a civic and economic development organization, including a Priority Development Fund grant to investigate the establishment of a Chapter 40R smart growth district at the train station.

Cambridge

Cambridge is home to a number of smart growth practices, ranging from an inclusionary zoning policy to innovative street design and bicycle lanes, but the major urban “infill” mixed-use development on the way for the city, on the heels of redevelopment around Kendall and Central squares, is Spaulding & Slye’s North Point. The city led a rezoning effort that emphasized the need for housing, open space and human-scaled streetscapes. The plan is for 2,700 homes, 10 acres of new parks that will double as a stormwater management area, 2.2 million square feet of laboratory and office space, and 150,000 square feet of retail. The developer, building on 45 acres of mostly unused rail yards between McGrath-O’Brien Highway and I-93 just north of the Charles River, plans pedestrian connections to the riverfront and the nearby Bunker Hill Community College Orange Line station; a new Lechmere station that will set the stage for the Green Line extension through Somerville; and bike repair and storage facilities for the Minuteman Path, a multi-use path that will come in through the Alewife area and Somerville to the banks of the Charles River and Boston.

Carver

This Southeastern Massachusetts town used a smart growth technical assistance grant to complete a comprehensive zoning update, including establishing a by-right cluster subdivision provision, an update of the section on conservation subdivision and the townhouse bylaw, a revision of setback requirements and an expansion of the village district. The town also adopted a new bylaw on accessory apartments, a key ingredient in producing affordable housing.

Easthampton

Honored with a Governor’s Smart Growth Award, Easthampton is another older mill community using a strategic planning effort to revitalize its center. The city targeted a revitalization of the downtown, an adjacent mill district and protection of the community’s farming heritage as planning priorities. Topping the list of actions is a rezoning that legalized a mix of uses in the mills, obtaining state funds to design and install streetscape improvements, and an initiative to transform the Lower Mill Pond in downtown as a new park. Other efforts included the construction of the new Manhan Rail Trail that traverses the city and the downtown, and encouraging artists to move to the city with live/work loft spaces permitted in the mill buildings. In addition, the city has aggressively sought to protect its farming areas outside of the downtown, most recently by adopting a Transfer of Development Rights bylaw – a technique spelled out in the Smart Growth Toolkit.

Haverhill

This Merrimac River valley city once known for its shoe manufacturing is considering establishment of a Chapter 40R smart growth district for its downtown, where the national developer Forest City is set to rehabilitate an old mill building, steps from the commuter rail station. The city is coming up with a creative parking strategy to balance commuters, residents and visitors to the cozy Main Street-style retail and restaurants in the downtown.

Lynn

The downtown district in Lynn is already a lively mix of shops and restaurants, and residential development adjacent to the commuter rail station has been featured in news stories as an illustration of the desire for more affordable homes and shorter commutes. In 2003, Lynn eliminated parking requirements for existing structures in their central business district, through a zoning overlay amendment. City officials say that move has helped smooth the way for 200 new homes in the last two years, and the 70 homes set to become available in 2006. The lifting of rigid parking requirements can make it much easier to re-use, rehabilitate and preserve older buildings. Lynn is also working on ways to improve its waterfront.

Medford

A new urban neighborhood is taking shape on the banks of the Mystic River at Medford's Wellington Circle Orange Line station: National Development's Station Landing, which includes 292 apartments over 25 retail stores, plus 165,000 square feet of office space, and an additional 12-story building with 127 condominiums and a three-story fitness center. In addition to facilitating this classic example of transit-oriented development, Medford hired Sasaki & Associates to write a master plan for revitalizing Medford Square (<http://www.medfordsquarevision.com/pages/masterplan.html>), and has instituted several citywide energy efficiency measures as well (<http://www.medford.org/fGovernment.htm>).

Newburyport

The focus here has been the downtown and about 20 acres of MBTA-owned land near the commuter rail station. In cooperation with the town of Newbury, Newburyport secured a Priority Development Fund planning assistance grant to assess a transfer of development rights program, to steer development plans for environmentally sensitive open space areas in both communities to this pedestrian-oriented area around the station. Total residential development could include up to 600 homes, steps from the train station

Newton

The Garden City has convened a citizen-based task force to foster the redevelopment and enhancement of historic Newton Centre – a classic and time-honored example of transit-oriented development (Newton Centre, Green Line). The Newton Centre Renaissance Task Force has been charge by Mayor David Cohen to identify the potential for redevelopment and improvement of Newton Centre and to develop appropriate zoning improvement and financing alternatives. The workings of the Task Force can be viewed at the following link: <http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/newtoncentretaskforce/>. Newton is also home to a recently completed latest transit-oriented development project, ArborPoint at Woodland Station, also on the Green Line.

Northampton

The highest scoring community in the Commonwealth Capital program, Northampton passed the Community Preservation Act last November, and has for years worked to change its zoning to create a consistent, traditional, vibrant downtown, with a mix of commercial, residential, entertainment, civic space and activities relating to the arts. The

western Massachusetts city has a number of initiatives to increase the production of more affordable homes, acquire open space, and expand a network of bike paths. In addition, Northampton is in the process of redeveloping its former state hospital site into a mixed-use village center.

Revere

Mayor Thomas Ambrosino is leading an effort with the Office for Commonwealth Development, MBTA and the Department of Conservation and Recreation to transform a series of parking lots adjacent to the Wonderland Blue Line station into 1 million square feet of mixed-use development, steps from Revere Beach. Developers are expected to respond to a request for proposals this spring, with the goal of a groundbreaking by 2007. The new homes and a possible hotel would be 10 minutes to Logan Airport and 15 minutes to downtown Boston.

Somerville

Somerville is host to a collection of smart growth initiatives that are unlike any other in the commonwealth. At Assembly Square, Maryland-based Federal Realty is set to redevelop old railroad yards and vacant lots adjacent to the shopping center and on the banks of the Mystic River, with a possible future Orange Line station a centerpiece for compact, mixed-use development, including homes, retail and office space. Just the west, the proposed Green Line extension from Lechmere to Medford Hills, including a spur to Union Square, is an unfolding case study in transit-oriented development. The city has spent long hours planning for development to be clustered around future Green Line stations up and down the corridor, in some locations replacing abandoned factories and vacant lots. The Brickbottom area, an industrial district just north of Lechmere that is home to some artists lofts today, is getting particular focus as the site of millions of square feet of new development. A waste transfer facility is being moved to pave the way for redevelopment. The Boston Society of Architects initiated a design competition to help circulate ideas on what this new urban neighborhood might look like.

Westwood

Town officials are working with Cabot, Cabot & Forbes and New England Development in the planned transformation of the 135-acre University Avenue office and industrial park, at the Route 128 commuter rail and Amtrak station, into a mixed-use development with 1,000 planned homes, 1.2 million square feet of retail, 2 million square feet of office, laboratory and R & D space, and 400 hotel rooms. Westwood changed the zoning for the area and integrated affordable housing and water-supply protections into the planning effort. A key tie-in is the train station – including a 14-minute trip to Back bay station on commuter rail, and Amtrak service that creates the possibility of one-hour-plus commutes from as far away as New Haven, Conn. The retail area is based on a walkable, urban-village design similar to Mashpee Commons on Cape Cod or City Place in West Palm Beach, Fla

Worcester

The next stage of revitalization for Worcester's downtown, after the remodeling of historic Union Station, is underway with two major projects: CitySquare by Berkeley

Investments, calling for 900 homes, 407,000 square feet of retail and nearly 1 million square feet of medical and office space, on 20 acres adjacent to the station. The centerpiece is a District Improvement Financing plan that will allow for the replacement of a single-use shopping mall and dramatic public improvements to the area. The other major redevelopment project in Worcester is the 55-acre Gateway Park, including 745,000 square feet of mixed-use space and residential development on a cleaned-up Brownfields site