

★ ISSUE BRIEF

Promote Livable Communities

Federal Policies Play a Major Role in the Quality of Life of Our Nation's Communities.

AIA POSITION

The AIA supports policies that promote the planning and design of prosperous, vibrant, healthy and livable communities with housing, retail, schools and employment in close proximity to transportation options.

For the last several decades, federal government policies have promoted the construction of buildings in open spaces outside of downtowns and traditional main streets. These policies not only have fostered neighborhoods that are economically and environmentally unsustainable, but they have also neglected to develop and maintain existing communities. This pattern of growth has created more long term costs and maintenance liabilities than it has generated in lasting value and revenues. Growth cannot sprawl ever-outward, a fact that has been made tragically clear during the recent foreclosure crisis.

Meanwhile, demand and demographics are shifting for real-estate. More Americans are expressing a preference to live closer to job centers in traditional downtowns, along main streets, and near transit hubs.

Yet neighborhoods with more populous, walkable, mixed use patterns of development and other characteristics have become scarce. Even communities in inner cities and "streetcar suburbs" have been degraded and depopulated to the point that they too are much more auto-dependent and exemplary of sprawl than they once were.

A major part of the problem is that transportation, land use, economic development and housing agencies at all levels of government are siloed, making plans without consulting one another. In 2009, the Obama administration formed the Partnership for Sustainable Communities between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Transportation (DOT), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to encourage collaboration and support broad principles of livability. The Partnership has worked to provide grants to communities to assist in planning more livable neighborhoods that provide people with more options for housing close to transportation and amenities