

# From Centers to Communities

The Past, Present, and Future of  
Regional Activity Centers

Presented to: The Planning Directors Technical Advisory Committee  
and Region Forward Complete Communities Team  
December 16, 2011

# The Framework

- Complete Communities
- The History of MWCOCs Regional Activity Centers
- Best Practices for Activity Centers

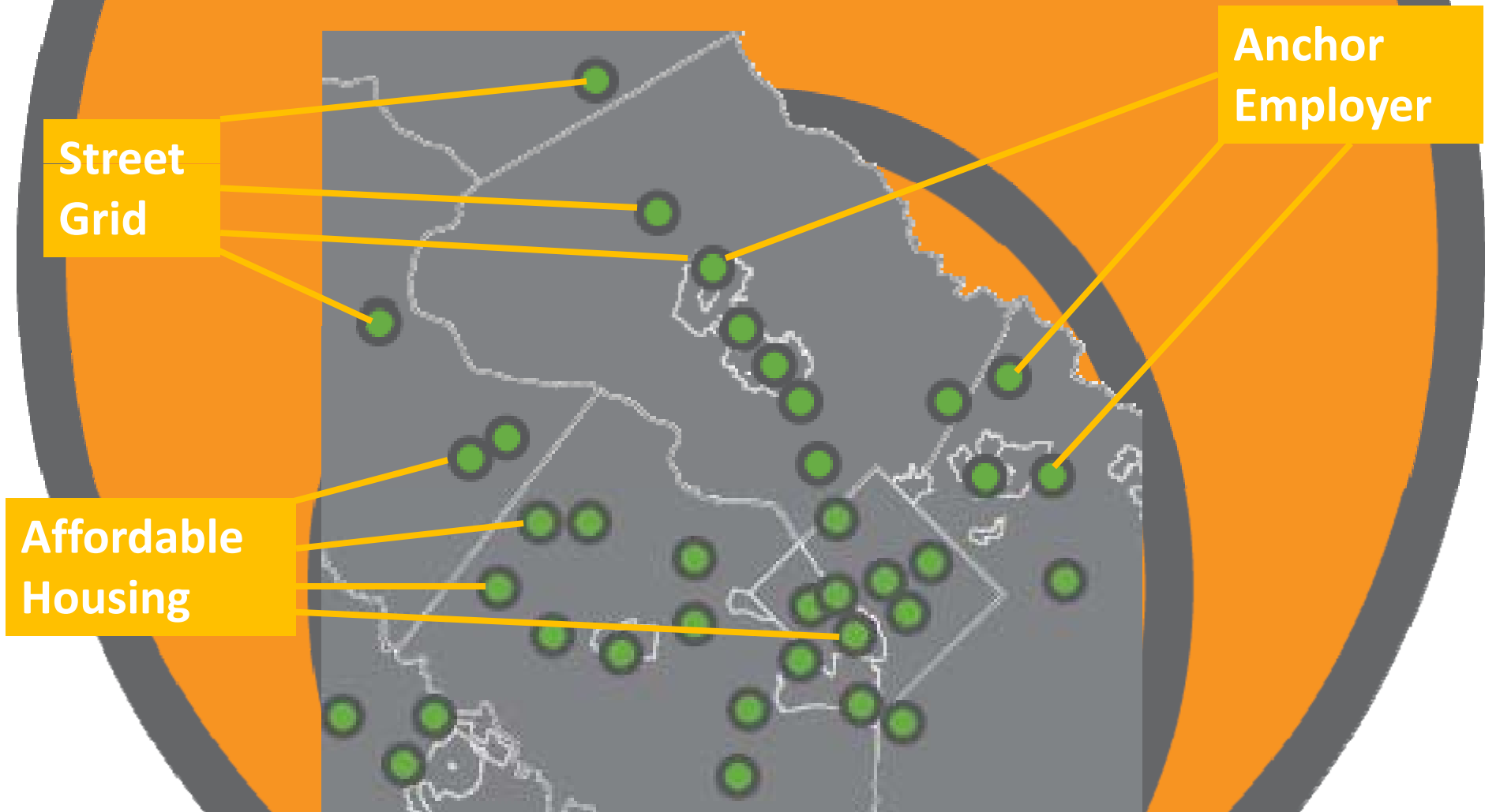


# Complete Communities

Sophie Minter COG Staff

# WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

*Common Priorities Inform Regional Action*



# SUCCESSFUL REGIONAL ACTIVITY CENTER CASE STUDIES

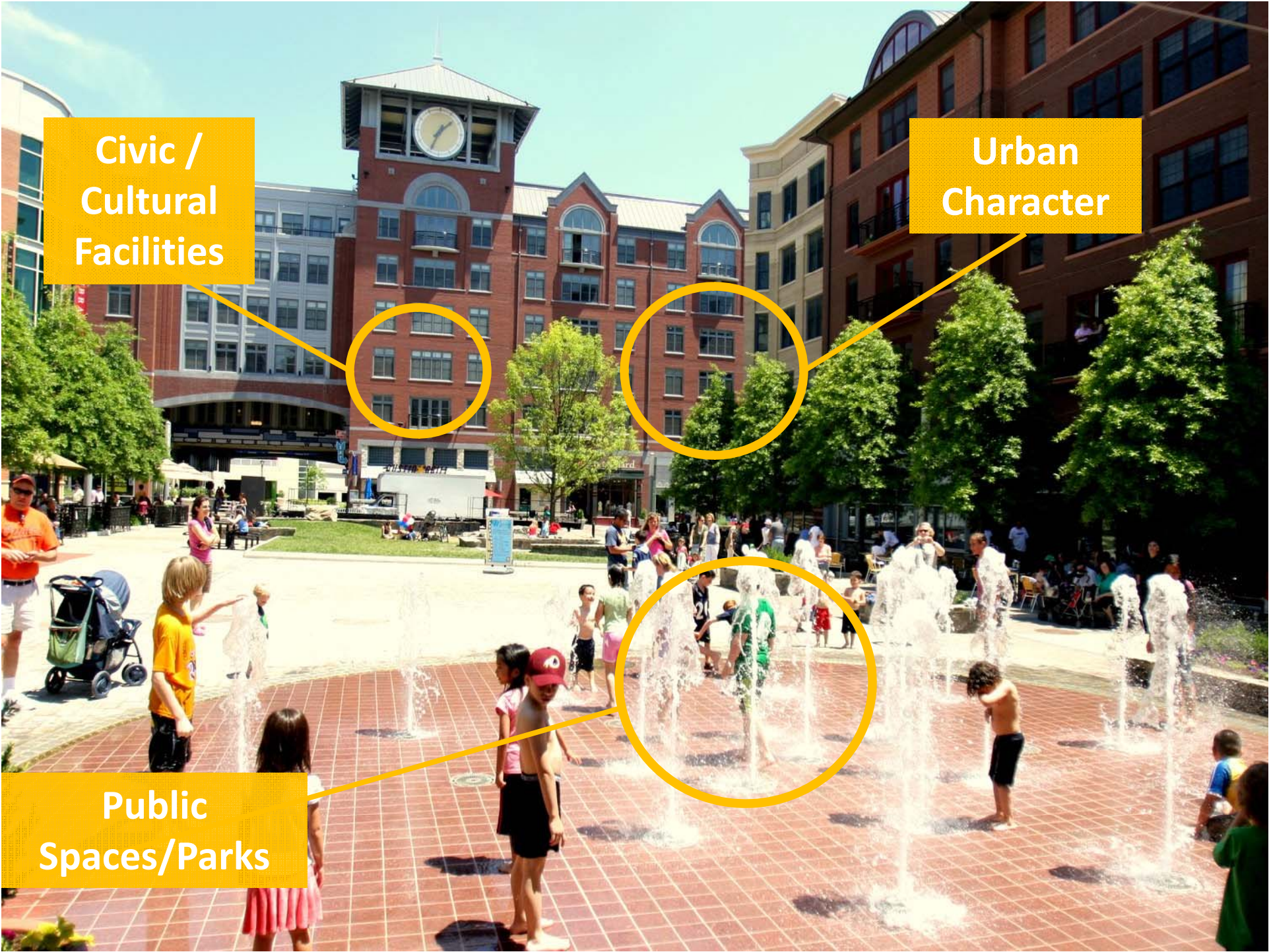
*Which attributes make these places successful?*





Street Grid

Diverse Housing Types



Civic /  
Cultural  
Facilities

Urban  
Character

Public  
Spaces/Parks

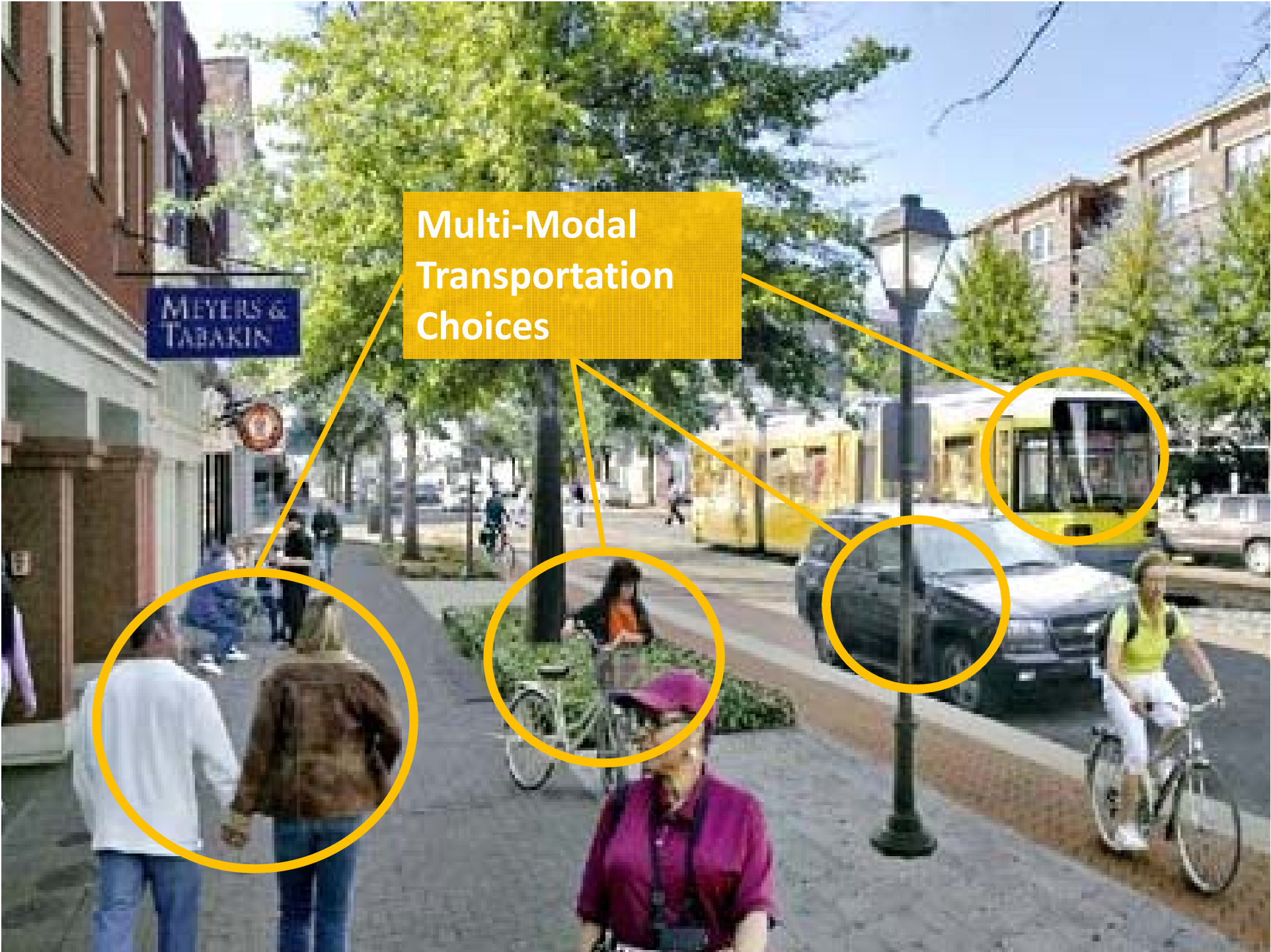
**Federal  
Facilities**

**Anchor  
Employer**

**Infrastructure  
Investments**

**Higher  
Education**





**Multi-Modal  
Transportation  
Choices**



# COMPLETE COMMUNITY FUNDAMENTALS

## Equity

Safe & Comfortable Streets  
Diverse Housing Types  
Affordable Housing  
Good Public Schools  
Fresh Healthy Food  
Healthcare Facilities

## Identity

Urban Character  
Sustainable Design  
Historic Preservation  
Branding/Marketing  
Parks/Public Space  
Civic/Cultural Facilities

## Prosperity

Anchor Employers  
Federal Government Facilities  
Higher Educational Facilities  
Variety of Jobs  
Infrastructure Investments  
Variety of Goods & Services

## Accessibility

Multi-Modal Transportation  
Connected to Regional  
Centers  
Walkable  
Parking Management  
Street Grid  
Mix of Uses

# EMERGING REGIONAL ACTIVITY CENTERS

*Which attributes could be applied to these places to make them more successful?*

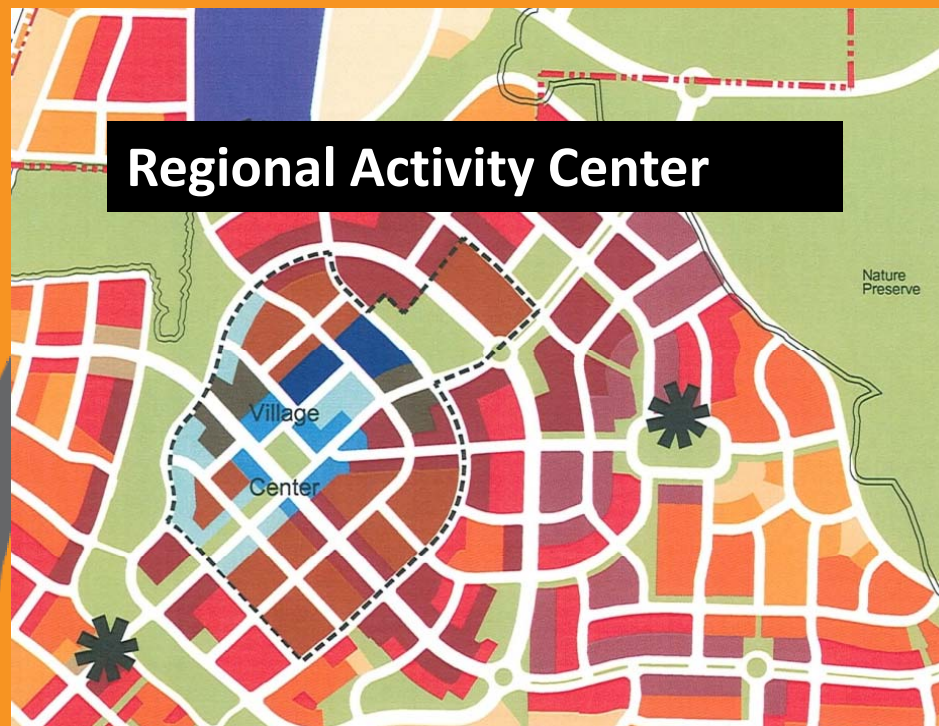
Identity

Safe  
Streets

Anchor  
Employer

Schools

**Regional Activity Center**



Affordable  
Housing

Higher  
Education

Health  
Care  
Facility

Parks and  
Public  
Space

Civic  
Cultural  
Facilities

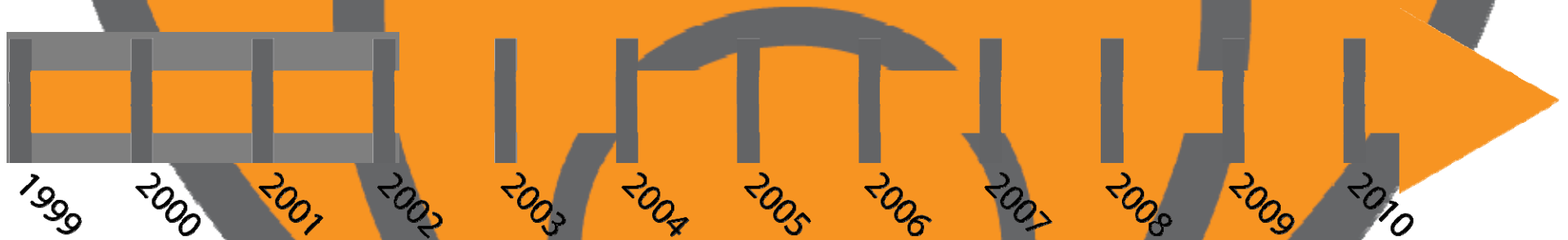


# The History of MWCOCG's Regional Activity Centers

Greg Goodwin COG Staff

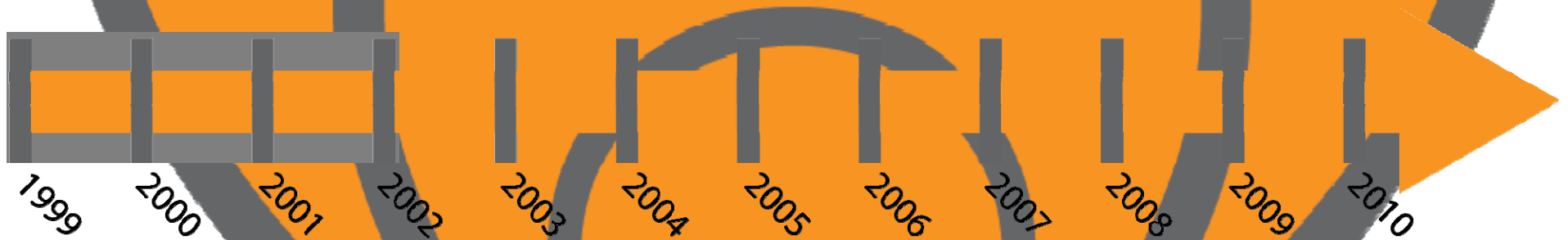
# THE BEGINNING

- Regional Activity Centers originated with the TPB Vision Action Agenda, Goal 2 (1998)
- Local jurisdictions submitted over 180 local activity centers for the first map (1999)
- Activity Centers were selected through a **Technical Process** based on the cooperative forecast



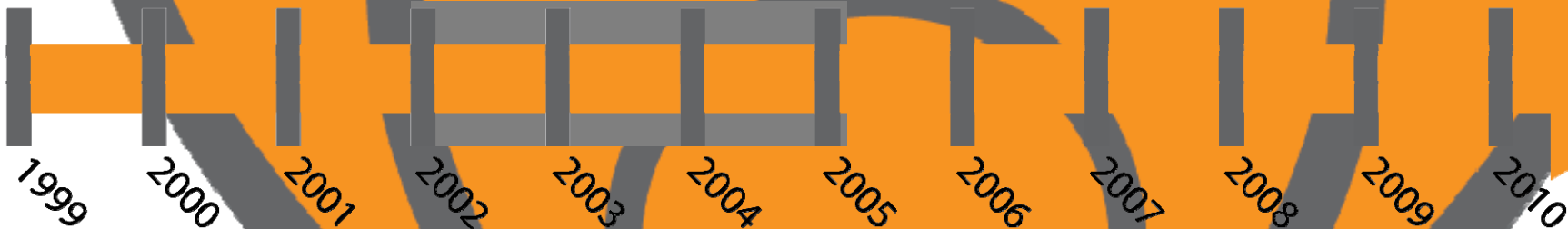
# THE BEGINNING

- A criteria were created to reduce the 180 local activity centers to 56 Regional Activity Centers
- Local activity centers provided a comprehensive inventory of valuable locations
- Local activity centers were a **Descriptive** tool
- Regional Activity Centers **Described** places of regional significance



# THE FIRST CENTERS

- The Regional Activity Centers map was approved by the COG Board of Directors and TPB in 2002
- The Activity Centers map enabled the region to analyze the impact of land use and transportation policies
- Activity Centers were used to measure the demographic and development trends



# REFINED CENTERS

- Regional Activity Centers were updated in 2006
- This was a technical update based upon updated cooperative forecast data
- Two new centers were added because new development plans had emerged





# THE CURRENT CENTERS

- Regional Activity Centers were aligned with the boundaries of the new COG “3722 TAZ System” (February 2011)
- This refinement was also a technical exercise
- Aligning to the boundary lines enabled more precise analysis of demographic and development patterns



# Five Regional Activity Center Typologies

1. DC Core
2. Mixed Use Centers
3. Employment centers
4. Suburban Employment Centers
5. Emerging Employment Centers

# Current Regional Activity Center Criteria

## **DC Core** – Major centers within the District of Columbia

- Contains the major governmental, cultural and tourism activities of the region
- Significant business and commercial activity
- Center of the region's transit system
- Pedestrian oriented sidewalk network with an organized street grid/block configuration

# Current Regional Activity Center Criteria

## **Mixed Use Centers** – Urban Character

- Areas up to two square miles (1,280 acres)
- Greater than 15,000 jobs
- Greater than 25 jobs per acre in 2030
- *Residential Criteria:* Greater than 10 units per acre

# Current Regional Activity Center Criteria

## **Employment Centers** – Higher-density areas

- Up to 3.5 square miles (2,240 acres)
- Greater than 20,000 jobs
- Greater than 30 jobs per acre in 2030

# Current Regional Activity Center Criteria

## **Suburban Employment Centers** – lower-density areas

- Less than 6 square miles (3,840 acres)
- Greater than 15,000 jobs
- Greater than 10 jobs per acre in 2030

# Current Regional Activity Center Criteria

**Emerging Employment Centers** – Rapidly developing “campus-style” suburban employment areas

- Less than 6 square miles (3,840 acres)
- Greater than 15,000 jobs in 2030
- Greater than 50 percent job growth between 2000 and 2030
- OR less than 50 percent commercial buildout in 2030

# Current Regional Activity Centers





# Targeted Growth Areas and Goals



beginnings

land use

roads and pricing

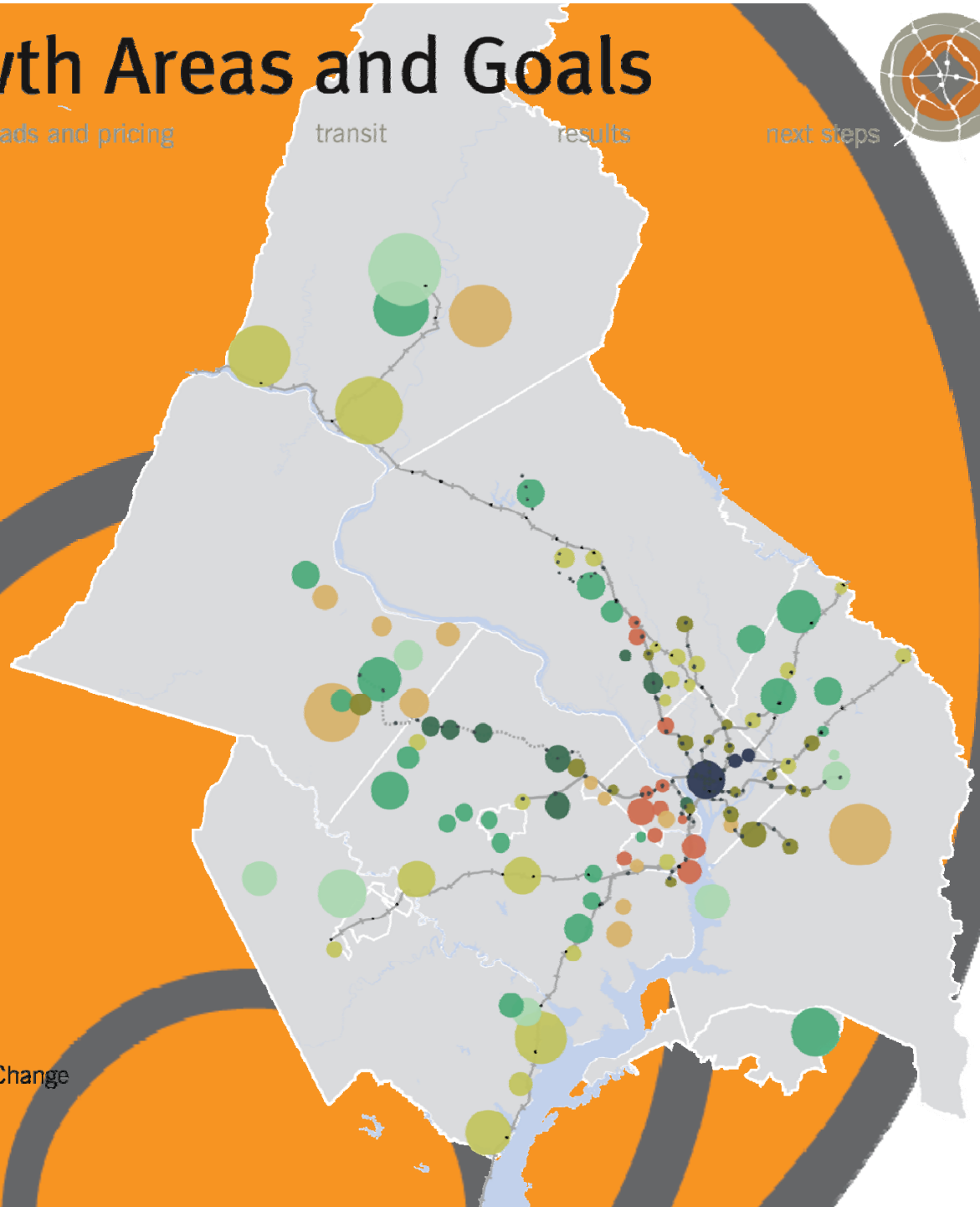
transit

results

next steps

Types of Growth Areas, Density Goals, and Jobs/Housing Balance Goals

- DC Core**  
32 jobs and 20 du/acre  
3 jobs/household
- Mixed Use Center**  
20-32 jobs and 10-20 du/acre  
2 jobs/household
- Employment Center**  
14 jobs and 7 du/acre  
2 jobs/household
- Suburban Employment Center**  
10 jobs and 5 du/acre  
2 jobs/household
- Emerging Employment Center**  
5 jobs and 3 du/acre  
1.6 jobs/household
- MetroRail or Transitway Station Area**  
10 jobs and 5 du/acre  
2 jobs/household
- Commuter Rail Station Area**  
3 jobs and 2 du/acre  
1.5 jobs/household
- Locally Requested Center or Area of No Change**  
Goals vary according to specific local staff input.



# Transportation Planning Board's Constrained Long-Range Plan Aspirations Scenario

- Developed to provide guidance on future residential and commercial growth to better meet TPB Vision
- Builds upon Regional Activity Centers and Cooperative Forecasts
- Also incorporates land use changes, additional transit station areas, and local preferences for where growth should occur

# Transportation Planning Board's Constrained Long-Range Plan Aspirations Scenario

## Land Use

- Redirects job and household growth into RACs and around existing or planned transit
- RACs with transit infrastructure receive enough growth to be transit-supportive, walkable, and mixed use

# Transportation Planning Board's Constrained Long-Range Plan Aspirations Scenario

## Transportation

Better accessibility to targeted growth areas through:

- Including all existing transit station areas
- Network of variably priced highway lanes
- Regional Bus Rapid Transit network
- Planned transit investments: Purple Line, Georgia Avenue Transitway, US 1 Transitway, VRE Extension

# Transportation Planning Board's Constrained Long-Range Plan Aspirations Scenario

## Local Outreach

- Met individually with 10 jurisdictions and VDOT
- Incorporate local concerns and preferences
- De-emphasize some centers, concentrate growth in other centers, and add in future growth areas from local plans that were not included in RACs

# Targeted Growth Areas and Goals



beginnings

land use

roads and pricing

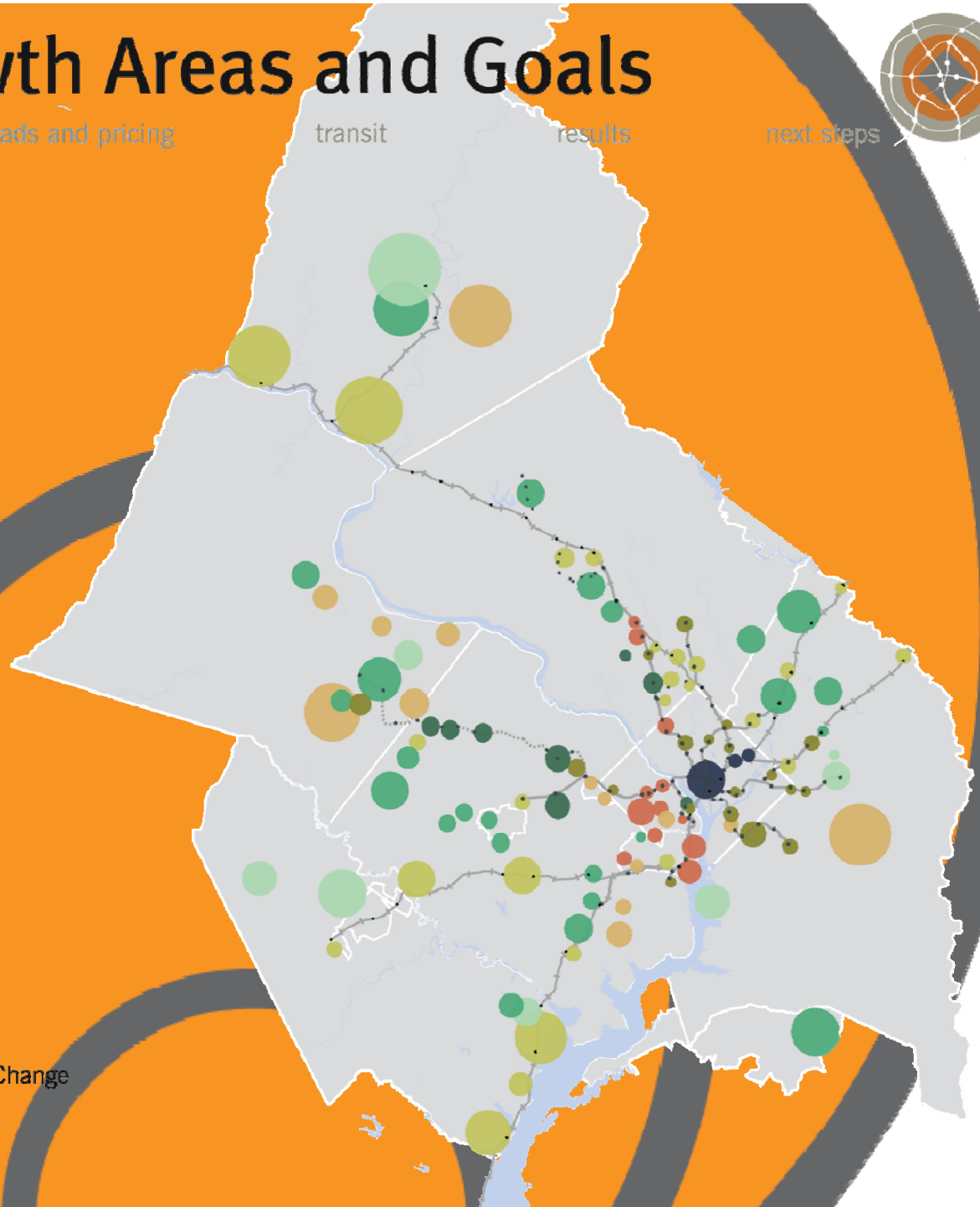
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# Best Practices for Activity Centers

Ryan Hand COG Staff

# What Our Counterparts Have Done

- Some regions use internal analysis tools with very little public information
- Other regions combine internal analysis tools combined with a public relations campaign



# Two Key Elements

- Center Selection Process



- Growth Management Program



# Three Basic Types of Programs

- Locally Sensitive
- Top Down Approach
- Hybrid Criterion Approach

# Locally Sensitive Approach

## The Basics

- Many centers are identified
  - Local jurisdictions identify their own centers
  - Approval is contingent upon meeting basic criteria
- Growth Management Program
  - Competitive planning grants
  - Competitive implementation grants

# Locally Sensitive Approach

## Pros

- Locally defined priorities
- Politically sensitive
- Rapid implementation
- Scalable implementation

## Cons

- Reduced long term impact
- Requires extensive funding
- Regional benefits might take decades to emerge

# Top Down Approach

## The Basics

- Comprehensive approach to Regional Growth Management
- Directly links growth to housing and transit capacity
- Categorizes centers throughout the region

# Top Down Approach

## Pros

- Maximum impact on Growth Patterns
- Maximizes existing infrastructure funding
- Treats all jurisdictions equally

## Cons

- Reduces local input
- Cost intensive
- Time intensive
- Favors existing centers

# Hybrid Criterion Approach

## The Basics

- Identifies Growth and Conservation areas
  - Locally Identified Centers
  - Basic Regional Requirements such as High Quality Transit
- Planning and Public Policy encourage targeted development and conservation

# Hybrid Criterion Approach

## Pros

- Locally sensitive
- Clear regional scope
- Future oriented

## Cons

- Diminishes extraordinary centers
  - Such as high density CBDs
- Impacts are primarily local
- Often uses a very large number of centers



# Questions?

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