

**ABA SECTION OF ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY & RESOURCES
COMMITTEE ON SMART GROWTH AND URBAN POLICY**

Smart Growth and Education: Implications of School Siting

In order to put the interaction between environmental and urban policy anywhere on the map, not only do we have to educate ourselves, but we need to educate more broadly. To encourage our members to go into the schools in their community, the Committee on Smart Growth and Urban Policy has developed a lesson plan for eighth graders, which can be modified to accommodate different grade levels. Students will participate in a mock public hearing in which they discuss the issues involved in siting a school facility. Students will be given roles to play at the hearing while the teacher will act as the moderator(s) to draw out the various issues. The goal of this lesson plan is to highlight the importance of location in environmental decision making and environmental concerns in land use decisions. To facilitate your efforts, the Committee on Smart Growth and Urban Policy has assembled the following lesson plan.

TEACHER'S INSTRUCTION SHEET

Preparing For the Presentation

1. Divide the class into 4 groups and assign each group a role (ABC Builders, Springfield Environmental Watch, Residents of Springfield, and Town Council). Have each group choose a representative who will give the presentation at the town meeting.
2. Provide to the members of each group the following: a copy of the introductory fact sheet, the fact sheet specific to the group, and the sheet of internet resources.
3. Allow the students to either read the fact sheet during class or at night as a homework assignment. Encourage the students to do research in preparation for their presentation.
4. The day of the presentation allow students time to meet with their groups and discuss their presentations. You may want to meet with each group separately to make sure that they understand the issues.

Holding the Mock Public Hearing

During the mock public hearing, you will be acting as the moderator. Each group will have 5 minutes to present their position. After each presentation, the other groups will have the opportunity to ask questions and offer comments. The moderator will also have the opportunity to ask questions.

SMART GROWTH AND EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS OF SCHOOL SITING

The town of Springfield is located outside a major metropolitan area. Over the past 15 years, Springfield has experienced unprecedented growth and development.

About half of the high school students attend Springfield High School. Springfield High School is located just outside the downtown area, near the shopping district and the public library. Because of its central location, many of the students can either walk or bike to school. Others ride either a public bus or a school bus.

Because of the growth trend, the school board estimates that within the next 3 years, Springfield High School will be too small to accommodate all its students. Another problem is that the school was built in 1950 and needs to be renovated to meet the town's building code requirements. The school board also recognizes that the school needs a lot of improvement: an air conditioning system, handicap accessibility, a new cafeteria and gym, and computer-friendly classrooms.

ABC Builders is a regional development company who has built a couple of the larger shopping centers and office buildings in the town. It owns a large parcel of land on the edge of town. It has offered to donate half the parcel to the town and has proposed building a large high school there. Right now, the site is an undeveloped, open space.

The town council is leaning toward accepting this proposal because it seems like the best available option. Before it makes its final decision, it is holding an open community meeting to discuss the proposal. ABC Builders, Springfield Environmental Watch and the residents will be at the meeting.

Each group should prepare a brief presentation to explain their position at the meeting and should be prepared to answer questions from the other groups.

ADDITIONAL FACTS FOR ABC BUILDERS

You are a large development company that has built many of the town's new hospitals, office buildings and shopping centers. Your development projects have attracted many new residents and businesses and have been a major catalyst for the town's growth. You own several parcels of undeveloped land on the outskirts of town.

Your task is to convince the others at the meeting to accept your proposal. You should anticipate questions and opposition from the members of Springfield Environmental Watch and the town residents.

You bought the land on the west end because you planned on building a mega shopping center there, but the process of getting approval from the town council's zoning board has been long and arduous. In the meantime, the land is just sitting there. So, your plan is to donate half the parcel of land to the town on the condition that the town expedite approval for the mega mall.

Your consultants have told you that if you build a school there, you will attract more families and foster the demand for new housing and attract retail tenants to your mall. This would in turn create more jobs for the residents of Springfield.

Your architect has designed a very attractive plan for the proposed school. It will be twice as big as the existing school so that twice as many students could attend. The new facility would look like a college campus. It would have huge modern classrooms that are wired for internet access, a cafeteria with huge glass windows and an adjoining snack bar, a giant gymnasium, and a state-of-the-art computer lab and library. The cost of all this would be \$5 million, which would be a bargain for the town.

One of the drawbacks of the proposed school is that it is located far from the town center. Because the students, parents, and school employees will need to drive or take the bus to get to school, you have included a huge parking lot to accommodate cars and busses. This is included in the \$5 million. It will cost the town additional millions to build a road and water and sewer services out to the site. You see this as no big deal because the town would have to build these things one day anyway (especially if there is going to be a mega mall).

ADDITIONAL FACTS FOR SPRINGFIELD ENVIRONMENTAL WATCH

You are residents of Springfield and members of Springfield Environmental Watch, an organization that is dedicated to protecting the environment and preserving open spaces. You may want to research the effects of development on the environment by checking out the Environmental Protection Agency's website at <http://www.epa.gov> or some of the websites identified on the sheet of suggested internet resources.

You are typically upper income individuals who can afford to shop at the local organic food co-op. You don't oppose all development because you recognize that it has led to more jobs and more money for the town, but have been dismayed at the rapid development of Springfield. You are opposed to the mega mall that you have heard ABC Builders wants to build on the west edge of town.

You are concerned about ABC Builders' proposal for the new school because of the impact it will have on the environment. Because residents will have to drive to get to the new school, you are concerned about the increase in air pollutant emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, and noise. Emissions from car travel will adversely affect the quality of air. You are also concerned that the new road and the giant parking lot will increase water runoff and degrade the quality of the water. You may want to research the environmental affects so that you can present them more convincingly at the meeting. (For information on the effects of runoff check out the Environmental Protection Agency's website at <http://www.epa.gov>, specifically http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/nps_edu/pdf/urban.pdf.)

One of your members recently has learned about a new trend in smart growth design. He has read that the neighboring town of Summerville has chosen to renovate its existing high school rather than build a new one. Because no one has researched the idea, no one is really sure if this would be a good course of action for Springfield. You may want to research and explore this option and present it at the meeting.

ADDITIONAL FACTS FOR THE RESIDENTS OF SPRINGFIELD

You are a diverse group of students and residents. You have known about the need for a bigger, more updated school facility. You have heard about ABC Builders' proposal for a new school site on the edge of town. If after discussing the issues, you cannot agree on a single position, you can break up into a group that supports the proposal and one that opposes it and give separate presentations at the meeting.

The students of Springfield High enjoy that they can walk or bike to school and don't have to rely on their parents for a ride. Because the school is so close to the downtown area, many students can go shopping or grab a slice of pizza after school. The students like the location, but recognize that the facility needs improvement. The gym is outdated and too small to accommodate all of the after-school activities. There is a single room that students use both as a music room and a computer lab.

Some of you are excited at the idea of getting a newer, bigger school. You think having a state-of-the-art school would inspire a sense of pride among the students and the residents. In addition, the new building will be able to house more clubs and activities.

Some of you are concerned that residents will have to drive about 30 minutes to get to the school. This will discourage participation in school meetings and extracurricular activities. It will also increase traffic congestion and increase air and water pollution, but you are not sure what degree. You may want to research this further by checking out the websites on the sheet of suggested internet resources.

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ADDITIONAL FACTS FOR THE TOWN COUNCIL

You are members of the town council and are leaning toward accepting the proposal, but are still open to hearing what the residents think. After all, they do vote for you. In presenting your position, you should consider the following additional facts:

Because ABC Builders has offered to donate the land, the town would save a lot of money. However, it will cost the town and its taxpayers additional millions to build a road and water and sewer services out to the site. The town would have to build these things one day anyway, so it might as well do it now so that it can take advantage of this offer of free land.

ABC Builders has also threatened that it would not donate the land if the town council did not approve the new mall. You recognize that the new mall would bring in new jobs and create a solid real estate tax base for the town.

One concern that you have is the impact of the development boom on the environment. A recent report by your environmental advisor has informed you that over the past 5 years, the air quality of Springfield has been getting worse as more people use their cars. Your advisor has also told you that the water quality of the town has gone down because of the increase in parking lots, roads, and other impervious surfaces have increased the water runoff in the town. (For a more detailed explanation of water runoff, check out the Environmental Protection Agency's website, specifically, http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/nps_edu/pdf/urban.pdf.)

The governor has informally stated that it will provide \$5 million dollars to fund the building of a new school. You have entertained the idea of renovating the existing school, but have never really considered it an option because the governor has not mentioned committing any money to renovation.

SUGGESTED INTERNET RESOURCES

EPA's smart growth page

<http://www.epa.gov/livability/index.htm>; <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/schools.htm>

Smart Growth Network (a partnership of governmental and nonprofit organizations)

<http://www.smartgrowth.org>; <http://www.smart-schools.org/>

National Trust For Historic Preservation's page on smart growth

http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/smart_growth.html

Sierra Club's page on sprawl

<http://www.sierraclub.org/sprawl>

Smart Growth America (a coalition of smart growth advocacy groups)

<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/>

Natural Resources Defense Council's smart growth resource page

<http://www.nrdc.org/cities/smartGrowth/default.asp>

National Association of Home Builders' smart growth resource page

http://www.nahb.org/reference_list.aspx?sectionID=216 .

Urban Land Institute

<http://www.uli.org>

National Geographic: Virtual World—The New Suburb?

http://www.nationalgeographic.com/earthpulse/sprawl/index_flash.html