



LIVABLE COMMUNITIES COALITION

Working to improve metro Atlanta's quality of life through smart growth

Citizens Guidelines

Dealing with change is scary, especially when the change affects your neighborhood. Technical terms used by planners, developers, and builders don't always help. In fact, they can sometimes make proposed changes even more confusing and intimidating.

Citizens and communities, however, need not be passive in the face of proposed change. Nor must they always just say no. Communities are increasingly learning how to manage and shape change.

Help in learning how to manage change is available in several places. Books like *Choosing Our Community's Future: A Citizen's Guide to Getting the Most Out of New Development*, a Smart Growth America publication, walk readers through the planning process and introduce them to planning's special vocabulary. Georgia's Department of Community Affairs works to educate and assist citizens and communities on a wide range of growth and development issues. Metro Atlanta's planning organization, the Atlanta Regional Commission, offers a wealth of materials on its Web site as well as training and educational forums.

The Web sites for all three organizations are rich in resources. You'll also find illustrations of smart growth, discussions of smart growth principles, and other helpful materials on this Web site.

In the meantime, if your community is facing proposed change now, keep in mind these guidelines:

1. Assume that you have a role in the planning process. In fact, no one knows your community better than you do. You don't just have a right to react to someone else's idea for change in your neighborhood. You have a right to participate in planning that change.
2. Know what you want as well as what you don't want. Change can be opportunity, too. Be guided as much by what you want for your community as what you don't want.
3. Get smart about growth. You don't need to be an expert. But it helps if you're able to articulate your goals and to explain why your preferred outcome is better than the one proposed by someone else.
4. Listen. Proposed changes may contain elements that you want to support and build on.
5. Be visual. Photographs, charts, and even tables of data may make the point more eloquently than the best two-minute speech.
6. Be specific. If you are most concerned about neighborhood and building design or the quality of construction, help define those goals. Don't leave it to chance or to vague agreements that will be hard to enforce later.
7. Assume that change will be proposed and that some change is probably inevitable in any neighborhood over time. If your community doesn't already have a vision for that change, ask your local government planning department to help your community create one.
8. Be persistent. Good, sound, smart growth is never the result of one meeting or one public hearing.
9. Be committed. Be willing to attend meetings, contribute ideas, and stick with planning and zoning processes that may extend over several months. Growth is process, not a one-time event.
10. Be creative. If necessary, suggest compromises that create a workable solution for all.