

To: Dr. Katherine Naff
From: Luiz Guevara
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Re: Bringing Smart Growth to Massachusetts Memo

During the mid 90's Massachusetts experienced unprecedented growth in housing and development. As more roads and homes were built outside of urban areas, there was an exodus of families and industry from the State's major city sectors, mainly Boston and Cambridge. The suburban neighborhoods that resulted from this housing-boom were not conducive to pedestrian friendly streets, public transportation, or affordable housing, and also were encroaching more and more on the State's limited open space.

Governor Mitt Romney ran on a campaign that promised to fix the State's "urban sprawl" problem, so one of his first acts as Governor was to appoint environmental advocate Douglas Foy to the position Secretary of the Office of Commonwealth Development (OCD). Mr. Foy was given the task of developing and implementing a "smart growth" plan, which would encourage less urban sprawl, and more appropriate uses of land within city business and residential sectors. Mr. Foy has many hurdles to jump in order to successfully complete this task, the following is a description of some of these hurdles and recommendations to overcome them.

Home Grown State: When it comes to creating a "smart growth" plan for the State of Massachusetts, Douglas Foy and the Office of Commonwealth Development, are experiencing major push-back from local governments and jurisdictions. State level mandates often go nowhere in states, like Massachusetts, that place a higher value on having strong local governments and property rights (Briggs, 2008). In order for Mr. Foy to successfully develop a "smart growth" plan he needs to have buy-in from local communities that will eventually be responsible for implementing the plan (Briggs, 2008). This means employing a Jeffersonian-Madisonian model of public administration in which the OCD is a non-bureaucratic institution that is responsive to the needs of local governments (Kettl, 2002).

In order for local governments, and the residents of Massachusetts to buy-in to the "smart growth" plan, the OCD must avoid top-down hierarchal models of administration, and instead focus on building an environment of inclusiveness (Briggs, 2008). Other States have developed "smart growth" planning frameworks that have shown little to no impact on growth patterns in local communities, because of local resistance to State mandates (DeGrove 2005; Logan and Zhou 1989). Mr. Foy needs to invite local officials, planners, developers, and other

key stakeholders and experts to be part of the conversation when developing “smart growth” initiatives. Building consensus and broad support will allow the “smart growth” plans to gain local government support, and it will also give the final mandate a level of legitimacy that will protect it from attack over time (Briggs, 2008; Weir, 2000).

Policy Paradox: Chapter 40B of the state zoning law, or as its better know the “Anti-Snob” zoning law has created a policy paradox that Douglas Foy must confront head on. Policy paradoxes are situations in which policies take on multiple, and often conflicting meanings and interpretations (Stone, 2002). In this case, the State of Massachusetts wants local governments to adopt “smart growth” development plans that will limit the amount of urban sprawl in their jurisdiction, but at the same time they have given housing developers the ability to circumnavigate local zoning laws if the city does not meet a 10% quota of affordable housing.

The underlying value or goal of the “anti-snob” law, like most policies, has to do with equity, efficiency, security, liberty, and community (Stone, 2002). The conflicting conceptions of these goals that has created friction between state and local lawmakers, so it’s up to the Mr. Foy and the State to diminish this rift by carefully restructuring its plan to provide affordable housing, without sending mixed messages. The OCD should continue to require for 10% affordable housing in all cities, but they should give local governments more time to develop sustainable plans and funding sources for these homes. Mr. Foy should also push for a redefinition of “affordable housing” to include privately owned homes that are rented or sold below the median home range

Carrots not Sticks: Many local governments have opted for urban sprawl because the increase in revenue through property taxes is a strong economic incentive to develop more housing. Rather than threatening to punish jurisdictions that fail to implement “smart growth” plans, Mr. Foy should push for the State of Massachusetts to give economic incentives to cities that meet “smart growth” requirements. Incentives can be given to organizations that build more homes in urban areas, or increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their public transportation system. Possible economic incentives include subsidized loans, or grants for infrastructure repairs, capital projects, and more schools. By providing incentives to those that meet “smart-growth” requirements, OCD might be able to convince other local governments to come on board too. As Briggs explains, staunchly independent states like Utah can move forward with their growth issues by directly financing local governments efforts, and “offering carrots without the sticks” (Briggs, p. 80, 2008).

Work Cited

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