



grow smart bay area



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smart bay area

The San Francisco Bay Area is growing. By 2035, nearly 2 million more people will live here, and the region will have almost 1.7 million more jobs. This growth presents an opportunity. We can invest in our neighborhoods and make them even better places to live. If we change how we grow—if we grow smarter—we can make our region more climate-friendly, affordable, and economically competitive, while protecting our farms, forests, and watersheds.

We can grow sustainably,
and we must.

THIS IS THE GROW SMART CHALLENGE. 

WHY NOW

“The days where we’re just building sprawl forever—those days are over.”

— President Barack Obama

THE ERA OF UNSUSTAINABLE GROWTH MUST END. For our climate, our health, and our quality of life, we can no longer afford to sacrifice the Bay Area’s stunning open spaces to new subdivisions and to add cars to the road while we neglect our urban neighborhoods and suburban downtowns.

Living better

We can make the Bay Area’s cities and towns into cleaner, greener, better places to live—enabling our region to grow in a way that is environmentally sustainable and that benefits our diverse population.

We can create walkable, bike-friendly neighborhoods. We can strengthen our economy and reduce the amount of time we have to spend in our cars by building more homes close to jobs. And by protecting vital lands, we can secure clean drinking water, fresh food, and places to play.

The future we can create

By meeting the Grow Smart Bay Area challenge, we will create better neighborhoods, invigorate our local economies, and do our part to combat global climate change.

If we care about the Bay Area’s future, we need to invest in its greatest assets: the vibrant communities and iconic landscapes that nurture tomorrow’s leaders and attract people from all over the world.





MEETING DEMAND

By investing in existing neighborhoods, cities can bring new life to neglected areas and offer more to residents.

More choices

For too long, housing development has followed a one-size-fits-all model.

But when people are given the choice, many opt for something other than the suburban, car-oriented subdivision. A Public Policy Institute of California study found that a majority of Bay Area residents would live in smaller homes if this meant they could have a shorter commute, and a majority would prefer to live in a mixed-use neighborhood if they could walk to stores, schools, and services.

And in recent years, as the housing market fell, homes in city centers held their value much more than foreclosure-plagued developments in outlying areas.

Ready for a new economy

Demand for in-town living is growing. Research indicates that attracting entrepreneurs and talented workers—the “creative class”—will require investing in vibrant urban centers. As Baby Boomers retire and more Americans live on their own than ever before, demographics indicate that the demand for living in central areas, close to services, will only rise.

“To be competitive, metropolitan areas need to meet the demand for walkable urban places, where one can meet most everyday needs within walking distance or with access to transit. The market is calling for change—with Grow Smart, the Bay Area can build walkable urban places and thrive.”

—Christopher Leinberger, developer, Brookings Institution fellow, and author of *The Option of Urbanism*

IT'S POSSIBLE



Transformations left and opposite: Steve Price, www.urban-advantage.com

The region's cities and towns can transform neglected land into attractive places to live, work, and shop.

➔ Greenbelt Alliance has found that the Bay Area can accommodate all its projected growth in existing cities and towns.

A model for growth

Across the region, there are more than 40,000 places—shuttered strip malls, seas of parking, vacant lots—ready for new development.

And Bay Area communities have set out visions for what their neighborhoods could become—for instance, commercial districts, residential areas, mixed-use areas, and more. In addition, cities are planning for development in priority areas, especially in downtowns and around transportation hubs, with the help of the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG).

ABAG is working with three other regional agencies to identify and direct funds to priority areas for development and conservation. This effort, called FOCUS, is building momentum toward smarter growth regionwide.

Plenty of room

Greenbelt Alliance's analysis has found that if the Bay Area redevelops opportunity sites with homes and workplaces in ways that are consistent with community visions, and if city plans succeed, our cities and towns actually have plenty of room to accommodate all our new residents and workers.

Done right, this infill development will improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods, with safer streets, more homes people can afford, and more services close by. Focusing growth within our existing cities and towns will also protect the iconic landscapes that provide us with local food, clean water, and places to enjoy the outdoors.

Transforming troubled areas

Land now empty or under-used can be transformed to create thriving neighborhoods. Troubled downtowns can add homes that provide customers for local businesses; office parks can make life easier for workers by adding restaurants and shops; and traffic-choked streets can become walkable boulevards.



Opportunity sites like these can be reimagined to provide homes for working families.

WHAT IT WILL LOOK LIKE

Cities can use new development to enhance existing neighborhoods around the region. The region's largest central cities will see the most growth, but every Bay Area community—from Petaluma to Pittsburg to Mountain View—has opportunities to improve the quality of life by providing homes, services, and jobs along more walkable streets.

CASE STUDY: Concord

Not far from Concord's park-studded downtown is a stretch of aging strip malls among modern office buildings. Near jobs and two BART stations, Willow Pass Road is a good place to add homes and retail to create a vibrant neighborhood.

Opportunities

The North Concord BART station is across from the 5,100-acre former Concord Naval Weapons Station, which will be redeveloped into a series of clustered villages. Along Willow Pass Road, several large lots could be key to Concord's transformation, connecting the downtown with the new villages. Residents here would be able to walk easily to the downtown plaza and BART.



Before and after: Concord could add homes and stores to enliven Willow Pass Road.



Local outlook

"I like people living closer together—it's better for community. I enjoy the life of a city."

— Tony, Concord

WHERE PEOPLE WILL LIVE AND WORK:

EVERY CITY AND TOWN HAS ROOM FOR NEW HOMES AND BUSINESSES—AND EVERY CITY AND TOWN SHOULD ENCOURAGE GROWTH IN THE RIGHT PLACES.

Four-fifths of the Bay Area’s growth can occur in seven “smart spots,” especially along transportation corridors—from El Camino Real to the North Bay’s new train—where new homes and jobs are a natural fit.

Each smart spot can accommodate a certain percentage of the region’s growth:



Northeast Santa Clara County

Homes: 26% | Jobs: 20%

Reusing old office parks along San Jose’s North First Street and downtown will take advantage of Caltrain and VTA lines and the major regional transit hub planned at San Jose’s Diridon station.

“We’ve had all of these new families move in who have become active in the neighborhood. It’s great.”

— Anne Ehresman, San Jose

El Camino Real

Homes: 14% | Jobs: 14%

Connecting 17 cities and towns, El Camino Real can become a grand boulevard with homes and offices along VTA bus routes and the parallel Caltrain line.



Inner East Bay

Homes: 15% | Jobs: 8%

New development can go along corridors like San Pablo Avenue, International Boulevard, Telegraph Avenue, Adeline, and East 14th streets, especially near this smart spot’s 13 BART stations and its Transbay and AC Transit bus routes.

“I wish San Pablo Avenue could be more bike-friendly. The neighborhood could be better if everyone who lives here is involved in making decisions about how the area changes.”

— Navina Khanna, Oakland

San Francisco

Homes: 8% | Jobs: 16%

Infill development in San Francisco, with its eight BART stations, three Caltrain stops, and network of MUNI buses and light-rail lines, will enable residents and workers to get around easily.

Southern Alameda County

Homes: 8% | Jobs: 6%

In cities like San Leandro, Hayward, Union City, and Fremont, large swaths of low-density development and vast parking lots around seven BART stations are ripe for infill.

Central Contra Costa

Homes: 6% | Jobs: 8%

Growth in this region can focus in Walnut Creek, in Pittsburg, at the former Concord Naval Weapons Station, and in downtowns and around BART or e-BART stations.

SMART Corridor

Homes: 5% | Jobs: 6%

The new Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) train line will provide a backbone for the North Bay to help keep development off farmland and focus growth in cities like San Rafael, Novato, Petaluma, and Santa Rosa.



“We have a nice downtown, but so many buildings are empty. It’ll be great when the train starts coming through, especially for the kids. Hopefully it will bring more people and businesses, too.”

— Sam Neff, Novato

SMART SPOTS FOR GROWTH

SONOMA

NAPA

SMART Corridor

MARIN

Napa

SOLANO

Fairfield

Vallejo

San Rafael

Richmond

Pittsburg

Concord

Walnut Creek

Central Contra Costa

CONTRA COSTA

Inner East Bay

Berkeley

Oakland

San Francisco

San Leandro

Livermore

Southern Alameda County

ALAMEDA

Hayward

Fremont

El Camino Real

Palo Alto

SAN MATEO

Mountain View

Sunnyvale

Northeast Santa Clara County








Santa Clara

San Jose




SANTA CLARA

MAP KEY

Smart Spots: Central areas where four-fifths of the Bay Area's housing and job growth can occur.

-  Northeast Santa Clara County
-  El Camino Real
-  Inner East Bay
-  San Francisco
-  Southern Alameda County
-  Central Contra Costa
-  SMART Corridor

Additional Opportunity Sites: Areas around the region where additional growth can occur.

-  High
-  Medium
-  Low

For a zoomable map, visit www.growsmartbayarea.org

ADDING IT UP



Steve Price, www.urban-advantage.com

TO CALCULATE HOW THE BAY AREA CAN GROW in a way that creates more inviting, walkable neighborhoods, Greenbelt Alliance built on existing regional research.

Here's how we determined the region's potential for infill development:

New homes and jobs = (opportunity sites x neighborhood types) + (in-law units) + (priority development areas)

Opportunity sites

Opportunity sites are properties that are likely to redevelop because what stands on the land is less valuable than the land itself. Greenbelt Alliance did not include properties with single-family homes.

(2006, Parcel Locator Database, Institute of Urban and Regional Development, UC Berkeley)

Neighborhood types

Neighborhood types are descriptions of what, in workshops around the region, communities have envisioned for their cities and towns. These descriptions include building heights and neighborhood character.

(2002 Smart Growth Strategy / Regional Livability Footprint Project)

In-law units

In-law units, also known as granny flats, will increase the number of homes by 5% in certain neighborhoods, based on community visions.

(2002 Smart Growth Strategy / Regional Livability Footprint Project)

Priority development areas

Priority development areas are places, generally in downtowns and close to transit, where cities will focus growth. Cities, together with the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), have estimated the number of new homes and jobs that will go into these areas.

(2009 Priority Development Areas, Association of Bay Area Governments)

Our analysis

Greenbelt Alliance assigned densities based on the neighborhood type, then multiplied the acreage of the opportunity site by the neighborhood's estimated density. We added up the new homes and jobs for all opportunity sites. We also added a 5% increase in homes in certain neighborhoods to include in-law units. In the priority development areas, we replaced our calculations with ABAG's overall growth projections. The total is the number of new homes and jobs that can be accommodated in existing cities and towns.

Room enough

This analysis shows that the Bay Area has plenty of room to grow within existing cities and towns. In fact, because the analysis makes several conservative assumptions—such as excluding single-family homes and government-owned lands, even though many of these will redevelop—it is probably an underestimate.

We have all the room we need.



➔ We can meet the Grow Smart challenge, and we all have a role to play.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Growing smarter

Today, instead of encouraging sustainable growth, many city policies actually prevent it. To create better neighborhoods and a better Bay Area, we need to change that.

To succeed, we need to:

Plan for walkable neighborhoods. We need to help more people live and work close to public transportation and shops. To do this, cities should establish minimum densities and raise maximum densities and building heights. Cities can also reduce building costs and use land wisely by reducing parking requirements and pricing parking to reflect its true cost. Streets should be designed for pedestrians and bicyclists rather than cars, and every resident should be able to walk to a clean, safe park.

Get everyone involved. Residents need to speak up for development in central areas that is good for the climate and for people. Cities, in turn, should bring residents into the planning process early on and ensure that they will benefit from changes to the neighborhood.

Bring good plans to fruition. Local governments should actively encourage investment in central areas by staffing planning departments and making the development process more straightforward, especially when proposed projects conform to city plans.

Stop sprawl. Cities and counties need to direct development away from the Bay Area's iconic natural areas and farmlands. Steps to do this include adopting urban growth boundaries, zoning to preserve rural land, and requiring voter approval of any development outside urban boundaries.

Invest in infrastructure—both gray and green. The region, the state, and the federal government should focus funding in key areas, upgrading transit, water, sewer, and park systems to support smart growth and conserve vital lands. This will make sure taxpayer dollars are spent cost-effectively to meet the needs of a growing population and protect the lands that provide us with fresh food, clean air, and clean water.

These are practical solutions to get the Bay Area on a path toward sustainable growth. With businesses, environmentalists, elected officials, social equity advocates, and residents from around the region working together, we can do it. We can achieve the vision.

We can make our region thrive.



“Greenbelt Alliance’s goals of focusing growth in urban areas and protecting iconic landscapes will make the San Francisco Bay Area a model for how the nation can grow greener and live better.”

— Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House



www.growsmartbayarea.org