One of the main goals of Smart Growth is to reduce urban sprawl and create close-knit communities. This can be achieved by prioritizing growth and development in existing neighborhoods. Some of the most successful strategies to reach this goal incorporate “working with what you have,” such as the ones listed below.

- Preservation of Historic Areas
- Fix-It-First Infrastructure Programs
- Reusing Vacant Lots and Brownfield

Preservation of Historic Areas
Preserving historic buildings and neighborhoods protects community character while reducing economic and environmental impacts associated with demolition and disposal. The National Trust for Historic Preservation found that repairing historic structures has a positive impact on investment and real estate values. Historic structures become desirable places to live and work largely because of their architectural uniqueness. Historic renovation projects also generate more jobs than the new construction of similar-sized projects.

Fix-It-First Infrastructure Programs
When cities repair and maintain existing infrastructure before extending new roads, water and sewer lines into undeveloped areas, they create incentives to invest in settled areas. In the EPA’s book, Using Smart Growth Techniques as Stormwater Best Management Practices, authors explain how a public works department might reduce sprawl by implementing a ‘Fix-It First’ budgetary policy. This would place the first spending priorities on repair, operations and maintenance. A sample goal might be to fix 25% of existing water infrastructure over five years.

Infrastructure investment lays the foundation for development, redevelopment, or infill of land in existing neighborhoods and business districts. Redevelopment occurs in areas that have already been developed. It can take place site-by-site or as part of a larger effort to spur investment and development activity. Gulfport, Mississippi’s Main Street Program attracted developers to reinvest in downtown after Hurricane Katrina with financial and regulatory incentives. It is currently restoring the exteriors of more than eighty buildings in Downtown Gulfport. Redevelopment also helps preserve open land in surrounding areas, thus lowering flood risks and stormwater management expenses.1

Historic buildings, like this former bus station renovated by the Gulfport Main Street Program, offer architectural uniqueness. Photo provided by Gulfport Main Street.

A historic bank building in downtown Gulfport, MS, gets a facelift after suffering damage from Hurricane Katrina. Photo by Kimberly Miller, AICP.
Community Character: Fix It First

Reusing Vacant Lots and Brownfields

**Brownfields** - sites that once contained soil and/or groundwater contamination - can be identified, cleaned up and redeveloped to provide opportunities for community development. The EPA offers grants to communities to help them assess and clean-up environmental contamination and return properties to productive use. The City of Hattiesburg received a brownfields grant in 2005 and is using those funds to conduct environmental assessment of identified properties in the city and articulate the local vision and goals for the eventual redevelopment of these parcels. Once the assessment and associated clean-up is complete, the redevelopment process will encourage re-use of property and return these once-contaminated lots to productive use.

**Tools**

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<tr>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
<th>POLICIES • TOOLS • TECHNIQUES</th>
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| Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place | Create a local [historic preservation](#) program  
Encourage the use of [Federal Historic Tax Credits](#) to receive a 20% income tax credit on the rehabilitation of income-producing historic properties  
Enact [clear design guidelines](#) so that streets, buildings, and public spaces work together to create a sense of place  
Revitalize aging downtowns with [Smart Growth Tools for Main Street](#) |
| Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities | Adopt a “Fix-It-First” infrastructure policy  
Conduct an “infill checkup” to evaluate and prioritize infill and brownfield sites for redevelopment  
Create [special improvement districts](#) for focused investment  
Strengthen state and local [brownfields programs](#)  
Use stormwater best practices to encourage [redevelopment](#) of underused properties |

*For a complete list of tools and resources, please see the “Tools & Resources Index” section of the Smart Growth and Sustainability Toolbox.*

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