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Checklist of Takeaways

Part 1: Densifying Existing Areas

1.1 Programs of Overall Metropolitan Densification

1.1.1 Greenbelts:

- Greenbelts are a viable strategy for growth control but must be combined with adequate policies, primarily by providing land for development within the area surrounded by the greenbelt and restricting leapfrog development or channeling it into well-serviced growth centers.

- Without proper policy alignment, greenbelts will only exacerbate sprawl and increases in housing prices.

- Greenbelt strategies typically require regional or state-level government to coordinate multiple municipalities.

1.1.2 Urban Growth Boundaries and Urban Service Areas:

- UGBs and USAs allow a city or metropolitan area more flexibility in guiding development than greenbelts, as well as preventing the creation of satellite towns or cities outside of the boundary.

- While some housing development inside an urban growth boundary can be lower density to keep housing costs down, some areas typically must be developed at higher densities (though not necessarily high rise). Housing configurations within UGBs might include small detached houses, row or townhouses, or low-rise apartments.

- By linking development with infrastructure provision, urban service areas ensure that providing infrastructure and services happens at a pace the responsible government can sustain financially, instead of obliging government to provide infrastructure at the rate that development occurs.

1.1.3 Density Requirements

- Both maximum and minimum density requirements can be used to structure urban space.
• Density requirements are greatly strengthened when coordinated with infrastructure plans, especially those dealing with transportation in order to ensure that new development is adequately serviced (Dodson 2010, 488).

• Increasing density around current or future public transit stations (known as transit-oriented development) or activity/town centers are common strategies to channel density.

1.1.4 Strong Metropolitan Planning Agencies

• Although challenging to manage, metropolitan planning can allow for greater coordination and equity in planning processes and outcomes.

• Metropolitan planning agencies can offer much-needed resources for smaller cities or municipalities who do not have the technical or financial capacity to conduct urban planning independently.

• The frameworks for metropolitan planning agencies can be complicated to put in place legally but financial incentives from higher levels of government can help to encourage their creation. For example, to receive federal transportation funding, U.S. metropolitan areas need to form a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) that conducts regional transportation planning.

1.1.5 Changes in Property Taxation

• Differentiation in the level of property tax for underused or vacant properties is a mechanism that can help governments to encourage development in targeted locations.

• As with many density strategies, differential property taxes rely heavily on a robust property taxation and cadaster or property registration system.

1.1.6 Transfer of Development Rights

• TDR policies allow an overall level of development (number of units or area of building) to be achieved within a designated area.

• The main problem is ensuring that the “receiving areas” have capacity to take the additional development, e.g. adequate infrastructure and neighbors amenable to such development.

• Good design that is sensitive to the context can help solve some of these issues.

1.1.7 Alignment of Government Policies and Programs

• Aligning policies can help to reduce unintended consequences and allow for more coordinated and effective leveraging of government resources.

• This alignment presents political challenges, as different policies often reflect the needs of different constituencies and the priorities of various government entities.

• National governments can foster alignment by making it a condition for funding.

1.2 Simplifying the Urban Infill Development Process

1.2.1 One-Stop Shops

• By shortening approval processes, one-stop shops can save time and costs for developers and governments alike.

• In doing so, one-stop shops can reduce development risk, thereby increasing the attractiveness of infill development, which tend to be more complex from a regulatory perspective.
• One-stop shops must be carefully regulated to ensure that they create a more equitable process for all developers, rather than continuing to favor certain influential actors.

1.2.2 Clear Rules and Regulations

• Clear rules and regulation reduce uncertainty for developers and investors and thus increase the attractiveness of development opportunities, including infill and densification.
• Other active stakeholders, like community groups, may also benefit from having a clearer sense of likely development outcomes to help guide priorities and community goals.

1.2.3 Project Facilitators

• Employing project facilitators provides a flexible approach to expediting development and encourages a strengthened relationship between the public and private sector.
• Governments need to deploy strategies to mitigate corruption while providing improved and more efficient interaction with users.
• A public project facilitator should be able to give all developers equal access, potentially opening up opportunities for smaller, local developers.

1.2.4 Educational Programs and Materials

• One barrier to infill development is the availability of educational resources and technical information. Providing clear and structured information to developers can help reduce development time lags. Even developers who are familiar with local development processes may benefit from regular updates concerning any changes in regulations.
• Educational programs and materials can be combined or aligned with other efforts, such as the initiation of a one-stop shop, changes to zoning regulations, or the creation of a municipal website to share data.

1.2.5 Land Readjustment

• Land readjustment can provide a mechanism for overcoming the barriers of land fragmentation in order to coordinate the development of additional infrastructure and buildings.
• It is important to pair the preparation of formal urban plans with land readjustment in order to achieve desirable planning outcomes.
• Because of the number of landowners and actors involved, readjustment can be a highly challenging process to coordinate.
• Land readjustment relies on a strong land registration system.

1.2.6 Redevelopment Agencies

• Redevelopment agencies offer a flexible model for bridging between a local government agenda and private sector investment through public private partnerships.
• Because of this flexible model, the approaches of redevelopment agencies and their dedication to community engagement vary substantially.
• Across the United States, local redevelopment agencies function in vastly different circumstances and with varying missions and levels of power. Recent federal programs (through the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative) have attempted to support and guide the work of local redevelopment agencies.
1.3 Promoting Acceptance of Urban Infill

1.3.1 Proactive Participation and Public Education

- At a minimum, highly interactive and visual community exercises can help to clarify complex development ideas in order to facilitate meaningful engagement. This proactive participation approach can raise awareness among residents about why development is taking a particular form and the expected benefits and risks.

- Proactive participation can also provide developers with a clearer understanding of local expectations and enable them to provide acceptable solutions.

- Current marketing techniques promoted by developers do very little to adequately address the true advantages and disadvantages of new developments in peripheral areas.

- Blogs, magazines, and other media that feature apartment, city, or high density life-styles can be an effective and informal way to market densification. Awareness can also be raised through conferences or major events organized by universities, research organizations, or major housing agencies about the benefits of and strategies for sustainable urban infill and densification.

1.3.2 Pilot Programs

- Pilot programs can allow government agencies and organizations to “kick the tires” before launching a large-scale program, thus reducing unnecessary spending or risk.

- Pilots can increase the likelihood of overall acceptance, as there is opportunity to assuage the fears of skeptical community members and to make improvements to performance and adjust policies to reflect community concerns.

1.3.3 Design Standards

- Design standards can help to promote new developments that are in keeping with existing community character. Since such standards lead to more predictable design, they can help to reduce resident resistance and encourage greater integration of new developments.

- Care should be taken that the imposition of design standards does not excessively increase costs and are not used as an excuse to stifle infill development through unnecessarily strict regulation.

1.3.4 Redevelopment of Historic Centers

- Historic downtown revitalization is challenged by limited government resources, as well as coordination, corruption, and lack of code enforcement.

- Emphasizing code enforcement and creating a clear framework that explicitly considers which target groups will be served through residential development can help to guide the redevelopment of historic downtowns.

- Partnerships and alliances with local institutions are key to successfully integrating housing projects within historic centers. These partnerships, with knowledge and expertise from local actors, can help facilitate integration during the rehabilitation process, which ranges from undertaking property inventories and social integration strategies, to financing for participatory design.

1.4 Promoting Alternative Tenure

1.4.1 Rental Housing

- Rental housing must confront the general tendency and policy bias toward
homeownership in many markets, whether for reasons of availability, cultural custom, density limitations, etc.

- Rental housing is often made possible through partnerships by the public and private sectors.
- Regulatory reform is often necessary to enable the construction and incentivizing of rental housing.

1.4.2 Accessory Apartments

- Accessory apartments can provide an option for incremental densification, particularly in areas where more intensive forms of infill development are not possible.
- Zoning and other building regulations in most areas with high rates of owner occupancy and residential lots with single structures prohibit the construction of accessory apartments, regardless of whether the unit is detached or a part of the primary dwelling. Allowing the legal, as-of-right construction of these units is an important first-step in promoting accessory apartments.
- Given that construction of accessory apartments is initiated not by developers but instead by homeowners who may not have any construction or rental management experience, challenges may arise. Negative externalities may include a loss of privacy, parking complications, or other undesirable outcomes. In addition, in areas with substantial infill potential, such modest densification may delay more intensive development.
- Technical assistance can foster better development.

1.4.3 Progressive Housing

- For formal progressive housing to be widely adopted, it is important that residents feel that they have secure land tenure. An essential consideration is figuring out how to reach the groups targeted by progressive housing initiatives.
- Locating progressive housing projects on the urban periphery may take advantage of lower land prices in these areas but may lead to high infrastructure costs.
- To promote densification, it is important that buildings be properly designed so that additions can be safely made and separate units can be independently and affordably added over time.

Part 2: Improving Greenfield Development

2.1 Fostering Well-Serviced Additions

2.1.1 Concurrency Requirements

- Concurrency requirements can help ensure new development is well-served by infrastructure and services and bolster the amount of control governments can exert over the location of new development.
- Governments need to have a clear way of funding the infrastructure to which developments will be directed; otherwise development backlogs will result, or potential developers or investors will be deterred.

2.1.2 Exactions and Impact Fees

- Exactions and impact fees are important to reducing the expenses of new infrastructure and service provision for local governments, thus making them more willing to accept new development.
- Exactions and impact fees will typically lower longer-term costs to government, who otherwise would have needed to provide the infrastructure themselves. This savings may eventually be passed on to residents in the
form of lower taxes.

- When fees are too great, they can act as a deterrent to development. Fees may also raise housing costs at the point of purchase, as developers pass on the additional expenses to homebuyers and renters.

- Determining the levels of exactions and impact fees that sufficiently maintain infrastructure quality without substantially discouraging future development or inflating housing prices is a key area of consideration for government entities. Adjustments in the fee policy will need to be made over time.

2.1.3 Master-Planned Communities

- Comprehensively planned developments that incorporate multiple uses can provide environments where people can conduct most of their daily activities within the developments, while also linking to a wider municipality.

- Differences exist among the types of master-planned communities, with comprehensive, new town style developments and smaller and simpler master planned communities that may not provide a full complement of uses. Although “new towns” are more difficult to develop, they can have more social benefits.

- Many precedents of master-planned communities incorporate social or environmental goals, like minimal environmental impact.

2.2 Sustainable Design for New Developments

2.2.1 Smart Growth

- Smart growth is an umbrella term for a variety of strategies to intensify development while preserving open space and creating an inviting public realm.

- Smart growth frameworks are a useful resource from which local governments can improve their strategies for greenfield development and densification policies.

2.2.2 New Urbanism

- New urbanism was developed to emulate the urban forms found in 19th and early 20th century United States and traditional urban forms in Europe.

- Given this specificity of this form, the applicability to other countries and cities should be carefully considered.

- Form-based codes are one innovative approach to development regulation that new urbanists have advocated but that do not necessarily need to be “new urbanist” in design. The overall aim is to regulate the type and design of building rather than the uses.

2.2.3 Transit-Oriented Development

- TOD can help support transit services, reduce dependence on private automobiles, and provide greater accessibility to jobs, services, and housing options.

- Planning efforts must be better aligned with transportation plans in order to designate housing investment in strategic areas, a task that could logically be led by municipal or metropolitan planning authorities. Transit agencies can also play a key role in helping to coordinate transit-oriented development.

2.2.4 Conservation Subdivisions

- Conservation subdivisions can preserve ecologically and culturally valuable land while allowing for increased development and a variety of housing in designated areas.

- On the other hand, their typically low
densities may mean that residents will face long travel times.

2.2.5 Green Buildings and Low-impact Design

• Green building and green infrastructure approaches can be combined with strategies that specifically incorporate social and economic goals in order to produce a more fully “sustainable” project.

• While household scale green building strategies can have important cost savings for families, green infrastructure deserves particular attention to assure that water and sewage is properly and sustainably managed.

Part 3: Retrofitting Places

3.1 Financing Upgrades to Services and Infrastructure

3.1.1 Value Capture

• Value capture is an appealing strategy for local governments, as it helps ensure that public sector investments receive some return.

• However, value capture can be unpopular with landowners, as they may feel that they are being unfairly charged before improvements have been made or benefits realized.

• In creating and implementing value capture mechanisms, consideration needs to be given to which increases in value are being captured (land value, property value, or some other kind of value), and which beneficiaries have to pay.

3.1.2 Tax Increment Financing

• TIFs are a powerful tool for funding investments that are concentrated in a specific area.

• TIFs rely heavily on an existing and reliable property taxation and cadaster system, so that property values can be properly assessed. This may prove to be a significant challenge for local governments that do not have a cadaster system in place.

3.1.3 Betterment Contributions

• Betterment contributions allow municipalities to recoup payment for infrastructure upgrades from the beneficiaries of those upgrades.

• Unlike TIFs or value capture, these payments are not contingent upon increases in property value or other measurable values.

• Betterment contributions allow for property owners to pay the contribution over time, although for lower-income taxpayers, even this may be a burden.

• A key component (and challenge) of implementing betterment contributions is determining the area of influence for an investment and which beneficiaries need to pay.

3.1.4 Land Leasing

• Long-term ownership of land can benefit municipal governments in that revenues from leasing to private entities can be an alternative way of funding infrastructure. This is particularly important for municipalities with few other financial resources.

• Land leasing also enables governments to maintain some control over the eventual development.

3.1.5 National, State, or Regional Grants

• Grants can be a way of promoting higher-level policy objectives while also meeting local-level planning goals.
- This is particularly effective in countries where planning and development authority is decentralized to the local level. Grants are thus a key tool for incentivizing local authorities to align with higher-level government policy priorities.

3.2. Creating Neighborhood and Town Centers

3.2.1 Strategic Location

- When creating new town and neighborhood centers in existing suburbs, location is a tradeoff between a well-serviced and accessible location and available underused land.
- It is important that new centers be placed in areas easily accessible through a variety of transport modes.
- In some places, former shopping centers that were developed at low densities provide good locations for redevelopment and strategic densification.

3.2.2 Accessibility Beyond the Car

- Accessibility is a critical component to effective town centers. Town centers should be pedestrian-oriented and accessible via a variety of transportation modes.
- Transit accessibility goes hand in hand with higher density developments (such as through town centers), as the financial viability of public transit options typically increases with higher densities.

3.2.3 Urban Design

- Urban design considerations contribute significantly to the integration and quality of life of new or developed areas.
- By carefully designing new downtown or neighborhood centers near transportation nodes and integrating human-scale buildings, public spaces, road networks, and other amenities, planners and designers can help to create functional and attractive environments that provide high quality of life and promote sustainability.

3.2.4 Compatible Land Uses

- Land use should be carefully considered to ensure compatibility for developing neighborhood and town centers. Thoughtful land use decision-making is greatly supported through community engagement and participatory strategies that seek community input on proposals.
- In land use planning, the limitations of the local market should not be underestimated. Chronically vacant commercial and office space in a town center or neighborhood center can be just as harmful to the vibrancy of a place as strip malls or big boxes.

3.2.5 Community Programming

- Effective programming of public space can be key to attracting residents and visitors to a town center.
- When combined appropriately with urban design strategies, programming can allow multiple users to make the most of a public park or open space.

3.2.6 Public-Private Partnerships

- Public-private partnerships are a model through which a number of the strategies outlined here can be achieved (value capture, tax increment financing, etc.)
- The more ambitious or complicated the project undertaken by the PPP, the more likely it is to run into problems and the higher the development risk.
- In jurisdictions with little experience with
PPPs, it is best to take on simple, smaller projects first.

3.2.7 Public Engagement/Involvement
- Public engagement during stages of the planning process can increase local acceptance of a town center development.
- Community participation helps to ensure that the development is oriented toward the desires and needs of residents.
- Engagement is important not only to the appeal for residents but also for the financial success and vibrancy of the town center.

3.3 Linking Housing to Jobs

3.3.1 Inclusionary Zoning
- Inclusionary zoning is a planning tool that promotes the creation of new affordable units to enable people to afford to live in or near the communities where they work.
- Depending on the agreement, affordable units can be located on- or off-site, allowing flexibility for both the municipality and the developer to determine the best outcome.
- If perpetual affordability restrictions are not put into place, the social benefits of inclusionary zoning may be minimal if units quickly revert to market rate rents or sales prices.
- If improperly formulated or implemented, inclusionary zoning strategies can discourage new development by reducing the financial returns of projects. A good strategy to incentivize developers is through negotiations with government agencies and community organizations based on site-specific variables.

3.3.2 Commercial Linkage
- Commercial linkage involves working with corporations and commercial developers to create nearby housing, balancing commercial and residential development, typically through fees imposed on developers.
- Linkage may be challenging to implement in a less competitive market, where developers may already be reluctant to invest and municipalities are more interested in offering development incentives than fees.

3.3.3 Tax-Base Sharing
- Tax-base sharing can reduce the incentives for individual municipalities to promote one or two kinds of development—those that are most financially advantageous—at the expense of a regional balance.
- Countries where most taxes are collected at the state, provincial, or national level can achieve a similar result if they prioritize such redistributions.
- This mechanism is one that would be aptly implemented by a metropolitan planning agency or authority.

3.3.4 Financial Incentives for Workers or Municipalities
- Financial incentives for workers to live near housing work best when such housing is indeed available.
- This strategy may not apply for all household members when income earners have jobs in different locations.
- Incentives for employers to provide housing near employment increase the choices of those who are able to move closer to their work places.
- These programs can be designed to
contribute to other social and development goals, such as promoting construction of affordable housing and infill development.

3.3.5 Financial Incentives to Hire Local Workers
- Job training and financial incentives for employers require collaboration between employers, workers, and local governments.
- Employment training and incentives can help match workers with local jobs, better equipping residents to find work close to their home or accessible via public transportation.

3.4 Dealing with Abandoned Housing

3.4.1 Tracking and Monitoring Systems
- Effective monitoring systems can help prevent abandonment by identifying properties at risk and intervening with owners and lenders.
- Universities and other research or policy organizations can help to jumpstart monitoring programs for housing abandonment, as they may already have the necessary technical equipment and expertise.
- Systems for monitoring abandonment benefit from data sharing and increased coordination between government agencies.

3.4.2 Housing Code Regulation and Enforcement
- Proactively dealing with maintenance problems can encourage rehabilitation and re-use.
- Structuring fines to increase with repeat offenses may improve their efficacy.
- Making financial support available to homeowners struggling with upkeep is an additional way to combine code regulation with proactive prevention strategies.

3.4.3 Government Expropriation and Disposition
- Government expropriation and disposition may be necessary in cases where landowners fail to remedy building code violations.
- Land banking can also encourage reuse or redevelopment of vacant buildings, as governments may then aggregate and sell parcels to facilitate a larger project.
- Rundown properties are sometimes beyond repair and can present challenges for government entities, which may face no choice but demolition.

3.4.4 Increasing Holding Costs
- Taxation systems can create a financial disincentive to engage in speculation, but the penalty must be set high enough to be meaningful to the speculators.
- For holding costs to have an impact, they typically rely on an existing property tax and cadaster system.

3.4.5 Promoting Rental Markets
- A healthy rental market can be an important and necessary part of a metropolitan area’s housing market.
- Renting a house can be a much better choice than buying a home for certain people, such as students, young people, or low-income households who may move frequently and cannot afford to pay the down payment, maintenance, and other costs associated with owning a home.
- Finding ways to promote the renting of individual units may be an important mechanism for making the housing market more flexible and encouraging the upkeep of houses, and will require regulations that support small landlords.
3.4.6 Demolition

- Demolition programs are expensive to implement, as they require a good amount of labor force and the turnover is not always guaranteed to cover the expenses. It should be clear who is responsible for the costs of demolition, and who will get ownership of the cleared land once demolition is completed.

- Demolition is most useful in extremely weak housing markets, areas that would be very expensive to provide public services to, or areas where there is extensive damage to buildings.

Part 4: Increasing Data Coordination and Developing Urban Indicators

4.1 Intergovernmental Data Coordination

4.1.1 E-government

- E-government has a number of advantages that enhance government performance as it improves service-delivery and promotes transparency and citizen engagement.

- A major challenge for e-government initiatives is that they usually require a substantial technical and organizational investment from the sponsoring agency.

- New technologies provide innovative ways to incentivize citizen participation through web-based platforms such as social media, web content, and digital applications.

- Unequal access to digital services across the population is a major drawback of e-government strategies. If the digital divide among citizens is too big, solely relying on these strategies might result in even greater segregation.

4.1.2 Spatial Data Coordination

- Coordinating spatial data is fundamental for urban planners because it creates a collaboration tool to interact with relevant stakeholders and government agencies.

- Even though technical barriers are often cited as the main challenges for implementing spatial coordination effort, the main barriers remain interorganizational aspects and human relationships problems.

- The visual nature of spatial information provides a foundation for community engagement in policymaking and community projects. Tools such as maps, graphs, and infographics help policymakers to convey important information with the larger public.

4.2 Developing Urban Indicators

4.2.1 Top-Down or Expert-led Approach for Developing Indicators

- A top-down approach to developing indicators enables comparison across different cities. For national governments and international agencies this approach simplifies the comparison of indicators across different geographical spaces to standardize and set goals. The UN Habitat Global Urban Indicators are an example of this approach.

- The main criticism of this approach is that often the selection of the indicators does not take into account the concerns and opinions of the stakeholders, hindering opportunities for engagement, debate, and use of the information created in the analysis.

4.2.2 Bottom-up or Participatory Approach for Developing Indicators

- A bottom-up approach to develop indicators
is particularly useful when action from participants is needed.

- Taking a participatory approach is also helpful for developing tailored indicators because integrative approaches require interaction and feedback from the study subjects, thus aligning with their needs and interests.

4.2.3 Bridging the Gap between Expert-led and Bottom-up Approaches

- A number of strategies can be used to bridge between expert-led and bottom-up approaches to develop indicators such as: selecting the appropriate methods, building comparative frameworks, selecting the scale of assessment, and defining the points of convergence in the interest of experts and citizens.

- Literature often recommends using a bottom-up approach to develop indicators, when the objective of the assessment is to implement a project.