

# **Growth and Development**

## **Smart Growth Gap Analysis**

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## **Gap Analysis: Introduction to Smart Growth**

Organizations as disparate as the National Association of Realtors (NAR), the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) have been sounding a call in support of a concept called smart growth. Major newspapers and magazines have written dozens of articles about it. Non-profits, governmental organizations and foundations have been pressing for it. What's it all about?

The way we have used land has helped shape our society. But, until recently, this fact has garnered little attention in the popular press or our national consciousness. That is beginning to change. More people are becoming interested as they confront the problems created by past land use decisions, such as dwindling open space, traffic congestion, air and water pollution, the loss of actively producing farms, and inner city decline. Moreover, we are gaining a more sophisticated understanding of how land use decisions affect the quality of our lives: time with family, community participation, educational opportunities, and neighborhood diversity.

Our current pattern of development tends to consume a disproportionate amount of land relative to the population growth it accommodates. The increasing distance between employment centers and homes leads to longer commutes while stratifying the population. Congestion becomes unmanageable, communities lose their identities and quality of life suffers as people spend more and more of their free time in cars. The demand for services in cities rises while their ability to fund those services decreases-fueling the cycle of urban decline and suburban sprawl.

While land use decisions are not the sole cause of poverty, obesity, urban decay, and other long-standing social problems, they are clearly linked. As a result, some believe a strategic shift in the way we use land could ameliorate, if not solve, many of these current problems. That approach is called "smart growth."

### **What is Smart Growth?**

There is no single definition of smart growth: its meaning depends on context, speaker and timeframe. The common thread among different perspectives of smart growth is development that revitalizes central cities and older suburbs, supports and enhances public transit and preserves open spaces and agricultural lands. Smart growth is not zero growth; rather it creates communities that are more livable by developing efficiently within the already built environment.

**Smart Growth is many things to many people:**

- To a parent smart growth might mean living in a community with sidewalks, narrow tree-lined streets and a good school within walking distance of home.
- A commuter who can catch a nearby train or bus directly to work might feel her community has grown smarter.
- Smart growth to a CEO might mean the ability to attract employees because housing is available and affordable.
- To someone living in a rundown section of an inner city, smart growth might mean investments and the creation of affordable housing in his community.
- Being able to use and enjoy undeveloped land close to where we live might be a sign of smart growth to the suburban family.

From a regional perspective, the objective of a smart growth campaign would be to create a fiscal, regulatory and political environment that encourages new development that is compact, sustainable and less automobile dependent than current growth patterns, while discouraging suburban sprawl. Meaningful public involvement - by local residents, businesses, and elected officials - is key to the success of any smart growth efforts.

Encouraging new housing and other growth to be built near existing infrastructure requires less public investment in new roads, utilities and streetscape amenities. Families that live within easy walking distance of shops, schools, parks and public transit, drive and pollute less. Sidewalks in such neighborhoods provide informal opportunities for social interaction and are safer and more inviting than in those new suburbs where the transportation infrastructure is designed solely for the car. Investment in the central core district can reduce crime, provide needed affordable housing and create vibrant downtown areas. All of these attributes could reduce traffic congestion on our coastal region's roadways and highways.

Coastal Alabama is projected to grow by over 122,000 new residents in the next 15 years.<sup>1</sup> This growth will require thousands of local decisions about where to site housing, employment, schools and shopping; which roads and public transit to maintain and enhance; and how to preserve the natural beauty that makes Coastal Alabama a much admired region. By agreeing to make growth and development decisions within the framework of smart growth, the region will be taking the first step toward sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> Population projections developed by the CBER

But consensus is not enough. The real challenge is to develop a region-wide strategy that curbs sprawl and revitalizes existing cities. What can each city do to create a more livable community for local residents? How could state regulations create incentives for well-conceived and designed compact development within existing communities? What regional plans could protect open space and prevent our region from sprawling ever outward? These are the critical questions that must be addressed.

### **Why is Smart Growth Important in Coastal Alabama?**

Limited investment in mass transit and increasing numbers of residential developments built on the fringes of the region and beyond are likely to compound traffic congestion as well as air and water pollution.

### **What Can Be Done?**

This document will review smart growth initiatives such as urban revitalization, resource conservation, mixed use, community and stakeholder collaboration, and open space protection at the local, regional, and state level in Coastal Alabama and comparable areas of the country. Many of the initiatives were in place before smart growth became a movement; others were developed more recently. All provide lessons that can help communities steer toward smart growth.

We hope to provide examples of what specific cities, towns, counties, and universities have developed and implemented as smart growth strategies. It would be an overstatement to say that any of them have achieved the smart growth ideal, but they all are moving in that direction. Most don't use the label of smart growth but the initiatives do demonstrate smart growth principles. Since land-use decisions are made at the local level, all of the strategies may not be appropriate for every jurisdiction. What works for a large urban area may not work for a small rural community.

This is a compendium of brief initiative descriptions. It is not a how-to guide. Efforts were made to include a diverse array of initiatives and strategies. There will be a comparative analysis of where the coastal region of Alabama differs from comparable areas and in what ways. However, the report is not exhaustive. It does not include strategies that address the disincentives, subsidies and laws that fuel traditional development. Those issues, though critical, are beyond the scope of this report.

A final caveat. The issues smart growth seeks to confront are complex and deeply entrenched. There are no silver bullets. Most of the initiatives represent efforts to address one or two dimensions of a multidimensional problem. The challenge for decision-makers at all levels is to involve the public in determining what combination of strategies is appropriate for their community.

### **The Initiatives Selection and Comparison**

Healthy Coastal Communities Initiatives began a process to identify the cities and areas that the Chambers of Commerce in the region visited over the past 5 years to do a comparison of our coastal region and these city/county regions with regard to Smart Growth Initiatives.

One common element is the need for community support, no matter the size of the endeavor. All of the programs in this document were accomplished with some level of citizen participation. However, the commitment and involvement of elected officials, non-profit organizations, and businesses are just as important.

The case studies have been grouped into five categories: urban revitalization, resource conservation, community and stakeholder collaboration, mixed use and walkable communities. Some case studies address more than one category.

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The introduction above was taken from an untitled document used in a research project. It can be found at:  
<http://www.abag.ca.gov>

## Gap Analysis

In comparing the coastal region of Alabama to other areas, of similar size, it was important to find activities based upon smart growth principles and group them into categories. The categories used for the analysis are: Urban Revitalization, Resource Conservation, Mixed Use Development, Walkable Communities, and Community and Stakeholder Collaboration. The areas to be compared are Mobile AL, MSA and Charleston SC, MSA; Monterey California and the smaller cities in the Alabama coastal region; and Baldwin County Alabama and Nassau County in Florida. The analysis will attempt to show the similarities and differences in the activities and may draw some conclusions as to their success when the information is available.

### Mobile Alabama MSA / Charleston SC, MSA

Demographically, these two MSA's are very similar in population, economic basis, and port facilities. While the population of the MSA's are the same, the size of the largest city is very different. The City of Mobile has a population of 200,000+, while the City of Charleston has only 100,000. The rest of the population of both MSA's are made up of smaller cities and town. Both are coastal communities in their respective states. However Mobile's MSA is the only coastal area in the State of Alabama making it the smallest coastline. Yet it is a vital economic component in the state as a whole.

The economic base for each MSA is almost the same with tourism and service industry functioning along with dock facilities. Mobile has a strong industrial base while Charleston has a strong military presence.

While the growth rate for Charleston is a little higher than Mobile according to census statistics, the issue of downtown redevelopment is a primary concern for both areas. Each has begun an effort to revitalize their urban core.

Mobile began its downtown redevelopment effort in the late 80's with the construction of a new convention center. Then a planning firm was contracted to plan a vision for Downtown Mobile. The vision was called the "String of Pearls". The plan included commercial and residential units to be developed. To date, most of the development has been more commercial and public in nature. There have been only small "pockets" of residential development created but "the reversal of the downward trend in the number of people living in downtown has already occurred." (Urban Development Department)

Charleston, South Carolina has a "Downtown Charleston Plan" adopted in 1999 and is based on nine principles:

1. Nurture inclusive, vibrant neighborhoods
2. Pursue economic diversity
3. Maintain downtown as the regional center of culture and commerce
4. Foster sustainability
5. Reinforce the existing urban structure
6. Respect the grain, scale, and mix of the peninsula's urban fabric

7. Ensure architectural integrity
8. Encourage a balanced network for movement
9. Use growth strategically

**They used three forums to bring the interests and issues together: A Charleston Downtown Partnership, A Design Center to create an urban design vision, and a Coordinating Committee.**

**The key to the Downtown Plan is a “collaborative approach that transcends the boundaries of individual issues and neighborhoods to deal with the downtown holistically”, said Chris Morgan, Planning Department for Charleston.**

**In trying to compare these two downtown plans, it seems that Charleston defined its values on which to base any planning activities prior to creating the plan. Mobile began with a facility first then hired a firm to create a vision for Downtown Redevelopment.**

**Charleston’s Plan is newer and more collaborative. It will be interesting to watch in years to come how effective this approach is compared to Mobile’s contracted plan. In a recent study of Mobile’s Downtown Redevelopment, a recommendation was made to encourage groups such as the Downtown Redevelopment Commission, the Mobile Historic Development Commission, the Mobile Area Association of Realtors, and Homebuilders Association of Metro Mobile to join forces to pursue downtown residential development. This would result in “strong residential redevelopment and ensure a sustainable, viable downtown, fully renewing what once was and what will be again the heart and soul of Mobile”. (Urban Development Department)**

**Mobile and Charleston have begun projects aimed at making their communities more walkable.**

**As part of their new smart growth initiative, Mobile is formulating a Master Plan for greenspace which includes walkability and connectivity between the parks and recreation areas and the residential areas. The city has completed a new transportation hub in a recently renovated Historic Railroad Station and has plans to make transportation accessible by walking from nearby residential areas and other downtown locations.**

**Charleston has two new zoning districts to help implement their City Plan. “The Gathering Place District” is designed for places in the city where they want town, neighborhood and village centers. These are centers of activity that are designed for walking. These places must have a wide mix of uses with on-street parking, street trees, and sidewalk cafés. The Gathering Places District regulates by street rather than parcel to ensure a quality street environment. The “District” zone will be applied only to locations where residents have been involved in detailed planning for the future.**

**The second zoning district is called “The Neighborhood District”. In response to a citizen survey, the city drafted a Neighborhood District that requires mixed housing and land use, a connected and walkable street grid,**

and public space. The city proposes to make this district designation a “by-right” option to encourage its use.

These two zoning districts are for suburban location of at least 80 acres. But additional Districts will be developed for smaller tracts, infill and redevelopment sites.

Both MSA’s have initiatives encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration.

Mobile’s Smart Growth Initiative was started in 2002 when Mayor Michael Dow directed the Urban Development Department to begin a new planning initiative to “address the manner in which inevitable growth and development will occur in Mobile.” A Steering Committee was appointed to develop a comprehensive framework issued to guide the city’s development future. After six months of discussion on policy and strategy, the committee has submitted a Smart Growth For Mobile Policy Document. Once adopted by the City Council, the committee will then recommend implementation options.

Citywide Plans were required by the State of South Carolina in the late 90’s. Charleston adopted its Century V City Plan which is a working document for the citizens of the city. It involves residents early in the planning process through workshops and charrettes.

As part of the City Plan, two processes were set up to facilitate citizen participation. One is “The Neighborhood Council Program” which allows regular access to city staff. The Mayor meets regularly with the presidents of these councils to discuss city business and find out what neighborhoods need.

The second process is “The Citizen Participation Plan” which provides assistance to citizens seeking access to government officials, staff, processes and documents. It provides a flow of citizen input and priorities about city problems, plans and projects.

The Century V City Plan was influenced by the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League which promoted this sustainability plan. Charleston also has a strong connection with the College of Charleston. The graduate program in Environmental Studies at the College made a commitment with Mayor Joseph Riley to audit the city’s emissions and pinpoint feasible policy approaches to reduce the output of greenhouse gases. The students assist the Mayor’s office with outreach associated with this project and will use their skills to help the city maintain its health and economic viability while reducing its ecological impact.

#### *Where are the gaps?*

It seems that both MSA’s, Mobile and Charleston, are moving in a forward direction with downtown redevelopment efforts and City Plans. However, there seems to be three factors that may influence the success of each plan:

1. State support—The State of South Carolina requires cities to plan for their futures. Alabama has not encouraged planning at the local level.

2. **Early and often Citizen Participation**—while both seem to utilize citizen participation, Charleston has a plan to facilitate that process and make it easy for everyone.
3. **Strong College Commitment**—Charleston has the support and encouragement from its local College to move toward sustainable activities. Their Environmental Studies Department has assisted the city with its air quality issue. Mobile has several colleges and universities but no real commitment with them other than some statistical information.

### **Baldwin County, Alabama / Nassau County, Florida**

Demographically, these two counties are very similar in their location with a long coastline, growth rate, and proximity to a large metropolitan city. Baldwin County has a larger population but the median age and income are the same according to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000. While Baldwin County has 12 cities under 20,000 in it, Nassau County has only six cities of 20,000 and under.

The growth rate is remarkably similar at 3.8% annually. Each County is the fastest growing and so the issues of growth control and sprawl are two of the major concerns. Baldwin County has had an on and off method of dealing with growth in the unincorporated areas. In 1991, legislation was passed giving the county the authority to create a Planning and Zoning Commission to aid in the implementation of zoning in districts that voted to come under county zoning. In 1994, Baldwin County adopted a long range comprehensive plan that included all government services and departments. It also had a land use plan that included the zoning districts and subdivision regulations. It set up a new planning department separate from its building department which was to oversee all development issues and make recommendations for change. The planning document was facilitated by a Citizen group which held town meetings to find out what the people wanted in the plan. In 1997, however, the County Commission did away with the longrange plan and just used its subdivision regulations and its zoning plan to manage growth in unincorporated areas. The County is presently going through another planning process that they anticipate will take 3-5 yrs. In early 2000, the commission adopted the framework for their Master Plan. There are six sections to the plan: Environment and Conservation, Parks and Recreation, Utilities, Transportation, Agriculture/ Industry/ Tourism, and Growth and Development. The plan will be prepared by the Planning Department and each section of the plan will be subject to public review.

Nassau County in Florida adopted a comprehensive land use plan in 2003 as required by the State of Florida. The plan covers all aspects of growth in the county including objectives to discourage sprawl, Recreation and open space, bicycle and pedestrian ways, and an intergovernmental

coordination element. As a result of the plan, the county has passed a Tree Protection Ordinance to protect Oaks and Magnolias, and a Management Overlay District for one of their major arteries which would manage development along the corridor and set standards that target pedestrian and bicycle circulation. The most notable result of the plan is an Interlocal Agreement for Public School Facility Planning. It is an agreement between the County, the Cities and the local School Board. It was created to better coordinate the building of new schools, improve student access and safety, better define urban form, and create greater efficiency and convenience. The Interlocal Agreement will “recognize the benefits that shall flow to the citizens and students of their communities by more closely coordinating their comprehensive land use and school facilities planning programs”. It was signed and dated June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

Baldwin County used Staff to develop their regulations while Nassau County hired a consultant firm to write their comprehensive plan. While the first plan for Baldwin County had strong public input, the planning and zoning regulations did not. Both, however, had public review once the documents were complete.

The focus for the Nassau County plan appears to be very different from the Baldwin County planning effort. There seems to be a clear effort to coordinate and cooperate with other local governments in their county. At present, Baldwin County only has its zoning regulations in place ( amended 2003) to manage growth. But even the framework for the Master Plan does not have coordination and cooperation with other governments as part of its plan. One thing that hinders Alabama Counties from even having that focus is the 1901 State Constitution. The restrictions on local governments limits the authority of counties and cities, to some extent, to work together.

Baldwin County has begun a conservation program that includes purchasing sensitive lands to be used for parks and recreation. As part of their future planning for increased public access, the County purchased 400 acres on the Tensaw River. The County also has begun a Wetlands Conservation Plan which has identified wetlands in most of the county and wants to provide the best information to “promote wise land-use decisions making with regards to wetland resources”. Nassau County has not made a decision to begin purchasing lands for parks and recreation, but has put incentives in their comprehensive plan to encourage “cluster developments”, setbacks and landscape buffers to protect sensitive areas. The County also works cooperatively with St. Marys River Management Committee to identify and qualify wetlands for their comprehensive plan.

Nassau County along with Duval, Clay, and St. Augustine are participants in the Regional Metro Planning Organization Regional Plan.

**This plan encourages even more cooperation and coordination between jurisdictions that are connected and want to work together.**

*Where are the gaps?*

**It seems that planning is a focus with both counties. Nassau County, Florida is required to submit a comprehensive plan while Baldwin County is not. Each county has had a plan adopted to manage growth and Baldwin County is working to formulate another plan. But there appears to be several differences between the counties that may affect their planning success:**

- 1. State support—The State of Florida passed legislation requiring cities and counties to submit long range plans if they want to seek state funding. The State of Alabama has not passed any legislation and continues to function under a cumbersome, inefficient state constitution which effectively places local control at the state house.**
- 2. Citizen participation in the planning process—Nassau County used a consulting firm to write their plan with public review. Baldwin County is having their planning department write the plan but plans public review after the document is finished. There have been public meetings for the parks plan which is one aspect of the Master Plan.**
- 3. Coordination and Cooperation--- Nassau County has a strong focus on working closely with other entities in their region. Coordinating the comprehensive plans from surrounding communities makes the planning easier and stronger since there is regional support for the objectives of the plan. The County works with a local environmental group to identify and protect sensitive wetlands. Baldwin County doesn't have those components in their plan framework.**

**Other Cities along Alabama's Coastal Region / Monterey, California**

**There are numerous small cities and towns in the Coastal Region of Alabama that are experiencing differing rates of growth and development. Their location near a large metropolitan area and a coastline, have an effect on development and the rate of growth. Monterey, California is similar in size and proximity to the coastline as most of the cities used in this analysis. For purposes of this analysis, the cities of Gulf Shores, Dauphin Island, Fairhope, Daphne, Foley, Saraland, Citronelle, and Chickasaw will be used. Each of these cities is dealing with growth and development in a different way and with different building and zoning practices. The City of Monterey sits on a peninsula which is only a part of Monterey County and has seen a fluctuating population growth in the past 5 yrs. It continues to see an increase in its cost of living, median income, and average home cost. Likewise**

most of the cities in the Coastal Region of Alabama are experiencing the same growth fluctuations and increase in housing costs. However the median income remains steady.

The economic base for Monterey and most of the comparable cities along the Alabama Coast is Tourism, Retail, and Health and Social Services. Monterey has a large segment of the workforce that is involved with Personal and Professional Services. Several Coastal Cities saw Manufacturing and Construction as large contributors to their economy.

Growth and development in Monterey has been limited to a degree because it is on a peninsula. So the challenges have been to facilitate growth while protecting their quality of life.

Several of the coastal cities in Lower Alabama have a similar concern with limited space such as Dauphin Island, Gulf Shores, and Chickasaw. These cities are land locked and will have the challenge of growth constrained by limited land mass. The other coastal cities are surrounded by greenfields but have different concerns such as sprawling development, traffic, and downtown preservation or redevelopment.

The City of Monterey has a General Plan which has a number of elements. The land use element supports the “mixed use neighborhood” alternative, which is a mix of residences, retail shops, services, and jobs in close proximity. These areas are designed to be well served by transit and bicycle routes, and be pedestrian friendly. The circulation element is the roadway capacity for the level of residential and employment growth anticipated. The conservation element provides direction regarding the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources. The elements covered in the conservation element are water supply, water quality, air quality, flora and fauna and marine resources, and energy conservation. Other elements of the plan include Urban design, Open space, and Safety. Monterey is a city of neighborhoods, and many residential and commercial neighborhoods now have Area Plans which are more precise but consistent with the General Plan. There are two measures of note that Monterey has implements that are aligned with smart growth principles. The first is the creation of a zoning designation called Neighborhood Commercial District or C1. This provides for businesses serving the daily needs of nearby residential areas. Another measure was the passage of an amendment to their tree ordinance which sets a monetary value of trees that are removed and the type and size of the replacement required are more specific. The ordinance designates certain trees as “local landmark trees” which means they are of significant value to the community. The role of the ordinance is to better clarify the role of tree preservation in the community with regard to the replacement of trees on private property.

**Fairhope, Alabama has a Comprehensive Plan that was developed through an extensive community participation process. Several alternative land use scenarios were proposed and brought to the citizens in numerous meetings. When all scenarios were reviewed, the village concept was overwhelmingly favored by the community. The city established a hierarchy of village centers that will be located throughout the city to meet different local and regional needs. Each of the village centers will be designed to include or be linked to compact, walkable neighborhoods, public spaces, pedestrian/bicycle trails, and a market driven commercial core.**

**Foley and Daphne are cities with Master Plans that have been changed to include Downtown Districts which allow for mixed use. Foley went further and designated the area as a historic district. The Planning Department is updating the zoning and subdivision regulations. There are already special zones established to locate commercial designations near transportation arteries. Another zone is a Special Waterfront R1-R which requires a minimum of 75' setback from the water. This buffer zone helps preserve the integrity of the waterway by allowing enough land to filter any pollutants.**

**Daphne has recently adopted a downtown mixed use district to encourage renovation and construction of multistory buildings that would have retail downstairs and residential upstairs. The city has been actively trying to create a system of trails through the city and requires sidewalks in all subdivisions. Recently, a trail was completed which goes under the Interstate running through the city.**

**The two cities that face the Gulf of Mexico are Gulf Shores and Dauphin Island. These cities are very different in their development practices. Gulf Shores went through a building surge after a major hurricane in 1979. Since then the city has become a city of condominiums built on the beaches. The unprecedented growth and development has created a tourist mecca but also has caused issues with beach erosion, traffic, and high property values. The city is presently working with a consultant to make recommendations for updating their city plan. Some of the recommendations are to encourage a variety of density developments, pursue the concept of mixed use in all land use areas, and make streets more pedestrian friendly. Gulf Shores has zoning and subdivision regulations in place but is considering the recommendations for future development.**

**Dauphin Island has maintained its small town atmosphere by structuring its zoning and subdivision regulations to restrict condominiums and encourage residential development. The city passed an ordinance to protect its wetlands. It also has walk and bike trail programs. The Property Owners Association for the island has a strong voice in the development of all**

land use issues. The city had citizen participation to help formulate a plan that would fit their vision for the future.

There are three smaller cities in Mobile County that have very different development issues to face. Citronelle, Saraland, and Chickasaw are all north of the large metropolitan city of Mobile. Citronelle is the farthest north and is experiencing growth and change. The city is relying on subdivision regulations, the Southern Building Code, and some zoning to manage growth. Saraland has seen an increase in growth rate due in large part to an Interstate being built just outside its city limits. The city is using the same methods of managing growth as Citronelle. Chickasaw was negatively affected by the same Interstate construction as Saraland. However, the Interstate cut Chickasaw off and made it land locked. This situation has caused the city to take certain measures to protect what it has. As a result, the city created a historic district in one of its original neighborhoods, and set up a landlord ordinance that requires certain upgrades to rental property each year.

*Where are the gaps?*

There seems to be a very diverse picture of growth management when all the cities and towns are grouped together. While they are all of similar size and proximity to a coastline, their methods of land use management is very dissimilar. Monterey, California actually lost population yet continues to plan for 20 years of potential increases by strong directed growth measures. Each city and town has ordinances and planning for the future but there are differences that may affect further planning successes:

1. **State Support:** California passed legislation requiring cities and counties to submit comprehensive plans. Alabama has not passed any legislation giving counties the authority to plan or requiring cities to plan for future development.
2. **Coordination and Cooperation:** The City of Monterey created their Master Plan in coordination with the County and other cities surrounding their jurisdiction. Their Plan actually has Neighborhood Area plans which cooperate with the Master plan. The cities and towns in the coastal area of Alabama have varying degrees of planning for future development but do their planning in isolation from all other jurisdiction. This exists in part due to the outdated State Constitution which holds all local decisions at the state house. The constitution hinders coordination between jurisdictions thus making region planning very difficult.
3. **The degree of citizen participation** seems to affect the ability to implement specific aspects of the plans. The City of Monterey has been able to get the support of the citizens by allowing them to vote on critical developments. The City of Fairhope held extensive town meetings to present the “village concept”. Dauphin Island seems to have strong

**citizen participation in their plans. The other cities are using planning departments to facilitate changes to their plans.**

- 4. Specific Conservation Elements: It seems that Monterey has more specifically focused on defining the community elements that are valuable to conserve. The plan actually states the value of trees, air, water, and land. Then states how they plan to preserve these valued assets. The Alabama coastal cities do not specifically define their assets nor their value to the community.**

## **SUMMARY**

**Throughout the gap analysis, one theme appears to be consistent: State Support. All of the comparison areas are in states with strong support for comprehensive planning by cities and counties. There is also encouragement to cooperate and coordinate with surrounding jurisdiction to increase efficiency and effectiveness.**

**Another means of support and encouragement for smart growth planning was the strong involvement of a local university or college. It seems that the academic involvement helped to facilitate innovative projects and helped the cities and counties save money while educating the students.**

**The participation and involvement of the citizenry in all aspects of the planning process seems to contribute to the success of implementation. There seems to be no consistent process to facilitate easy citizen participation. The comparable communities seem to have set up a process to allow easy access to decisions that affect their community. Most have neighborhood structures that have a function in local decisions.**

**The most telling gap is the lack of communication and coordination between jurisdictions. While most of the local governments have plans for development, there is little if any knowledge of surrounding jurisdictions and their plans. Without knowledge of surrounding land use plans, how can any plan be cost effective and efficient? How can watersheds be protected, air quality be protected, people transported effectively, or children educated effectively?**

**As the coastal region of Alabama moves toward regional smart growth discussions, it will be helpful to remember the practices of some of the cities and counties our chambers chose to visit and how they are able to engage the citizenry and plan to protect what they value.**