

GETTING STARTED

Driven to Action

A CITIZEN'S TOOLKIT

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D*riven to Action* is a community organizer's toolkit aimed at empowering local residents. The elements of the tool kit include fact sheets, samples, advice on action and a detailed background paper called *Understanding Sprawl – A Citizen's Guide*.

Governments have to accommodate the expected growth in population and commercial and industrial activity. Current political leadership across the country has primarily allowed low density auto-dependent development to meet this growth. Provincial planning laws and guidelines remain weak and municipalities often ignore their own planning rules at the request of eager developers. It doesn't have to be this way. Sprawl is not inevitable.

Evidence shows that sprawl has serious impacts on human health, municipal budgets and the environment. To counter sprawl we must understand the decision-making process and how to organize effectively for change.

WHO'S WHO?

Municipal Council

Councils have direct control over local planning. They are in charge of municipal roads and public transit. With vigilant monitoring, good city plans and bylaws can halt bad development and foster compact, mixed use communities.

action tip

City or Regional Official Plans contain goals, objectives and policies that express the community's vision for growth for the next 20 years. Secondary Site Plans, found in Official Plans, determine how growth looks. Zoning By-laws set actual densities, heights, lot sizes, and permitted uses. These will differ across the city, depending on what type of development the city wants to attract, i.e. industrial, commercial, residential.

Good example:

East Clayton Neighbourhood Development, Surrey, British Columbia;
<http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/sustainability/casestudies/eastclaytont.htm>

The Provincial Government

Provincial governments develop general rules for land-use planning. They may be written as laws or guidelines. Municipalities must follow these rules but can always choose to do better. Provinces also have the power to protect natural lands from development and legislate Urban Growth Boundaries. Provinces can also exert influence over municipal planning through infrastructure grants which may state how much must be spent on items such as roads or transit expansion.

Land Developers

Developers draw up and implement plans for land development. They appear to be offering solutions to Councilors worried about accommodating growth in population and jobs. They often maximize their profits by building single-use developments – all houses or a mega-retail complex. The result is mammoth development that eliminates farm land and paves over natural areas and wetlands. Some developers use their influence to lobby councils to amend official plans and zoning bylaws in order to get approval for their projects. They may also lobby provincial

governments against strong, progressive land-use policies and for more highways.

The experts

Planners can either work for developers or government. Most are very aware of the environmental and economic costs of sprawl. They are also familiar with progressive concepts such as Alternative Development Standards.

Allies

Community groups can play an active role in curbing sprawl. Their vigilance is critical to ensuring public interest is at the heart of community planning priorities. These groups include renters, ratepayers, community associations, outdoor recreation enthusiasts and environmental organizations. Building alliances with like minded organizations can strengthen your campaigns and ensure that there is a broad base of support for change.

START A CAMPAIGN

Tackling sprawl may seem like an unwinnable campaign. That's because it appears to have multiple causes and no single solution. In fact the only rational approach is to engage in campaigns on specific projects, with measurable objectives and adaptable strategies that can be transferred to other campaigns. Here are a few potential campaign ideas to help focus your efforts:

Challenge a Local Project

Are you aware of any development proposals currently threatening your community? Start a campaign by engaging your local government. Phone your municipal Councillor to find out everything you can about the proposal and when Council will make a decision. Lobby Councillors to vote against the proposed development and seek improvements to turn it into a "Smart" development.

Potential Campaigns:

- Your municipality wants to expand a road
- Another mega-retailer wants to build a new store and a huge parking lot
- A potential new subdivision is threatening a local forest
- Transit fares are being hiked

Build Compact Communities

Campaign to have your municipality adopt Alternative Development Standards (ADS) to guide future planning. Get ADS adopted into the city's Official Plan and Zoning Bylaws. Ask your Councillors to use these standards to evaluate all new development proposals.

Protect Land from Development

Ask your planning department to give you a map of your municipality's boundaries. Use this to make sure new development proposals stay within this line. Campaign for your provincial government to adopt legislation that prohibits development on certain lands by creating urban

planning tool action card

Campaign Goal	Stop Mega-Retail Complex
Organize to Win	Find out what is going on by talking to your local Councillor and the developer Design a flyer to inform your community
Potential Allies	Make a list: neighbours, local small businesses, environmental organizations, etc. Conduct a survey to test your support
Lobby Goal	Find out which Councillors support/oppose the development
Media Goal	Prepare a fact sheet for reporters. Make a note of who is interested in your story.

growth boundaries. Work with a provincial environmental group to get the provincial government to adopt stronger planning rules that encourage compact development and stop sprawl. You can also contact local conservation groups to help turn private lands into publicly-owned and protected natural areas.

Many small environmental groups are affiliated with the Canadian Environment Network or their provincial counterparts. To find a list of groups in your area go to www.cen-rce.org

Make a Plan

Your campaign is important to the health of your community. Turn your ideas into a winnable campaign plan. Start with tasks that your group can do and do well. As your campaign grows you can revise this plan.

Focus your actions: Work in the wards/ridings where you need to shape a politician's decision.

BUILDING LOCAL SUPPORT

You are not alone in your concern. Listen to the radio, watch TV, engage in conversations – across your community people are talking about traffic congestion, air pollution, poor transit, high taxes, lack of rental housing, and street front shops being replaced by giant retail outlets. All are symptoms of sprawl. Chances are that, like you, your neighbors want to do something. Get together and start turning talk into action.

Keep the Campaign Moving

Stay in Touch

Be inclusive. Give everyone the opportunity to work on the campaign. Keep them up to date on what is happening, share in exciting turns of events, make them part of the victory. Acknowledge and thank volunteers for their time, skills and hard work.

Regular focused meetings. People like to get together and contribute to change. Update, swap information, invite a politician, developer or planner to speak, brainstorm. Meetings are especially handy before a big event. Rally the troops, get commitments to participate and sign people up for tasks, such as making a deputation to city council.

Phone tree. Need fast action? Call people. The telephone tree is a very effective means of communicating quickly. Each person on the tree has the responsibility to telephone five more people who each call another five. It is also important to use the tree to thank people when they do something.

Email list. Your best communications tool. Use email to keep people up to date on what is happening, ask them to do something else, and provide feedback on what good their efforts are doing. Send at least one every two weeks.

bring people together

Starting with yourself or a couple of friends, use these tools to build a list of potential supporters and activists:

START A PETITION. A petition is useful for collecting names from the community and can help identify potential volunteers for your campaign. Include sections for phone numbers and email addresses!

MAKE A FLYER. A flyer is a small handbill that alerts people about issues or events.

CONDUCT A SURVEY. Use the “Sample Community Survey” to identify areas of concern.

GO TO COMMUNITY MEETINGS. Attend local meetings and bring your petition, survey or flyer.

KEEP PEOPLE BUSY. Once you have volunteers get them engaged in meetings and organizing.

places to find people

- Go directly to residents that are being affected by sprawl.
- Show up at developers' open house meetings.
- Attend politicians' community events.
- Campaign at the farmer's market.
- Go out to conservation group outings.
- Don't forget schools, churches, PTAs, community groups.

continued >>>

Make it Fun & Exciting to be Involved

Involve politicians. Invite politicians to speak at community meetings and press conferences – they are always a big draw for residents and the press.

Hold a city-wide contest. Ask residents to send in their picks for the ugliest and most beautiful places in their city and why they choose them. This can make a great media story.

Host a slide show. Showing the good and bad side of your community can inspire change.

Create sprawl watch. Track the companies. Where are they building? Distinguish the good from the bad. Write a profile of a developer and show if they've created sprawling growth or "Smart Growth"

Get diversity & expertise: Recruit a broad spectrum of participants including residents from rural areas, suburbs and downtown, housing advocates, environmentalists, planners, community groups, high-profile architects, health professionals, homeless advocates, politicians, seniors, farmers and outdoor enthusiasts. Include an anti-sprawl developer, real estate company or local business associations that are pro-transit.

put your new friends to work

You've been collecting names of supporters. Now it's time to bring them together and start handing out jobs. The more active you keep people, the longer they will stick around.

PUT PEOPLE IN CHARGE

- collect petitions
- update the email list serve
- activate the phone tree
- organize flyer drop teams
- motivate the fundraising team
- continue to build support
- handle media
- schedule meetings with politicians, developers, planners
- meet with key officials and decision-makers

get on the Web

Find a website that allows you to set up a free list serve. Topica is an example of a service that hosts for free (www.topica.com)

1. Create an account
2. Click on "Start a new List" and follow the instructions



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SOLUTIONS ARE IN OUR NATURE

Getting Started: part I of **Driven to Action, A Citizen's Toolkit**

Published by the David Suzuki Foundation • October 2003