



Planning for Prosperity - Limiting the Cost of Sprawl

FACT SHEET

In a recent study completed by the Sierra Business Council (SBC), researchers found that the most successful cities or towns located within the Sierra Nevada Region are those that maintain and enhance their centers or downtown cores through thoughtful, ongoing public and private reinvestment. In addition to reducing public and private costs through more efficient use of existing infrastructure, reinvestment in town centers and cores raises property values throughout the community by increasing the economic and social vitality of the city or town.

Results from a survey conducted for the SBC study regarding reinvestment in town cores found that Sierra residents appreciated the quality of their towns and supported the idea of further reinvestment. Of the people surveyed, 56% felt counties should be putting more effort into developing and promoting the quality and vitality of the downtown areas.

As part of the Truckee Meadows Regional Plan (Regional Plan), located in the Reno, Sparks, Washoe County areas, there are two traditional downtown cores and eight defined regional centers. The cores and regional centers are identified for redevelopment or intensified development to allow mixed-use commercial and higher density housing.

The core and center areas are connected by five transit-oriented development corridors (TODs), which are designated to provide transit links between the downtown cores and regional centers. The intention is to reduce sprawl development in the outlying areas and encourage increased density. By doing so, it is anticipated that there will be a reduction in infrastructure costs, and development is paced at an appropriate level within the approved development boundary identified as the Truckee Meadows Service Areas (TMSA).

Simply defined, the TMSA is a zone within which municipal services and infrastructure will be encouraged and provided over the next 20 years.

The Truckee Meadows can encourage private investments in the core and regional centers by making it easier to build on the vacant land located in core areas. A compact urban form, as supported in the Regional Plan, was adopted as a way to support downtown growth and redevelopment in the 10 designated centers and five transit corridors.

Compact development is being promoted as many communities in the Eastern Sierra are poised to move away from the 1950's sprawl development mind-set. Through deliberate planning and capital improvement processes concentrated development in the downtown areas is saving communities money on a variety of infrastructure, development and day-to-day living costs.



City Center Apartments in Reno, Nevada

WHAT IS SPRAWL?

From the Regional Plan—sprawl is “Premature growth or outward expansion of development. Low-density land-use patterns that are automobile-dependent, energy and land consumptive, and require a very high ratio of road surface to land development served.”

Quality of life impacts related to sprawl may include; lack of transportation options, bicycle facilities, and pedestrian friendly neighborhoods. Infrastructure impacts include increased cost for construction, operation and maintenance of public services including: streets, highways, roads, water and sewer systems, schools, police, and fire services. Added to the public costs, are private costs of residential, commercial, and industrial construction and operation of the businesses usually required to support sprawl development.

Natural resource impacts of sprawl include: loss of open space, natural areas, agricultural lands, and wildlife habitat, including degradation of air and water quality. Sprawl may also contribute to an overall missing sense of neighborhood or community.

Residents of sprawling neighborhoods tend to emit more pollution per person and suffer more traffic fatalities. Sprawl has been linked with increased obesity since walking and bicycling are not viable commuting options. Sprawl is controversial, with supporters claiming that consumers prefer lower density neighborhoods and the amenities associated with low price of land and housing found in those neighborhoods, this information was also noted in the SBC report.

WHAT DOES SPRAWL COST THE COMMUNITY?

A case study completed for the Central Valley in California provided below provides insight into an area study that included 39 cities. The case study includes annual revenues, cost of services, and the calculated difference between a Compact Growth and Urban Sprawl form of development.

A Cost Comparison of Urban Sprawl vs. Compact Growth in the Central Valley of California:				
	Urban Sprawl \$m	Compact Growth \$m	Difference \$m	1992-2040 Cumulative \$m
Annual Revenue	\$5,115	\$5,134	(\$19)	(\$466)
Annual Costs of Services	\$6,100	\$4,917	\$1,183	\$28,384
Net Surplus/ (Deficit)	(\$985)	\$217	\$1,202	\$28,850
As Percent of Revenue	-19.30%	4.20%	23.50%	N/A
<i>Note: All figures are in millions of 1993 Dollars. Figures reflect projections for 39 cities in the Central Valley of California.</i>				
Source: American Farmland Trust 1995. Future Urban Growth in California's Central Valley: The Bottom Line for Agriculture and Taxpayers, Washington, D.C.				

While a comprehensive study has not been completed for the Truckee Meadows, if one were to extrapolate the outcome of the California study to the Reno area, most likely the cost of sprawl would also be in the millions over a 30-40 year time frame for both public and private investments.

HOW DO WE PRESERVE OUR QUALITY OF LIFE AND REDUCE SPRAWL?

The Truckee Meadows Regional Plan is the foundation for a well-planned community which supports our unique quality of life, promotes a distinctive destination resort and recreation industry, while enabling our economic base to expand and diversify. Mindful of our Western Heritage, the Regional Plan welcomes a diverse population and values our precious waters, majestic Sierra Nevada, and high desert country.

There has been much public support for open space and wildlife habitat preservation, redevelopment and higher density development in the urban cores. The Regional Plan vision and goals support compact urban development, which limits impacts to water and air quality, and requires development be held to limits of the adopted Truckee Meadows Service Areas. The TMSA concept was adopted by the cities of Reno and Sparks, Washoe County and the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency (TMRPA) in 2002, with the adoption of the 2002 Regional Plan.

While much has been accomplished there is still more to do. Public and private investment decisions can either build or diminish a communities' wealth. Before asking the public to make new investments, local officials must ensure that existing infrastructure and public facilities are being used efficiently and wisely. Sprawl, whenever possible, should be discouraged with redevelopment and new development in centers and cores heartily encouraged.

The cities of Reno and Sparks along with Washoe County are looking to provide adequate housing, commercial, and industrial opportunities that complement the existing community while continuing to support our quality of life and the prosperity found by so many in the Truckee Meadows area.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CONTACT:



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