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To: Douglas Foy, Secretary of the Office of Commonwealth Development  
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Subject: Addressing Barriers to Smart Growth in Massachusetts

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The growing loss of open space and an increase in sprawl have both been identified as growing concerns by the public. However, before the issue of sprawl can effectively be addressed, the State has to address other issues that are posing as a barrier to smart growth. These issues include reforming current policies, creating consistent growth management policies across different municipalities, and gaining support for public transit improvements. All of these things must be considered while considering a declining budget. In this memo, these three outstanding issues along with their recommendations are identified.

**Reforming Current Policies** Antiquated policies, including Proposition 2.5 and Chapter 40A, need to be updated to reflect the current state of Massachusetts and its economy. Proposition 2.5 not only creates a ceiling on property taxes which limits revenue, but also encourages development throughout municipalities. Similarly, Chapter 40A allowed development without local approval.

*Recommendation:* To address these outdated policies, an evaluation should be conducted to determine what policies and how they should be changed. A final step in the policy cycle includes policy evaluation, which considers the policy's impacts and its overall effectiveness (Theodoulou, 2004). Reasons for change include a change in the economic and political environment (Theodoulou, 2004). A policy evaluation of these policies will determine their current impact in today's economy.

**Creating Consistent Growth Management Policies** Land use management has evolved to become the responsibility of local government. This local autonomy has resulted in the

fragmentation of government in the arena of land management, which often leads to the “[separation] from the resources” that might otherwise help solve the problem (Denhardt, 2006, p. 107). Local government independence has also become a barrier to smart growth and mixed-use development.

*Recommendation* Similar to the existing transportation planning organizations, special districts or organizations could be created to address land use management (Denhardt, 2006, p. 108).

They are often created with the intent to “handle... public function over a specifically designated area” (O’Toole, 2005, 128). In this way, municipalities can work together to address problems specific to their geographic region, while yet still maintaining some autonomy. Upon creation and coordination of these special districts, the state can act as integrator, to “further coordinate activities, handle problems, and ensure the provision of quality services” (Goldsmith, 2004, p. 76).

**Leveraging Support for Public Transit and Infrastructure** Infrastructure influences sprawl. In addition to leveraging funds, public support is needed to help implement the expansion of the Greenbush commuter rail line and other public transit projects. However, many citizens do are not in favor of these projects as they will “harm land values and historic buildings in the vicinity” (Scott, 2005, p. 16).

*Recommendation* To address these concerns, local and state government should provide outreach and education awareness to the public about how public transit projects will aid in decreasing sprawl, and thus preserving open space. The media can be a key stakeholder in shaping a public issue, especially by portraying public transit as a benefit to the public (Briggs, 2008). As more people become convinced of the projects’ feasibility and benefits, it could create a bandwagon effect and influences others to be in favor of the proposal.

## References

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