



Community Choices

Infill Development

What Is Infill Development?

Infill development involves building and developing in vacant or underutilized areas in cities or suburbs. Infill typically means using land that can easily and efficiently be served by public facilities and services, thus limiting costs of extending infrastructure into newly developing areas. As an alternative to greenfield development, infill development can reduce the loss of land to new development by focusing on the development of vacant parcels within or near existing neighborhoods. Infill projects may present some design challenges, particularly to ensure that the character and scale of new development is consistent with that of the established neighborhood. Infill standards typically apply to all lots and parcels that are adjacent to developed land on two or more sides. Infill development is a key ingredient to accommodating growth and redesigning our communities to be environmentally and socially sustainable.¹

Why Infill for Our Region?

The Strategic Regional Policy Plan adopted by the OKI's Board of Trustees calls for the redevelopment of underutilized areas and infill development within existing areas for more efficient use of land resources, with consideration given to the need for parkland and green space. Throughout the process of creating the strategic plan, which included extensive participation by local officials and the public, OKI's Land Use Commission indicated a strong preference for encouraging more redevelopment and infill development, using less land to accommodate future growth, and pre-serving greenspace.

When new development occurs in areas where centers of population and employment already exist, public facilities and infrastructure are more readily available at less cost to the taxpayer, but infill development must be enabled and encouraged by local comprehensive plans.

Why Is Infill Development Important?

Infill Development can...

- ...increase tax revenues and property values.
- ...provide both affordable and market rate housing, near job centers and public transit.
- ...benefit businesses by increasing activity and demand for goods and services.
- ...contribute to unmet commercial, economic, social, housing, or civic needs in the existing community.
- ...enhance circulation and walkability of a community by replacing vacant sites with vibrant land uses.
- ...reduce growth pressure on rural areas by providing for efficient use of land and public facilities and services.
- ...improve quality of life in older communities.
- ...capitalize on existing community assets such as schools, parks, transit and other infrastructure; and creates new community assets such as child-care centers, arts districts, and shopping areas.
- ...take advantage of existing capacity rather than providing duplicative public investments in roads, water and sewer lines, schools and other infrastructure.
- ...take advantage of some existing school capacity in areas with a declining enrollment or aging population.

¹ *Model Ordinance for Infill Development* from the Atlanta Regional Commission Community Choices Team, http://www.atlantaregional.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-3F57FEE7-BDABE7FF/arc/hs.xsl/392_ENU_HTML.htm, (accessed June 13, 2006).

What are some Challenges of Infill Development?

Communities can promote infill by anticipating barriers to development, such as land availability, antiquated infrastructure possible environmental contamination, physical site constraints, higher land acquisition and construction costs, financing, and regulatory barriers such as improper parking requirements, the need for waivers or variances, inappropriate required lot dimensions and the separation of mixed uses.

Some developers may question the marketability of infill development sites. The costs associated with infill may also be prohibitive based on the site conditions. If environmental concerns exist, they may also complicate development. Financing for infill projects may be another challenge. This can depend on the scale of the project and the site selected. Infrastructure repairs may need to be addressed as well.

Community opposition may present another factor. Infill development should be based on the goals of a community and sufficient measures should be taken to ensure compatibility with existing surrounding structures or neighborhoods. Infrastructure, such as roadways and greenspace, should also be considered.

How Can Infill Development Be Implemented Effectively?

A comprehensive plan that contains goals, objectives and policies that address the appropriate location and intensity of infill development is key. Not only will this assist communities in determining where and when infill development is possible, it is also a necessary step in establishing infill development or compatibility standards within the zoning regulations that protect the health, safety and welfare of the public. Once the comprehensive plan is in place to provide guidance and serve as a basis for future actions, then the community can create standards for reviewing infill development projects. Establishing public goals and the bases for standards up front gives citizens and developers certainty in the actions of the local government.

Comprehensive plans, specific area plans, and growth management policies, communities can provide for infill and implementation strategies. Public participation is essential for an effective infill development program. Because infill takes place in or near established communities, input from area residents should be sought, preferably during the infill planning process, and before specific projects are proposed. Planners and developers should work with the community early in the process, and include their input in meaningful ways to effect creative solutions to community concerns.²

Identifying priority sites for redevelopment, providing information on sites through an abandoned land inventory, and targeting development in key infill locations are techniques that communities can use to reduce the number of problems developers encounter and encourage infill development. Updating zoning ordinances or providing a process for administrative waivers for items like height, setbacks, bulk, or parking can also help to reduce the time spent for developers. Communities may want to exempt or “grandfather” existing lots of record in order to promote infill on smaller existing lots. Design review processes and standards for infill can help ensure compatibility with existing structures. Incentives such as design assistance,

²*Managing Maryland's Growth: Models and Guidelines for Infill Development*, Maryland Department of Planning, October 2001, http://www.mdp.state.md.us/mgs/infill/InfillFinal_1.pdf, (accessed June 13, 2006)

marketing, capital improvement planning, marginal cost pricing (fee reduction), financial incentives such as cost sharing, land acquisition, tax credits, and low interest loans can also assist in making infill development more attractive to developers.

Sample Regulations

The Infill and Redevelopment Code Handbook, produced by the Transportation and Growth Management Program, Oregon Department of Transportation, and Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, Salem, Oregon, September, 1999 provide an excellent set of samples and discussion for various techniques for infill development. This document is presented as a starting point in consideration of adopting zoning provisions to encourage infill development. The appropriate local planning and legal staff should craft any new zoning language proposed to be adopted within a community to reflect local priorities and implement local goals and objectives.

The following is taken from the Atlanta Regional Commission's *Infill Development Strategies* publication, created as part of the Quality Growth Toolkit which can be found at http://www.atlantaregional.com/cps/rde/xbcr/SID-3F57FEE7-BA14EC5C/arc/INFILL_%20DEVELOPMENT_TOOL.pdf (accessed December 4, 2006).

APPENDIX 3: Tools and Techniques for Encouraging Infill Development

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR ENCOURAGING INFILL DEVELOPMENT			
Needed Actions	Possible Incentives	Target Opportunities	Cautions
Stimulating Developer Interest in Infill Development	Training programs/seminars/ publicity campaign	Outreach to builders, developers, and Realtors through professional associations and the news media	May have to go outside the region for speakers who have had success with infill development.
	Parcel files; information on prototype projects	Comprehensive; or only for special uses (multi-family; industrial)	Needs careful staff supervision
	Design competitions	For scattered small lots; for large areas offering unique opportunities	Needs volunteers to serve on review committees and needs funds for prizes.
Removing Obstacles Created by Government			
Reducing delays in project reviews	Reform of staff review procedures	Small scale projects	Must assure adequate citizen participation
	Elimination of unnecessary hearings	Projects requiring variances or special use permits	Requires cooperation of many local departments and staff members
	Creation of ombudsman or expeditor	All projects; or just those involving assisted housing or employment generation	Obstacles in state enabling legislation
Correcting excessive or inappropriate standards	Re-examination of code provisions; encouragement of performance-based requirements	All infill projects; most important for redevelopment and rehabilitation projects	May encounter resistance from various interest groups. Results will not be immediately visible.

Improving zoning balance (not enough multi-family land; overzoning for industrial uses)	Comprehensive review of zoning map and/ regulations	Designated neighborhoods as part of neighborhood planning process	May encounter resistance from neighborhood and property owners depending on the types of changes proposed. Must be based on sound market analysis.
Creating Neighborhood Support for Infill Development	Prepare neighborhood plans with explicit strategies for dealing with vacant lots.	All neighborhoods with infill potential	Neighbors must see advantages for existing housing and businesses as well as the developer if they are to be convinced; developers must be flexible and willing to listen
	Project review meetings with developer in advance of official hearings	All projects likely to generate controversy	May also need to meet neighborhood groups in advance
Addressing Market Weakness or Uncertainty	Demonstration projects involving local development corporations and neighborhood interests	Low-and moderate-income neighborhoods, especially for projects providing jobs and/or increased shopping or services	Builds confidence if successful; high risk; limited expertise in dealing with risky situations
	Loan guarantee	Projects in areas with poor image but location advantages near jobs, transit, major institutions)	Risk of unsuccessful projects requires expertise of experienced builders and banks
	Below-market financing through mortgage revenue bonds, Tax Allocation District, CDBG or Section 108 financing	Target neighborhoods and projects where special financing terms can act as a magnet to households or businesses who would otherwise locate at the urban fringe	Federal regulations limit flexibility and specify eligibility criteria; need for careful market studies.
	Greater attention to maintenance and rehabilitation	Low-and moderate-income neighborhoods	Concern over long term displacement of the poor

	Visible public commitment to upgrading public works	Target neighborhoods	Political resistance to targeting on a neighborhood basis
	Interim uses (parking, gardens, play areas)	Areas with established neighborhood organizations that will assume maintenance responsibility; areas with open space or parking needs	High maintenance burdens; resistance to future change
Addressing Site Specific Problems			
Reducing the high cost of infill land	Land price write-down	Unique opportunity to achieve public purpose	High costs if used extensively; adverse political impacts from using public funds to subsidize strictly private projects.
	Tax abatement	Definite project with committed developer	Concern regarding foregone tax revenues
	Leasing of publicly owned land	Varies; generally used for housing developments priced for low/moderate-income occupancy	Careful lease structuring needed to protect public interest
	Density bonuses; permitting variances from side-yards or setbacks to allow greater coverage	Projects with exceptional merit, e.g. mixed-use projects; projects incorporating assisted housing; transit-supportive infill development	Need to assure design compatibility with sounding areas; possible opposition of neighbors.
	Forgiveness of delinquent back taxes	Definite projects with committed developers	Legal obstacles in some states.
	Downzoning	Areas where permitted densities do not match local housing market preferences	Objections of landowners; potential legal challenges

	Fee Waivers	All infill projects	Fees are not a high proportion of project costs; effects are more psychological than financial
	Impact Fee Waivers	Projects with extraordinary employment benefits or affordable housing	Subject to fee replacement from other funds.
Increasing land availability	Land assembly	Definite projects with committed developers	Expensive; legal limitations on use of eminent domain powers
	Land banking	Areas with extensive scattered parcels; high incidence of tax delinquency	Expensive; may require enabling legislation; land may not be marketable in the short run; especially in weak markets
Correcting infrastructure	Public funding of off-site capital improvements (minor street and utility extension or upgrading)	Small-scale infill projects, especially for affordable housing or job-creation in distressed areas	Reluctance of elected officials to target limited capital dollars to new development; need for flexibility in CIP.
	Tax allocation district	Larger projects, especially mixed use	State approval and regulatory limitations
	Community Improvement District	Commercial and industrial areas covering both infill and rehabilitation	Majority of commercial property owners must be willing to participate
	Greater flexibility and creativity in plan review	All infill projects	Resistance from city public works/ engineering staff to deviate from standards