

# Preface

In the first edition of this book in 1999 (*From Sprawl to Smart Growth: Successful Legal, Planning and Environmental Systems*), the ever-growing problems of suburban and exurban sprawl were documented, as were the successful state, county, and city efforts to control sprawl through smart growth systems. While those smart growth systems, utilizing sustainable new urbanist patterns of growth, were highly effective in creating antidotes to sprawl, the problem of increasing outward migration in the nation as a whole continued unabated through the fall of 2006.<sup>1</sup> Large-scale developers continued to buy swaths of vacant agricultural land, incentivized to do so through subprime mortgages that lacked the purchaser income to support them. These mortgages were then fed to major investment firms, banks, and financial institutions; packaged into exotic mortgage debt instruments; mixed with more valuable securities; and sold to the world. The combination of reckless deregulation of financial instruments and institutions, the institutional myopic view that real estate values could never decline, and the highly leveraged and integrated web of institutional debt finally collapsed in 2007 and became the great recession of 2008–2010.<sup>2</sup>

Coupled with the financial crisis has been the inability of state and local governments, through rapidly declining property and sales tax revenue, to provide adequate police, fire, education, recreation and capital infrastructure maintenance and repair to existing populations, no less new growth. Foreclosures, abandonments, and the descending home prices of exurban subdivisions have led to a new recognition that urban sprawl is a deadly virus in our society.<sup>3</sup>

Other major problems have arisen. The extraordinary rise and fall of oil prices during 2007–2010 has made long distance commuting an environmental and cost nightmare. Smart growth, sustainability, and new urbanist movements have continuously

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1. *Study Shows Urban Sprawl Continues to Gobble Up Land*, SCI. DAILY, Dec. 24, 2007, at 1 (a study of changing land use patterns found significant increases in sprawl between 1973 and 2006, with the greatest fragmented land use occurring in nonurban areas located 80 miles from the nearest central cities).

2. M. Jay Wells, *Why the Mortgage Crisis Happened*, INVESTOR'S BUS. DAILY, Oct. 30, 2008, at 1.

3. Philip Langdon, *Economic Turmoil Alters Development Landscape*, NEW URB. NEWS, Oct.–Nov. 2008, at 1 (the U.S. lending crisis has cut homebuilding everywhere, but walkable, transit-oriented developments are suffering least).

worked to reduce auto trip lengths and to build mixed use, higher walkable jobs-housing balanced neighborhoods close to transit.<sup>4</sup> The political agenda of the Obama administration in recognizing climate change and the need to convert our energy supplies to renewable sources will lead to greater urban investment, increased job growth, and better national security.

The realization that we need to return to established urban and suburban areas for growth has keyed new questions for the nation as to how we can achieve and implement these fundamental goals, objectives, policies, and strategies.<sup>5</sup> This book hopefully rises to that challenge. We will show how umbrella sustainable growth systems comprising the spokes of smart growth, green development, renewable energy, and new urbanism have been devised in the past and how they can be planned and implemented in the present and the future. We will show that while constructing these systems seems complex, the reality is that we fully understand the techniques of how to achieve these goals; what we have always lacked is the simple political will to direct coordinated action. As readers go through the book, they should be amazed to learn how effective and wealth producing these sustainable growth systems have been in producing quality of life, revitalizing neighborhoods, conserving agricultural and sensitive environmental land, combating climate change, and reducing air pollution and energy usage.

The nation is on the march, and we trust that this book will be the tune that the band plays.

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4. Hank Ditmar & Gloria Ohland, *The New Transit Town: Best Practices in Transit-Oriented Development* 36–37 (2004).

5. Daniel K. Slone & Doris S. Goldstein, *A Legal Guide to Urban and Sustainable Development* 29 (2008).