Starting in 2001, the Harrison County Council of Governments and Harrison County Board of Supervisors began to collaborate to create a regional sustainable development plan. The purpose of this planning process is to formulate growth policies to guide future development and balance the quality of the human and physical environment of the region. As a result of this process, the *Smart Growth Resource Guide for Harrison County* assists government officials, planners, developers, and citizens in thinking about how Smart Growth principles can be applied to achieve land use goals throughout the county. The intention of this Resource Guide is twofold. First, the Resource Guide provides a review of a community opinion survey, existing planning documents, and policies in both municipalities and unincorporated areas of the county. Next, given the community plans and citizen desires, the Resource Guide includes Smart Growth policy tools that can be used to direct growth, preserve community character, and meet community goals. This summary provides an overview of the Resource Guide. To obtain a copy of the complete guide call the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District at (228) 868-2311.

**Principles of Smart Growth**

Smart Growth represents a philosophy, method, and goal for managing community growth. The American Planning Association defines Smart Growth as a collection of planning, regulatory, and development practices that use land resources more efficiently through compact building forms and infill development. Smart Growth goals include reducing the outward spread of urbanization and planning for more attractive, livable, and economically strong communities while protecting natural resources. Smart Growth offers methods to better manage new development, especially as it relates to new single-family housing development.

Local governments understand that it is expensive to service housing that is spread out. Research has shown that sprawling housing leads to more costly infrastructure and public services. For example, it is more expensive to run sewer lines to service single-family houses that have 200 feet of frontage than to the same number of houses with 50 feet of frontage. Local governments also understand that sprawl can have a negative impact on the environment and the quality of life of citizens.
Smart Growth Principles

Smart Growth includes but is not limited to the following principles:

- Creating walkable communities that are desirable places to live, work, and play
- Providing quality housing for a variety of income levels so that young, old, single persons, and families can find places to live
- Creating distinctive communities with a strong sense of place that respond to community visions for design and use
- Preserving open spaces and critical environmental areas by placing limits on outward expansion of urban growth
- Integrating a mix of land uses that locate housing, shopping, offices, and other amenities near each other
- Providing alternative transportation choices to reduce dependence on private cars by creating transit-oriented and walkable communities
- Constructing compact development that fills in vacant and/or underutilized land
- Encouraging regional coordination of land use policies to control sprawl, protect natural lands, and offer housing opportunities for all

For example, sprawling communities with houses separate from businesses require citizens to depend on their cars for every errand, which can lead to an increase in traffic congestion, the need for more roads, increased energy consumption, and air pollution. Communities are concerned about these and other issues related to sprawl, and they are looking for Smart Growth policies to help address such concerns.

What do Smart Growth principles mean for local government officials and how can they apply these tools? One method to achieve Smart Growth is to adopt land use controls that will encourage development that meets the Smart Growth principles. There are a variety of techniques that complement traditional zoning and subdivision regulation approaches to land use. These techniques more effectively address environmental, social, and fiscal concerns related to community growth.

In order to achieve Smart Growth, local governments need to adopt Smart Growth techniques that are most appropriate to their community. Over time, development patterns will respond to these policy changes. The result will be a higher quality of life for citizens, a lower cost of services for the local government, and greater protection of the natural environment.

For more information about Smart Growth principles and policies visit these web sites:

American Planning Association: www.planning.org

Congress for the New Urbanism: www.cnu.org

Smart Growth America: www.smartgrowthamerica.com

Smart Growth Network: www.smartgrowth.org
Harrison County Planning and Development Survey

Residents in Harrison County are charged with the enormous responsibility of rebuilding their communities in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. In an effort to gauge public opinion about planning, development, and Smart Growth policies in Harrison County, a newspaper survey was published in the *Sun Herald* newspaper for two days in October 2006. The survey asked citizens for information regarding their involvement in the planning process before and after the storm, insight on various land use policies, and, perhaps most importantly, the planning issues that respondents would like to see the County set as priorities. The 359 responses returned as of November 2006 offer insight into the opinions and hopes of Harrison County residents as they continue to plan for growth and development.

One of the first questions addressed in the survey asked residents in Harrison County to compare the perceived level of importance of planning in their communities before and after Hurricane Katrina. Most respondents, 57.7 percent, felt that their community was concerned about planning before the storm. Since the storm, 83.9 percent of respondents indicated that planning is of high importance in their community. This change is good news for respondents who believed that growth and development has generally been poorly planned and located in inappropriate places (46.7 percent).

The results from this first series of questions mirror the change in the public’s involvement in planning before and after the storm. Before the storm, less than a third of respondents said that they occasionally attended planning meetings for their community (30.9 percent), with far fewer indicating that they attended the meetings frequently (8.2 percent). From a planning perspective, one reassuring outcome from the hurricane is that public awareness and involvement in the planning process have increased. Since the storm, 45.6 percent of respondents either frequently or occasionally attend planning meetings (15.1 and 29.5 percent, respectively). The results of the survey imply that people want to have a voice in the growth and development of their communities. To maintain both the interest and the increased level of participation, planning and public officials will need to continue to actively engage residents in Harrison County.

Respondents have strong opinions about the location of growth and development, and they want to change the trends that have been occurring in the County. In general, respondents want growth to occur in cities and/or where existing infrastructure is already in place. This indicates that people want to maximize land use and preserve the rural character that exists in undeveloped portions of Harrison County.

Residents were asked their opinions on Smart Growth policies. They were asked to indicate their level of agreement on the adoption of such policies in Harrison County, ranking their answers from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.
The results show that respondents are interested in a majority of the policies listed, some more than others. Of the planning policies most highly agreed upon, respondents felt that both existing commercial development along main streets and existing neighborhoods should be revitalized. Other policies that had high support included allowing for mixed land uses (residential, retail, commercial, and industrial development) near each other and promoting mixed uses within specific development projects.

Respondents also supported forming smaller lots for homes in order to create parks and provide communities with open space. Respondents supported reducing people’s dependence on the automobile by creating walkable communities. They also emphasized the importance of protecting natural areas. In fact, there was high support for preserving wetlands that exist in the county that are facing, or could potentially face, development pressures, as well as support for limiting the use of certain properties in order to preserve designated land. Both of these potentially reflect respondents’ desires to see Harrison County retain its rural character.

Where respondents seemingly differed in opinion were on questions concerning compact development on vacant or underutilized land. While 50.9 percent of the respondents indicated that they were in favor of higher residential densities, 42.2 percent were either indifferent or did not support such densities that would ensure affordable housing or public open space. Although there was some disagreement, participants appeared to support a majority of the planning policies listed in the survey. Many of the policies listed in the survey overlap with the policy recommendations offered in this Smart Growth Resource Guide. Therefore, it appears that survey respondents would support Smart Growth policies.

The Harrison County Planning and Development Survey was a helpful tool in gauging public sentiment on a variety of different issues. The survey is particularly interesting because it shows how the perception of planning has changed in the minds of many respondents in Harrison County since Hurricane Katrina. Not only are people more interested in the planning process, they want to learn more and share their knowledge with other communities in order to improve their communities and region. For more detailed information about these survey results please contact the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District at (228) 868-2311.

Community Plan Summary

Smart Growth is designed to improve the overall quality of life in communities. Such policies and initiatives have been successful because they account for the economic, community, and environmental impacts that development can have on particular places. The Mississippi Renewal Forum, hosted by the Governor’s Commission for Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal, held in October 2005, produced planning and design documents for each city in Harrison County. Harrison County extended the work of the Renewal Forum to include planning for the unincorporated communities in the county. To date, plans have been developed for Biloxi, D’Iberville, Gulfport, Long Beach, Pass Christian, and four unincorporated communities (DeLisle, Henderson Point-Pass Christian Isles, Pineville, and Saucier), all of which incorporate Smart Growth principles. Examples from Harrison County communities are discussed below.

Residents in Harrison County have been proactive in rebuilding their communities after Hurricane Katrina, resulting in significant attention to developing community plans. The City of Biloxi has prioritized the provision of affordable housing in their community. In neighboring D’Iberville, focus is being placed on creating a sense of community by promoting mixed-use and cluster development in the city. The City of Gulfport is focused on redeveloping its harbor, including
the Mississippi State Port at Gulfport. Just to the east in the City of Long Beach, the community plan recommends that a new park and marina be built adjacent to US Highway 90, in addition to a mixed-use development project complete with restaurants, retail, and residential units. Pass Christian hopes to rebuild its neighborhoods according to principles of New Urbanism. Although the cities in Harrison County were the first to develop plans, unincorporated communities are developing plans of their own.

In DeLisle, residents want to encourage retail development in certain locations while maintaining the natural areas in others. Henderson Point-Pass Christian Isles residents want to use planning policies to maintain their scenic views over the Bay of Saint Louis as they rebuild. Meanwhile, the community plan in Pineville reflects the community’s desire to maintain its rural character. Finally, Saucier residents are interested in creating a mixed-use town center and encouraging economic development while preserving their rural character. While their goals may differ, communities are embracing Smart Growth strategies.

While each plan represents individual goals of communities, they all rely heavily on Smart Growth principles. To view the plans developed by cities and unincorporated communities in Harrison County, visit the following websites:

Harrison County Zoning Administration (http://co.harrison.ms.us/departments/zoning/)
Governor’s Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal, Mississippi Renewal Forum (http://www.mississippirenewal.com/info/plansReports.html)

The use of Smart Growth policies can preserve what is valued by the community, such as beaches, wetlands, or historic structures.
Residents and local officials in Harrison County have made it clear in their community plans that well planned development is desired. To assist these communities in achieving their goals, the following Smart Growth policies could allow residents and policy makers to guide growth and development:

1. Adequate Public Facilities Ordinances allow local governments to require adequate public facilities and services (e.g., water and sewer, roads, schools, fire, and police) before development can occur.
2. Cluster Development permits houses on smaller lots and retains the saved space for shared open space and community purposes.
3. Conservation Easements protect designated land areas by limiting the use of property in order to protect the environment in perpetuity.
4. Conservation Subdivisions are a type of residential development, predominantly in rural areas, where a considerable amount of land is preserved as natural space.
5. Density Bonuses allow for increased residential densities in exchange for developers providing either units allocated for affordable housing purposes or other public amenities such as parks.
6. Design Review ordinances give communities the opportunity to review and comment on new development projects to ensure that they meet established community standards.
7. Fiscal Impact Analysis is a tool used by local governments to calculate the net fiscal impact of a development by considering the costs associated with servicing a new development and the revenues it is expected to generate.
8. Historic District Ordinances require that development and restoration projects be subject to additional regulations and a design review process in order to preserve a community's historical and/or cultural heritage.
9. Infill Development uses vacant or underdeveloped land in existing communities for redevelopment, thereby minimizing the need for construction in currently undeveloped areas.
10. Mixed-Use Development purposefully combines residential, commercial, and public uses together in one development, creating a more walkable community.
11. Overlay Zones typically apply an additional layer of regulation to a zoned district to impose specific building requirements that can achieve goals such as historic preservation and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes.
12. Transfer of Development Rights programs enable property owners to sell the development potential of a property to encourage development in areas where growth is desired, while protecting other areas for open space, historic landmarks, and environmentally sensitive areas.
13. Zero Lot Line Ordinances allow residential units to be built adjacent to a property line and with minimum setbacks from the sidewalk in order to cluster development and maximize space.

There are a number of communities in Mississippi that have adopted and benefited from Smart Growth policies such as conservation subdivision, cluster development and infill development. Examples of these policies are discussed further below.
Wildwood is a 1,200-acre residential community currently under construction in Carriere in Pearl River County, Mississippi. The community is being developed as a conservation subdivision with 900 lots, with the objective of preserving the site’s natural amenities while capitalizing on its economic potential. The development preserves 330 acres, which creates smaller lots for homes but maintains the same overall density in traditional suburban subdivisions. There are a variety of housing styles from which residents can choose, but homes either border green space or wooded areas or they have access to the seven miles of trails or 20 acres of parks planned for the community.

The Riverwalk is a cluster development project proposed in Bay Saint Louis. Once the site of a small farm, developers plan to create a residential community with opportunities for retail and other recreational activities. As a cluster development, the success of Riverwalk is that it preserves wetlands and forests and encourages a habitat for wildlife. Of the 183 acres available for development, only 23 percent will be used, giving the rest of the land back to nature and the community.

The City of Tupelo has embraced infill development as a land use tool in order to create a vibrant city center that complements the city’s economy and strengthens its role as a regional center in Mississippi. In an effort to capitalize on the success of its downtown and expand its tax revenues, the fairgrounds next to downtown Tupelo are being redeveloped. When completed, the Fairpark District will be a live-work community, with housing, retail, and other civic services all within walking distance of one another.

For more information and recommendations on Smart Growth for Harrison County, please refer to the complete Smart Growth Resource Guide.

Measures of Success

In order to help communities in Harrison County evaluate their current situations and evolving Smart Growth policies, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends creating a “scorecard”. This method can be easily adapted to each community in Harrison County and their specific goals and policies. First the community issues and needs are identified in conjunction with public and private community leaders. Once these issues are identified, they should be summarized and expressed in a short statement. Each statement should include information about the planning-related issue, as well as several multiple choice questions relating to the statement.

Questions usually focus on local land use and zoning regulations in a particular community. Typically, answers to questions are given scores between 1 and 3. The individual answers are compiled together to create an overall score. Once the scores for each question have been aggregated, they inform government officials and community leaders of the level of attention that needs to be paid to particular issues facing their community. The EPA has compiled a list of scorecards from around the country that can be applied to most communities with some modifications. For example, Harrison County communities might ask:

**Question 1: Does your street design enable pedestrian traffic?**

- **Yes.** We have a good network of sidewalks and pedestrian/bike paths connecting much of the community, including safe and convenient crossings of major roads. (3pts)
- **Yes.** We have some sidewalks and a plan for pedestrian/bike paths to connect to specific areas of town. (2pts)
- **We have only limited sidewalks and no plan for pedestrian/bike paths.** (1pt)
**Question 2:** Do people have easy walking access to goods (such as housing, offices, and retail) and services (such as transportation, schools, and libraries)?

- Yes. Most of the neighborhoods have access to these amenities within walking distance (1/4 miles). (3pts)
- Some neighborhoods have easy access to these amenities within walking distance, but most do not. (2pts)
- No. Most of our neighborhoods require residents to drive to access these amenities. (1pt)

Once the questions are completed and returned, a score for each section is determined that tells government officials where their communities fall in their Smart Growth evaluation. If the community scores high, then the community is on the right path to achieving their Smart Growth goals. If the community scores in the moderate range, it might be in transition towards encouraging Smart Growth. Finally, a low score suggests that the specific Smart Growth policy issues need attention. For more information on Smart Growth Scorecards, see [http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/scorecards/](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/scorecards/).

**For Further Information**

The *Smart Growth Resource Guide for Harrison County* offers many policy recommendations in order to achieve the countywide goal of sustainable future growth and development. In addition, these recommendations have taken into account the land use goals of individual communities within the county. The County and its communities should work together to implement these policies and consider their impact at the county level. As a means to measure future success in accomplishing community goals, the County should utilize evaluation tools such as the EPA scorecard.

For more information about Smart Growth in Harrison County visit the Harrison County Smart Growth website at [http://www.co.harrison.ms.us/departments/zoning/smartgrowth.asp](http://www.co.harrison.ms.us/departments/zoning/smartgrowth.asp). The complete Smart Growth Resource Guide for Harrison County is available by calling (228) 868-2311.

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