

Executive Summary

The San Francisco Bay Area will add a million new residents by 2020. What this means for the region depends largely on where and how this growth occurs.

On average, Bay Area cities score 34%, with only one-third of the needed policies to achieve smart growth.

The region can accommodate growth while making its cities and towns a better place to live. This approach is called smart growth. It requires directing new growth into already-urbanized areas, protecting farms and natural areas, creating walkable neighborhoods, and revitalizing downtowns.

To learn how well the region is doing at pursuing smart growth, Greenbelt Alliance has undertaken a landmark assessment of the planning policies of all 101 cities and nine counties of the Bay Area. These policies provide the blueprints for how the region will grow in the future. Strong planning policies are critical to a vibrant, livable region.

The *Smart Growth Scorecard* measures policies. It does not measure on-the-ground reality. For instance, the region's densest cities may not score highest on density, because their policies may not be strong enough to ensure that new development is also dense. Political will is also important to achieving smart growth, as it ensures that good policies translate into good development. The *Scorecard* does not measure political will. The *Scorecard* evaluates only policies, which create the framework to make smart growth possible.

Evaluating Cities and Counties

The *Smart Growth Scorecard* evaluates cities and counties separately, to reflect their separate roles.

To ensure a healthy environment and high quality of life, cities should be the sites of compact, lively, and pedestrian-friendly development, especially in their downtowns and near transit stations.

Counties also have a critical role to play in fostering smart growth by channeling development to the cities; protecting natural resources, open space, and farmland; and providing transportation options between cities.

City Results

The *Smart Growth Scorecard* reveals that across the region, Bay Area cities could be doing much more to support smart growth. Of 101 cities, only 17 earn scores of 50% or more, out of a possible 100%. On average, cities score 34%, with only one-third of the needed policies to achieve smart growth.

Preventing Sprawl with Urban Growth Boundaries

There are 78 cities in the Bay Area that are not encircled by water or other cities, and so should have urban growth boundaries. Of these, 25, or about one-third, have strong boundaries. The lack of boundaries in many areas leaves a significant amount of the region's open space at risk of sprawl development.



Photo: Galen Rowell

Protecting open space and improving the Bay Area's quality of life requires good policies to guide growth. Today, Bay Area cities and counties are doing only a third of what is needed to achieve smart growth.

Making Sure Parks Are Nearby

Many Bay Area cities should be doing much more to ensure their residents live near parks. Of 101 cities, only 31, about one-third, require parks to be within walking distance of every resident. Without this standard, open space may be inequitably distributed, leaving many residents unable to easily enjoy a neighborhood park.

Creating Homes People Can Afford

One of the Bay Area's greatest needs is for homes that people can afford. Many Bay Area cities do have policies supporting the creation of affordable homes. Fifty-nine of 101 cities have inclusionary policies, which require affordable homes to be included in new residential developments. However, many cities do not have strong enough inclusionary policies or are lacking other necessary policies, and the average score regionwide is 36%. In this critical area, cities are falling short.

Encouraging A Mix of Uses

The Bay Area's cities are doing better at allowing mixed-use development than they are in any other smart growth policy area. Of the region's 101 cities, 79 allow a mix of uses downtown and near transit stations, though some require special permits. Mixing shops, jobs, and homes enlivens neighborhoods and helps people to get from place to place without having to drive.

Encouraging Density in the Right Places

Bay Area cities are not doing well at encouraging or requiring density even in the most appropriate places: downtown and near transit. On average, cities score only 29%, the second lowest regional average. Without increasing density in the right places, the region will fail to accommodate growth while protecting open space and providing homes people can afford.

Requiring Less Land for Parking

Cities in the Bay Area are doing very little to encourage better land use by reducing parking requirements. The regionwide average score is 26%, the lowest of any policy area. By keeping parking requirements high, cities are missing the opportunity to build more homes and commercial space.

Defining Standards for Good Development

With an average score of 32%, Bay Area cities are doing only one-third of what they could be to use development standards to make streets and sidewalks inviting. However, most cities do earn at least some points, and five cities earn scores of over 75%: Windsor, Walnut Creek, Sonoma, Livermore, and Oakland.

County Results

Bay Area counties on the whole are doing somewhat better than cities. On average, they score 51%, meaning they are doing half of what they could do to promote smart growth.

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Managing Growth

In many cases, Bay Area counties are doing better than cities at preventing sprawling growth. Seven counties have adopted strong growth management policies intended to prevent urban development on greenbelt lands, though only three are voter-approved ordinances. Counties' average growth management score is 51%.

Permanently Protecting Open Space

Counties perform better in open space and parkland policies than in any other policy area, with an average score of 60%. Only two counties in the Bay Area, Solano and Napa, have not yet established a public agency for open space acquisition and preservation.

Preserving Agricultural Land

Bay Area counties can significantly improve their agricultural zoning ordinances. They score only 49% on average. County ordinances that allow rural land to be split into smaller parcels, or allow multiple houses on each parcel, represent a latent threat to the greenbelt. San Mateo's model agricultural ordinance should be imitated by lower-scoring counties including Santa Clara, Marin, and Sonoma.

Conserving Natural Resources

Bay Area counties average 48% in enacting conservation policies to protect creeks, trees, and steep slopes. Often counties have taken a first step by stating the importance of these resources, but few have specific ordinances to ensure their protection.

Offering Transportation Choices

The region's counties vary widely in their transportation planning, policies, and investment, with an average regional score of 41%. Santa Clara

County leads the way with significant transit funding. Solano and Napa lag because they do not have transportation sales taxes that could provide funding for local transit.

The Way Forward

These scores are low. In general, Bay Area cities and counties are doing only a fraction of what is needed to ensure smart growth.

But that can change. For every policy area, there is a city or county that can guide other jurisdictions as they seek to improve.

The future of the entire region is at stake.