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According to the U.S. Census, more than half of the population of the U.S. lives in a coastal county, and this number is expected to continue to grow. As residents of a coastal area, we are aware of the sensitive ecosystems that exist in coastal areas, and the natural hazards that face them. As coastal areas continue to grow, they can protect natural resources by implementing land use policies known as “smart growth.”

The term “smart growth” can be defined in many ways. For the most part, however, smart growth can be described as being sustainable growth: the planned development of a community that discourages sprawl and encourages open space and the preservation of natural areas, basically, a balance of development and growth with conservation and natural resources, all leading to an improved quality of life for residents and a healthy community.

According to the Smart Growth Network, there are several major principles that a community may practice to achieve smart growth. These are:

- Create walkable communities
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
- Encourage community collaboration in the planning process
- Foster distinct, attractive places with a strong sense of place
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective

- Mix land uses
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas
- Provide a variety of transportation choices
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- Take advantage of compact building design.

Many communities in Mobile and Baldwin counties are currently implementing principles of smart growth, and are working to incorporate more of these principles. For more information on smart growth, visit the Smart Growth Network online at www.smartgrowth.org.