



*EPA Office of Sustainable Communities*  
**SMART GROWTH POLICY  
AND CODE AUDIT TOOL  
FOR RURAL  
COMMUNITIES**

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February 26, 2013  
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# Smart Growth Audit Tool Overview



# Smart Growth Technical Assistance

- **EPA's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program has three goals:**
  1. **To support communities interested in implementing smart growth policies;**
  2. **To create regional examples of smart growth that can catalyze similar projects in the area; and**
  3. **To identify common barriers and opportunities for smart growth development and create new tools that other communities can use.**



# Smart Growth Policy and Code Audit Tool for Rural Communities

- **Purpose of Tool: Help rural communities assess the level of support for smart growth in their plans and policies, and identify potential changes that can support their economic, environmental, health, and fiscal well being.**
- **Builds upon two previous EPA publications:**
  1. **Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities**
  2. **Essential Smart Growth Fixes for Rural Planning, Zoning, and Development Codes**



# Smart Growth Policy and Code Audit Tool for Rural Communities

- This technical assistance focuses on smart growth strategies most applicable to rural communities and small towns.
  1. Large town/small city and village/small town
  2. Rural landscape
- Focus on Madison County and NY with a view toward creating a national tool.
- The recommendations include code strategies, plan policies and example programs.



# Applying the Audit Tool

- Tool is being used during ½ Day Workshops with Oneida, Chittenango, Brookfield.
- Includes questions about content of code and policy documents for 11 goal areas, and applicability of various strategies in the community.
- Points to areas that may need updates if the community's goal is to promote smart growth.



# The 11 Goal Areas

1. Engage and connect community members
2. Improve health and promote active living
3. Increase energy efficiency and provide renewable energy
4. Invest in efficient public infrastructure systems and operations
5. Meet housing needs for a range of ages and incomes
6. Preserve historical and cultural resources
7. Protect natural habitats and ecosystems
8. Provide transportation choices
9. Revitalize village and town centers
10. Strengthen the local and regional economies
11. Support productive agriculture for a variety of markets



# Tools for implementing smart growth: Codes

- Zoning Ordinance
- Subdivision Ordinance/Land Development Ordinances
- Engineering Standards
- Design Standards
- Building Code/Energy Code



# Tools for implementing smart growth: Plans

- Comprehensive Plan/Area-Wide Growth Strategy
- Economic Development Plan/Strategic Plan
- Systems Plan (such as a Long-Range Transportation Plan)
- Special Area Plans (such as a Downtown Redevelopment Plan)
- Sustainability Plan
- Public Outreach Guides





## Typical issues faced by rural communities and small towns:

- **Loss of resource-dependent and manufacturing jobs**
- **Slow growth, population loss, aging population**
- **Rapid and unplanned growth in communities near a university, urban center, or natural attractions**
- **Fiscal challenges to maintaining or improving infrastructure and amenities**
- **Public health challenges including high rates of obesity**





## Issues faced in Madison County:

- **Steady growth, though most has occurred outside of villages**
- **Major decline in farm land over past 60 years, though has recently stabilized**
- **Aging population, especially among farmers**
- **High rates of obesity, heart disease, asthma**
- **Fragmented planning responsibilities**





# Smart Growth in the Rural Context





# What is Rural Smart Growth?

Development strategies intended to:

- Support the rural landscape,
- Help existing places thrive, and
- Create great new places.



Smart growth supports and strengthens the traditional resource-based economy.



Photo: Norwich Farmers Market

**Smart growth makes use of land preservation strategies to support working lands and strengthen community centers.**



# Smart growth prioritizes public investment in existing community centers.



Photo: Port Washington, EPA Smart Growth (Flickr, 2011)



Smart growth encourages private development and employer relocation in existing community centers.





**Smart growth supports development of new compact, mixed use, walkable places.**

Photo: Meadowmont Village, Chapel Hill, NC; (Renaissance Planning Group, 2012)



**Smart growth improves accessibility by connecting people to destinations and offering multiple ways to get around.**



*Photo: Woodville, FL (Renaissance Planning Group, 2010)*



# Smart Growth Case Studies

## What Does Rural Smart Growth Look Like?



Photo: Charlottesville Times



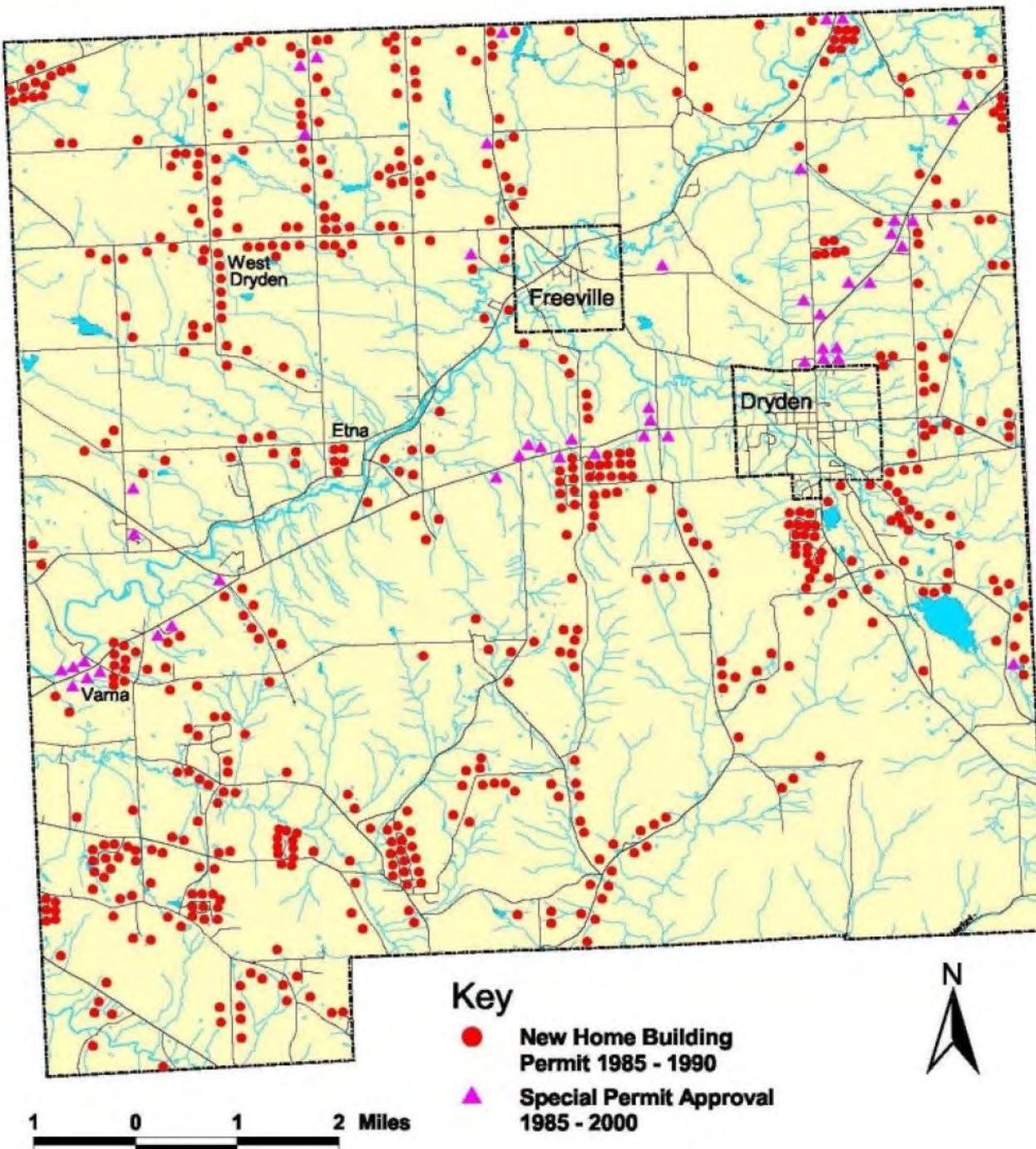


# Shaping Growth in Dryden, New York



# Challenges

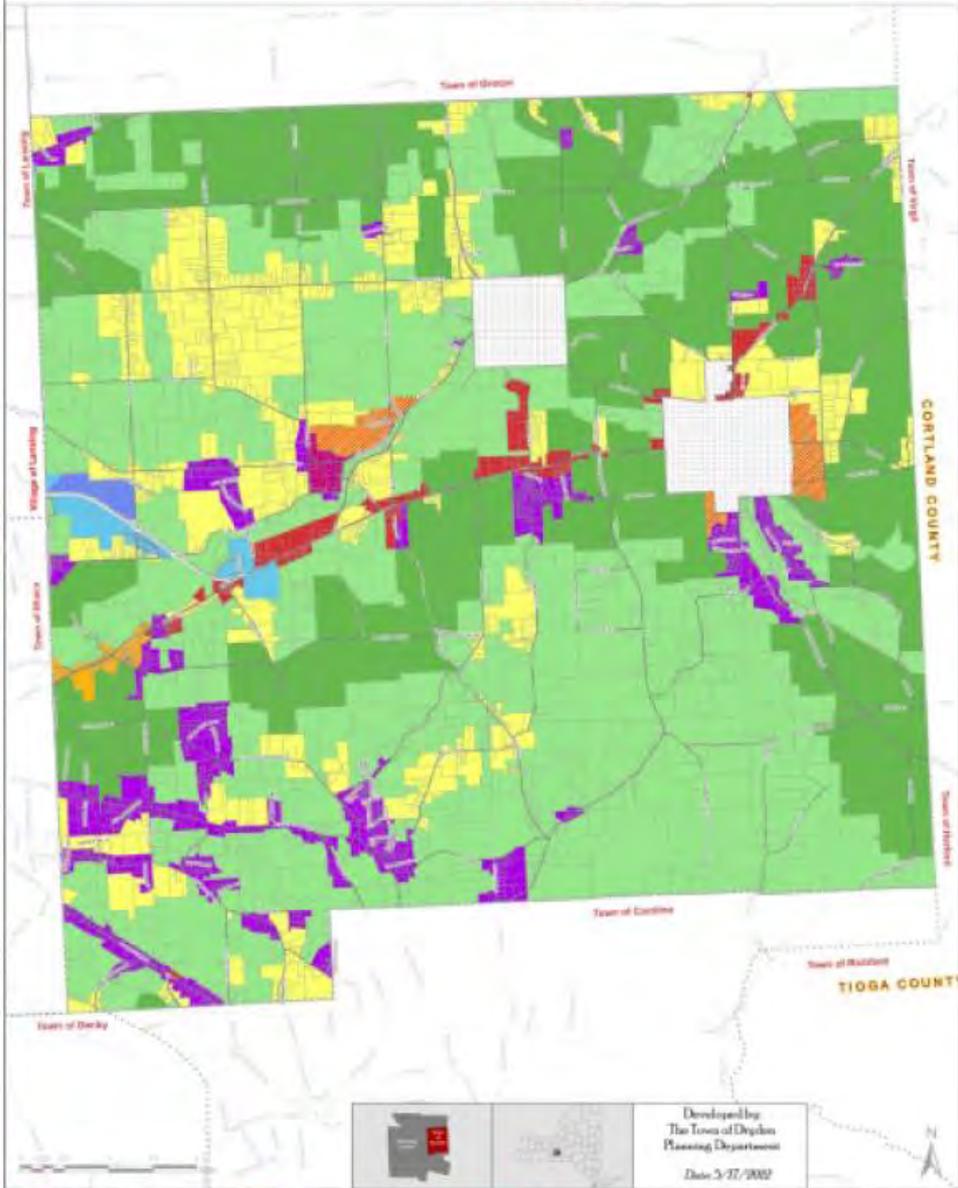
- Steady growth outside of the town's villages
- Farmland and open space preservation
- Need for more middle-income housing options
- Potential negative impacts resulting from natural gas drilling





# TOWN OF DRYDEN ZONING MAP

FINAL DRAFT



Developed by  
The Town of Dryden  
Planning Department  
Date 5-27-2009

Mixed Use Commercial District	Light Industrial/Adult District	Traditional Neighborhood Development Overlay District	Wilage
Conservation District	Light Industrial District	Rural Agriculture District	
Hamlet District	Neighborhood Residential District	Rural Residential District	

## Smart Growth Responses

- Developed Residential and Commercial Design Guidelines (2008)
- Updated Zoning Law (2012)
- Varna Community Development Plan (2012)
- The Dryden Sustainability Inventory (2012)
- Next steps:
  - Develop sustainability goals and a Sustainability Action Plan
  - Update Town Comprehensive Plan





Image: Living in Dryden

## Early Results

- Developers are applying design guidelines to new proposals

## Lessons Learned

- Starting process with design guidelines was critical
- Importance of view sheds, water/sewer infrastructure
- Importance of simple strategies and plain language





## A New Direction in Cheyenne, Wyoming



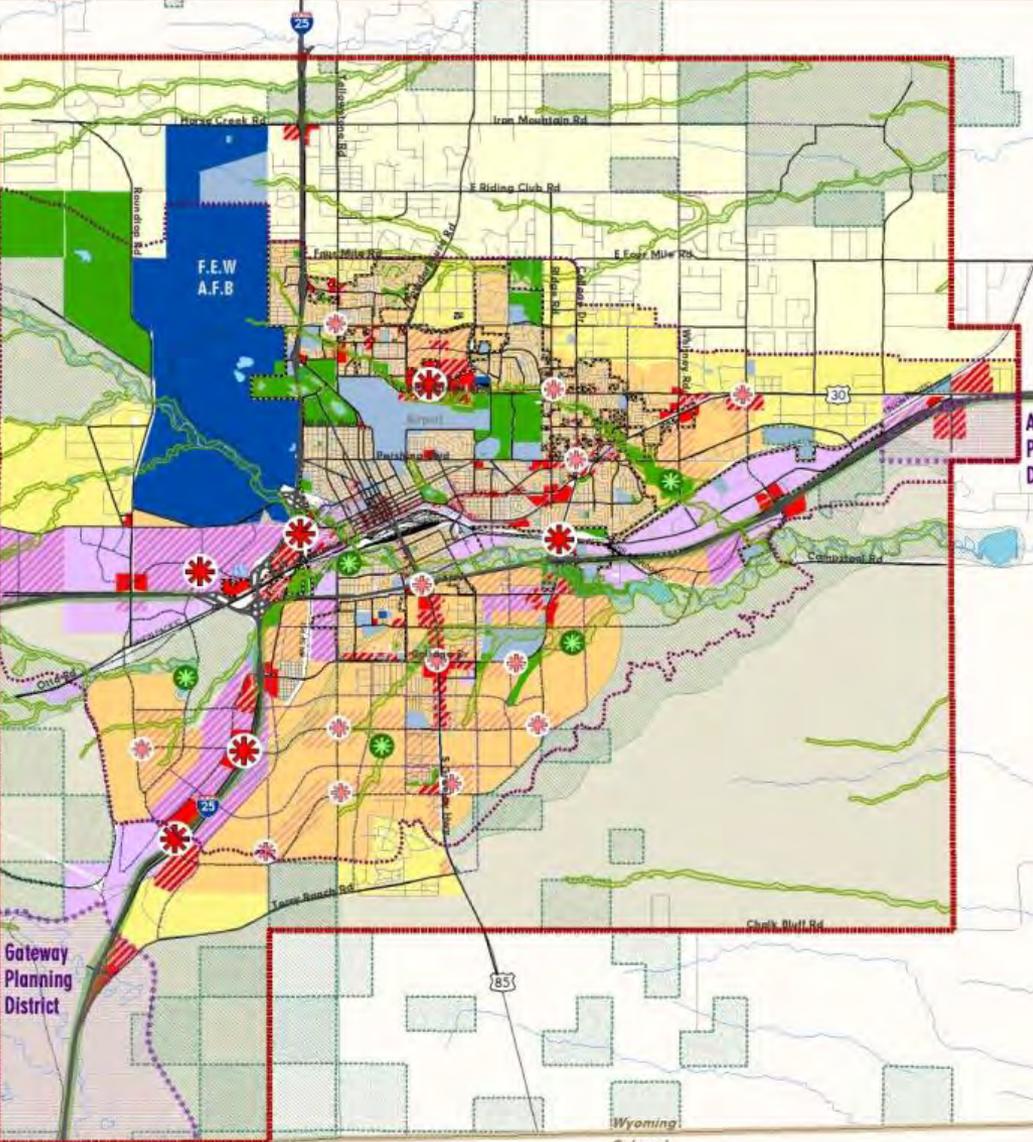
# Challenges

- Rapid growth spreading along interstates and major highways
- Economy heavily dependent on public sector employment
- Competition with other Front Range cities for people and jobs
- Outdated codes and zoning regulations, often in conflict with each other
- Sensitive political situation regarding the intersection of property rights and land use policies



# Smart Growth Responses

- Forum 1999 led by Greater Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce
- PlanCheyenne (2006 Comprehensive Plan)
- Implementing PlanCheyenne: Strategies and Opportunities for Smarter Growth in Cheyenne
- Adopted Unified Development Code (UDC) in 2012 to streamline zoning code, subdivision regulations, and street standards



**FUTURE LAND USE PLAN**  
**Cheyenne Area Master Plan**





Image: Renaissance Planning Group

## Early Results

- UDC is far more accessible for developers and has expedited the review process
- Parking credits have reduced unnecessary parking provision
- Proposed commercial development has been more attractive and pedestrian-friendly

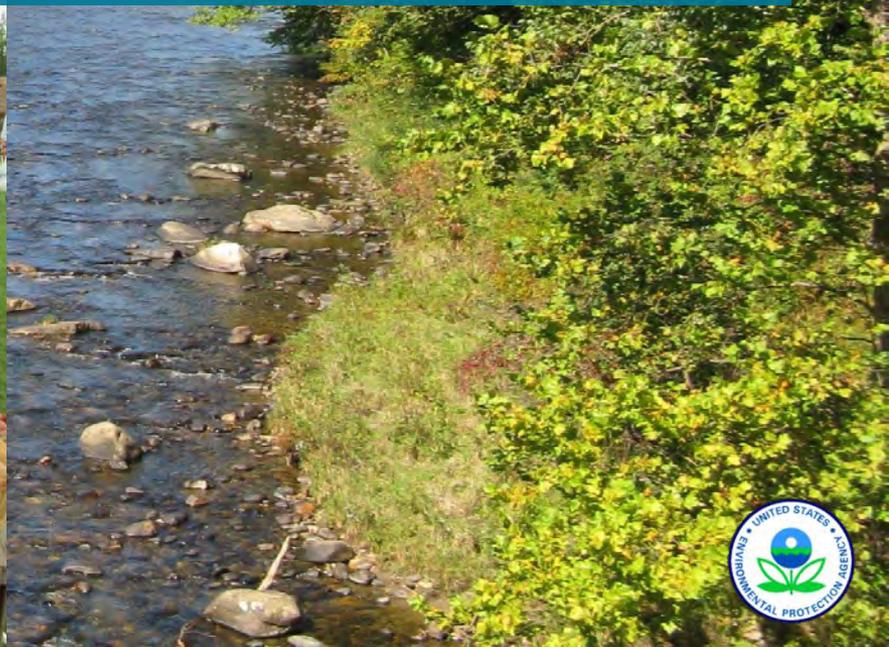
## Lessons Learned

- Provide incentives for good design
- Remove obstacles to infill
- Getting developer buy-in on UDC





## Smart Growth Audit Tool Goal Areas



# 11 smart growth goal areas were identified with Madison County's help for inclusion in the rural policy and code audit tool



# 1. Strengthen the Local and Regional Economies

- Streamline the development review process
- Support business attraction & retention through economic development policies, incentives, and promotion
- Support new business development with assistance and education programs
- Encourage local spending and tourism through Buy Local and other marketing campaigns





## STARworks Center for Creative Enterprise: Star, NC

- A former textile mill now used as a business incubator
- Currently houses the regional development organization, biofuels producer, glass blower, ceramic works, and community supported agriculture



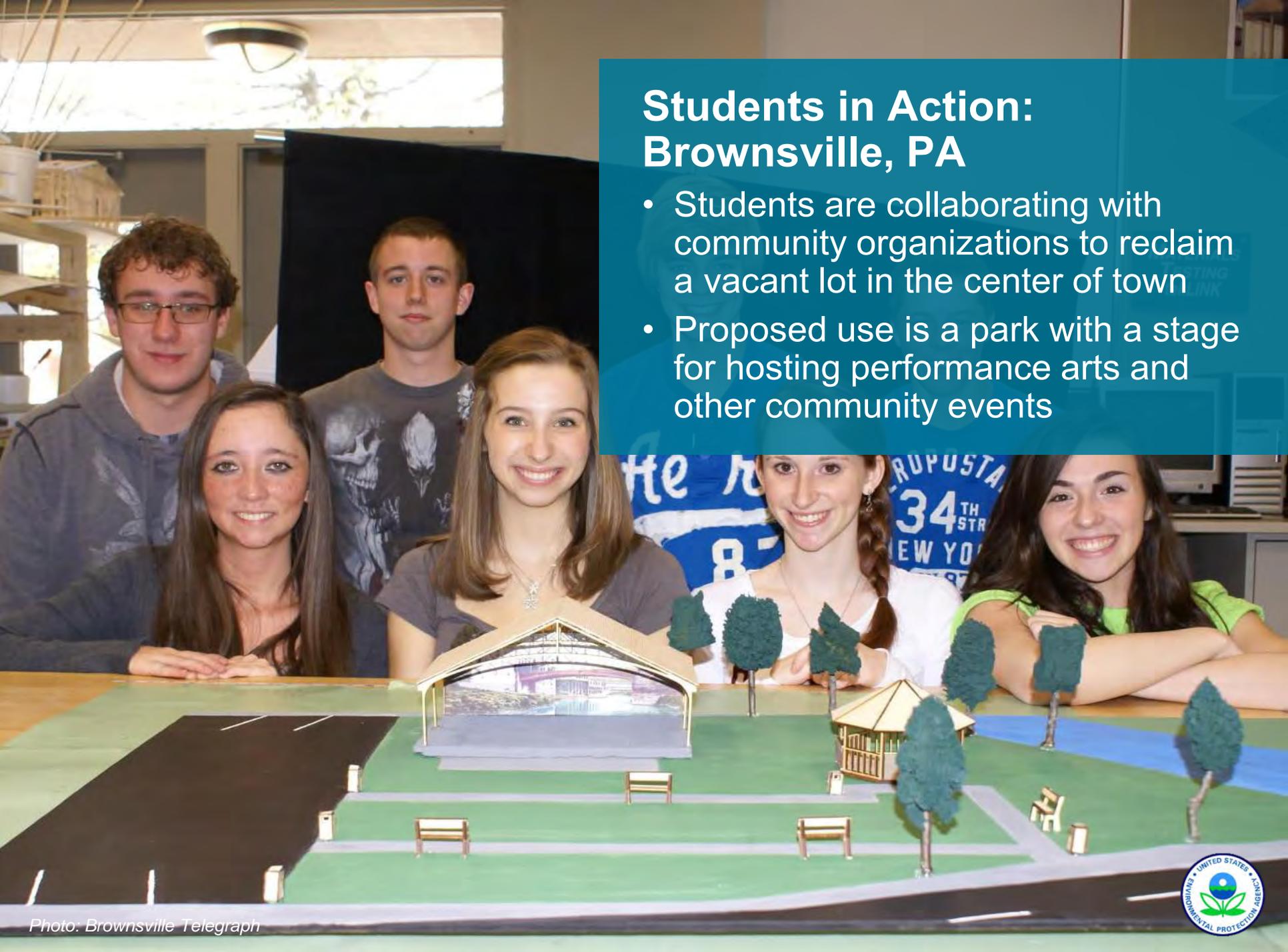
## 2. Engage and Connect Community Members

- Engage the public in the planning process
- Provide places and opportunities for community interaction
- Encourage the establishment and active participation of non-governmental organizations in the community
- Use the internet and social media to foster communication



## Students in Action: Brownsville, PA

- Students are collaborating with community organizations to reclaim a vacant lot in the center of town
- Proposed use is a park with a stage for hosting performance arts and other community events





### 3. Improve health and promote active living

- Support urban agriculture and healthy food retailing
- Provide access to open space and recreational opportunities
- Encourage active transportation modes such as walking, biking, and transit
- Improve access to health care services





## Open space development: Clifton Park, NY

- Adopted Trails Plan, Open Space Plan, Land Conservation Plan
- Purchase/transfer of development rights, conservation easements
- Conservation subdivision zoning
- Open space incentive zoning

## 4. Protect Natural Habitats and Ecosystems

- Use landscaping and site design to reduce water consumption
- Protect water resources from pollution
- Conserve open spaces for agriculture, recreation, and wildlife
- Protect and expand urban tree canopy

# Westfield River Watershed Protection: West Springfield, MA

- Planning Commission developed Open Space and Recreation Plan and 5-year Action Plan
- 100' no development buffer zone established in 6 riverfront communities
- Bylaws established for corridor land use to protect wilderness character of river
- Federal designation as a Wild and Scenic River

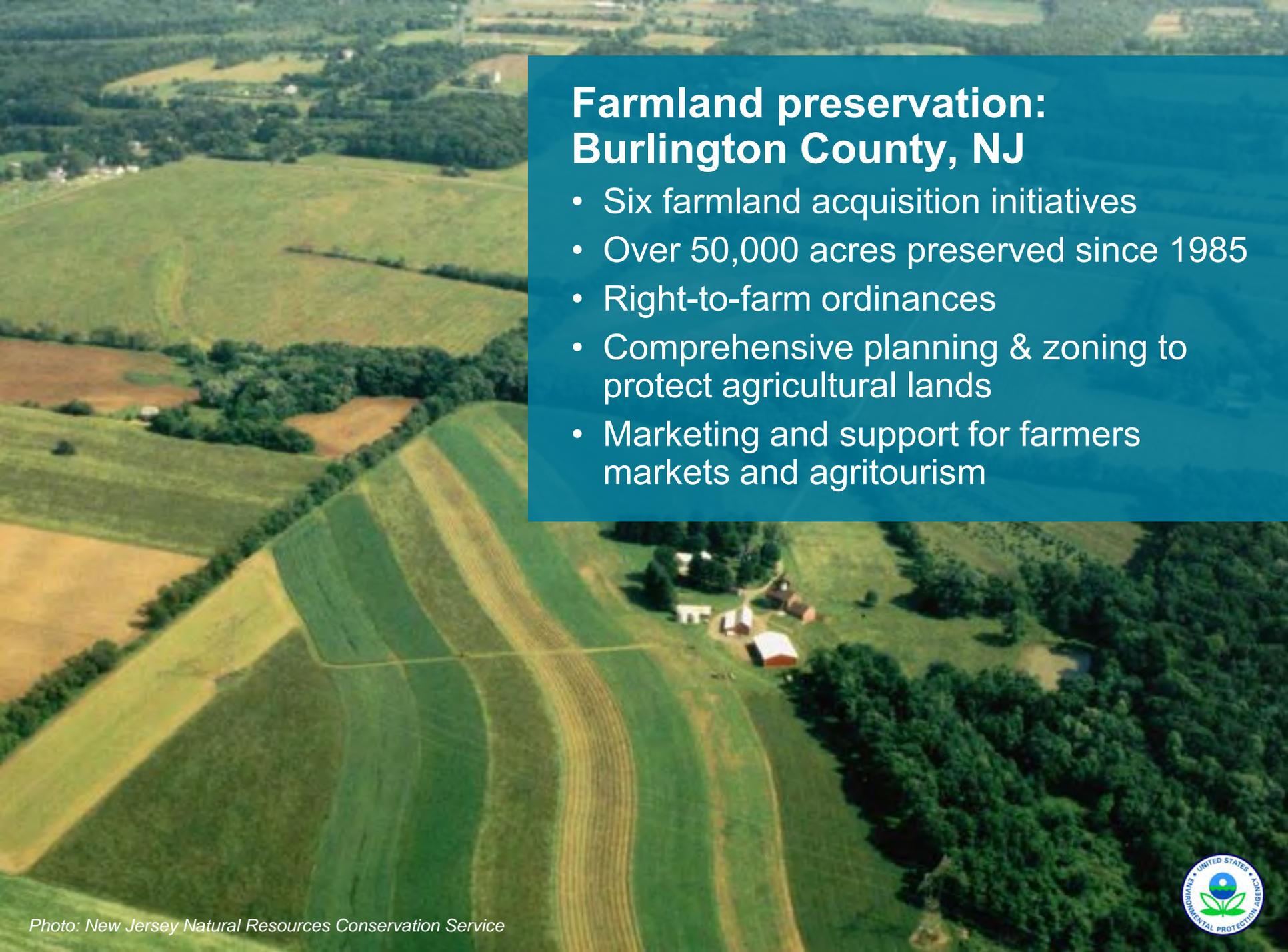




## 5. Support Productive Agriculture for a Variety of Markets

- Preserve agricultural lands and other rural open space
- Support ecotourism
- Provide marketing and opportunities for farmers to sell goods locally and in nearby metropolitan areas





## Farmland preservation: Burlington County, NJ

- Six farmland acquisition initiatives
- Over 50,000 acres preserved since 1985
- Right-to-farm ordinances
- Comprehensive planning & zoning to protect agricultural lands
- Marketing and support for farmers markets and agritourism

A photograph of a modern, multi-unit residential development. The buildings feature light-colored siding, dark roofs, and large, covered porches. A well-maintained green lawn and a paved walkway are visible in the foreground. Several people are seen sitting on the porches and walking on the path. The scene is set in a lush, green environment with tall trees in the background.

## 6. Meet Housing Needs For Different Ages and Incomes

- Encourage development of a wide range of housing types
- Ensure an adequate supply of housing for older adults and low-income residents
- Encourage mixed use development in housing communities



## New mixed-housing development: Longmont, CO

- New Urbanist development
- 585 units on 340 lots
- Includes detached homes, townhomes, apartments, live/work lofts, central park, and businesses
- Variety of building styles from traditional to modern
- Pedestrian-friendly design





## 7. Revitalize Villages and Town Centers

- Use zoning, plans, and incentives to encourage mixed-use development in existing centers
- Promote street-level activity through site, building, and streetscape design
- Improve safety, comfort, and convenience of walking in activity centers
- Focus transportation and infrastructure improvements towards existing centers





## Corridor revitalization: Ranson & Charles Town, WV

- Two separate corridor revitalization efforts connecting both communities
- Goal is to clean & reuse brownfield sites, create Complete Streets, and attract mixed use infill development
- Adopting new zoning code with green downtown overlay district
- Public and private projects will incorporate green infrastructure and design elements



## 8. Preserve Historical and Cultural Resources

- Preserve/protect buildings, districts, viewsheds, and other sites of historic/cultural significance
- Establish design guidelines for historic districts
- Inventory and document significant historic/cultural resources
- Provide signage and marketing for significant historic/cultural sites





## Preservation Planning: Staunton, VA

- Façade improvement program
- Preservation implemented through tax incentives, architectural review board, technical assistance to building owners
- Streetscape and transportation improvements, financed in part by special tax district
- National Register & VA Main Street designations



## 9. Provide Transportation Choices

- Ensure new development is walk & bike friendly
- Retrofit sidewalks, bike lanes/paths, and pedestrian-friendly streetscaping (benches, trees, etc.)
- Encourage development of a well-connected street network
- Identify opportunities for implementing or expanding transit services



# Pedestrian-friendly street design: Lincoln City, OR

- Implemented traffic-calming program
- Installed green median with turn lanes in place of center two-way turn lane
- Sidewalks widened to 10' where possible
- Streetscape and aesthetic improvements
- Improvements to parallel local street network





## 10. Invest in Efficient Public Infrastructure Systems and Operations

- Encourage cluster development
- Reduce storm water runoff
- Expand tree canopy
- Require green design elements in public building and infrastructure projects
- Expedite approval of low-impact projects



## Rain gardens: Bellingham, WA

- City installed three rain gardens in 2003 to capture parking lot stormwater runoff
- Saved 75-80% off installation cost versus more traditional stormwater management structures
- Currently installing 36 gardens along downtown streets



# 11. Increase Energy Efficiency and Provide Renewable Energy

- Set minimum energy efficiency standards for new building and site construction
- Provide programs and incentives for energy-efficient building retrofits
- Promote local clean and renewable energy production
- Support energy conservation through government programs and purchasing





## Green design: Greensburg, KS

- All new public buildings must be LEED Platinum certified
- Energy consumption reduced through high-efficiency windows and use of recycled materials
- Clean energy produced by wind turbines, solar panels, and geothermal



# Next Steps

- Refine the tool incorporating feedback from local staff.
- Prepare final report that includes updated tool.
- County and local staff use their training to apply tool in interested communities in Madison County.
- Communities use tool to identify code and policies to consider updating.