

Maine Climate Council Webinar - Land Use Policies: Meeting Housing Needs and Climate Goals

Building Right in the Right Places: Gaging the Impact of Land Use, Housing Production and Multimodal Transportation Policies on Emissions, Land Conservation, and Housing Affordability

May 21, 2024

[View the Webinar Recording on YouTube](#)

Webinar Highlights

Presenter: Anna Zetkolic – RMI

- **Smart growth is an overall approach to development** that encourages a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and robust community engagement.
- **Smart growth policies can help address multiple priorities at the same time, such as reducing emissions while meeting housing needs and reducing household rising costs.**
 - Based on national data that shows 27% of greenhouse gases are coming from transportation, RMI's analysis estimates smart growth strategies alone can slash vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 20% in most U.S. metro areas
- When thinking about growth that encourages a reduction in emissions, **new housing is not sustainable if it dictates that the residents must be car dependent.** More efficient and accessible land use is the biggest lever – this means spurring more housing types in places where, by design, people need to travel less to get to jobs, schools, medical care, groceries, and other essential services. As well as the reverse, diversifying uses in exclusively residential neighborhoods – or commercial rebalancing.
- **Many local climate action plans miss the climate benefits that infill and other pro-housing land use strategies offer.** Housing and comprehensive plans often lack emissions and resilience impact, due to reasons such as difficulty measuring those potential emissions compared to easier to quantify sectors such as rolling out renewables, switching the electric cars and fleets, and unknowns as to what the market will actually build.
- **Where housing is built can be as impactful on emissions as how it's built and operated.** For state and local governments, building housing in low-VMT, medium-income neighborhoods can be the most impactful strategy available for emissions reduction – and a key strategy for equity and inclusion. This includes:
 - **Housing upzoning** - building residential density on parcels that have been formerly zoned for less dense building types.
 - **Infill and redevelopment** - developing vacant or redeveloping underutilized parcels into building types that offer a diversity of uses.
 - **Transit oriented development** - redeveloping parcels near public transit stops, offering residents greater access and connectivity.
- **Climate-aligned VMT policy improves affordability, safety, and health outcomes over the long term,** including: electricity savings, cleaner air and improved activity, less climate pollution, consumer savings, and prevented crashes. Refer to RMI's [Smarter Modes Calculator](#) for additional state-specific calculations.