

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF URBAN SPRAWL

ICURR LITERATURE SUMMARY NO. 6

June 1999

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BACKGROUND

During the booming years of the post-World War II period, the phenomenon of sprawl surged across the urban landscape of North America. Spurred on by the universal use of the private automobile, the construction of highway systems, and the affordability of land at the urban fringe, the suburbs soon replaced the traditional downtown as the residential area of choice. As industry followed the workforce out of the inner-city, North American cities quickly became characterized by the low-density, wide-spread development associated with urban sprawl.

In recent years, North American cities have been confronted with the realization that urban sprawl is not sustainable. As cities continue to grow, urban planners are being forced to acknowledge the limited carrying capacity of the land in and around cities. Sprawl, in retrospect, is also being criticized for its negative social, economic, and environmental impacts including loss of community character, higher infrastructure costs, and destruction of agriculture land.

In the face of continued urbanization, both private citizens and public officials are being called upon to make informed choices about future growth patterns of cities, towns, and regions. In the planning field, literature is increasingly proclaiming alternatives to sprawl as essential to effective growth management and sustainable patterns development.

This summary presents a selection of documents which discusses the key causes, impacts, issues, and debates related to the topic of sprawl in Canadian and North American cities. These documents are organized under the following three categories:

- General Overview
- Alternatives to Sprawl
- Case Studies of Sprawl

ORGANISATION

This document pulls together a selection of existing resources on sprawl available through the ICURR library collection. In selecting publications for inclusion in this document the following criteria were considered: currency, Canadian content or relevance, the potential for application by municipalities, and a substantive focus on sprawl. While this document provides general discussion on issues relating to sprawl, prior literature summaries on *Healthy Communities* and *Alternative Guidelines and Practices* provide additional information on related topics to alternative and sustainable patterns of development. Entries are presented in chronological order, beginning with the most recent works in each section. While this summary document of resources available on sprawl is wide-ranging, it is by no means exhaustive.

ICURR LITERATURE SUMMARIES

ICURR Literature Summaries are an information service provided by ICURR. The intent of these summaries is to provide an overview of key resources available through ICURR on topics of interest and relevance to Canadian municipalities.

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OTHER ICURR LITERATURE SUMMARIES

June 1998	<i>Alternative Guidelines and Practices for Municipal Planning and Development</i>
July 1998	<i>Healthy Cities, Healthy Communities</i>
July 1998	<i>Performance Measurement and Program Delivery</i>
May 1999	<i>Safe City and Crime Prevention Initiatives</i>
July 1999	<i>Communication Strategies for Municipal Government</i>

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GENERAL OVERVIEW

Rybczynski, Witold. 1998. *Urban All Over the World.* *Macleans* (4 pages, ICURR Doc. UH 288, English)

Purpose

To provide commentary on the future of Canadian cities in the new millennium.

Key Definitions

Edge cities are the new cities that have formed at the metropolitan fringe that “account for more office space, more employment, and far more economic activity than traditional downtowns” (p.50). *Urban sprawl* is far-flung horizontal growth of cities.

Summary

The past 100 years have been a time of unprecedented urban growth. The author of this article argues that “as the globe has become urbanized, the challenge is to create something more meaningful than sprawl” (p.48). This article thus provides discussion on the future trends of urban growth. The article examines the need to recreate the urban landscape of Canada in a time of technological and to accommodate the uncontrolled growth of the past and the future. Rather than attempting to stop sprawl and problems related to it, such as automobile use and abandonment of traditional downtowns, the article discusses ways in which cities and citizens will adapt to recreate a sense of urbanity in the cities of the millennium.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Technology has made the entire metropolitan area, not just the central city, an attractive place to live. Fax machines, cell phones, and the internet have made work possible from almost anywhere while VCRs, satellites, and television have brought entertainment to our doorsteps. The author concludes that the decentralization resulting from technological advances has both encouraged sprawl in large cities and made smaller cities increasingly competitive.

Urban sprawl has come at great cost to the traditional city. Sprawl is ugly and lacks the variety once found in traditional downtowns. City life once thrived on the differences between city and country. As the lines between the two have become blurred, civilization has becoming almost entirely urban.

Despite attempts to curb sprawl in Canada’s major cities, cities have continues to expand. The authors warns that it is unlikely that urban sprawl will be prevented by comprehensive land use planning of the future.

The author also concludes that the chief problem of the future will not be to control sprawl. The problem will be incorporating the elements of urbanity such as density, walkability, and variety into the expanded metropolitan areas. The key to successful urban environments, the author advises, is the creation of “24-hour places” that combine residential, office, retail and entertainment uses in close proximity.

Issues of transportation will both change and remain constant in the millennium. Automobile use will continue to predominate. Pollution issues will become less of a concern as electric and energy conserving cars enter the market. Congestion, however, will continue to be a problem. The author recommends transit, in the form of mass small scale transit linking shopping, office parks, light-rail to residential suburbs, as the solution to congestion problems.

Though Canadian cities have largely avoided American trends of abandonment and inner city decline, in future main note be so insulated. Cities need to reinvent roles for themselves and establish themselves in new fields. Cities can no longer rely on being the central city of a region.

Small cities can now support themselves as industries locate in them. Though traditional downtowns are no longer the cheapest or most convenient place to do business, the author advises reviving them as historic districts, cultural institutions, and amenities.

Part 1: urban all over

Kenworthy, Jeff and Tamim Raad. 1998. The US and Us: Canadian Cities are Going the Way of their US Counterparts into Car-dependent Sprawl. *Alternatives Journal* (9 pages, bibliography, ICURR Doc. TH 117, English)

Purpose

To explore the different national cultures and distinct approaches to urban policy making in Canada and the United States; to note ominous signs that Canadian governments are beginning to abandon these principles, and, to make suggestions for preserving Canadian cities under changing economic and political conditions.

Key Definition(s)

Suburban growth “usually occurs through gradual expansion of the urban envelope and is seeded by higher-density nodes where office, retail and residential land uses occur in healthy mixes” (p.14). *Edge cities* form in the hinterland around the older hollowed-out cities. Access to edge cities reliance on car ownership for they tend to be poorly serviced by transit and are almost totally car-dependent. The *public choice movement* holds that a large number of municipalities competing to attract new taxpayers is the best way to keep governments efficient and honest (p. 17).

Summary

Both Canadian and U.S. cities have experienced the phenomenon of sprawl. The urban population boom of the post-World War II period resulted in largely unbounded growth and development in cities in both countries. Canadian and U.S. cities, however, have experienced and responded to sprawl in distinct manners. This article provides a comparison study of the phenomenon of sprawl in Canadian and U.S. cities. The authors examine how sprawl has occurred in each country, to what degree sprawl has occurred, and explore why Canadian cities are beginning to follow the same routes of their American counterparts.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Different national cultures and distinctive approaches to urban policy making have shaped the physical form of North American cities. Canada’s collective ideals have led to more public minded planning. American planning, in contrast, most frequently serve local and corporate interests over regional and collective ones.

The article concludes that Canada prevented the hemorrhaging of its inner cities, as experienced in the US, through investment into public transit, public housing, parks, and through the preservation of social services, quality education, and racial diversity. Similar investments have been sacrificed in American cities in the interest of lower taxes.

The consolidation of local government units also enhances the ability of Canadian regions to deal with challenges of urban growth relative to American regions. Political fragmentation in the United States, encouraged by local governments rights to self-determination, inhibits the cooperation required for successfully regional planning.

The article also concludes that Canadian cities are beginning to lose control over growth and follow the path taken by their U.S. counterparts. Canadian governments are abandoning their collectivist principles. The article outlines the following actions as signs that Canadian cities are beginning to follow the trends of their American counterparts:

- Funding of social programs with property taxes leaving them vulnerable to the fluctuations of the real estate market and economic cycles.
- Disbanding of regional planning commissions across the country resulting in municipal fragmentation.
- Limiting of Regional authorities which therefore lack the effective legal mechanisms to ensure plan implementation.
- Reduction of funding for public transit with while investment in regional roads and commuter railways to distant suburbs continues.

To avoid the destructive patterns of sprawl, as seen in US cities, the article advises Canadian cities to:

- Strengthen the values and institutions that have enhanced urban livability and mitigated auto dependence.
- Reaffirm their commitment to public values.
- Reinvent and strengthen the institutions charged with their stewardship.
- Establish real legal authority in regional planning.
- Promote co-operation over competition between all municipalities in functional regions.

Part 1: introduction; Part 2: Canada's collective ideals; Part 3: institutional innovations in Canada; Part 4: losing control over growth; Part 5: troubled futures; Part 6: building on the tried and true

Nagorka, Jennifer. 1998. *Champions of Sprawl Confront Growth*. Washington: Urban Land Institute (4 pages, ICURR Doc. 210, English)

Purpose

To examine the phenomenon of sprawl in the state of Texas; and, to explore attempts to control sprawl and manage growth.

Key Definition(s)

Municipal utility districts (MUDs) permit developers to build infrastructure without putting up their own money by issuing tax-free bonds to finance streets and water lines, and property taxes would be used to repay the bonds. The City of Austin's *growth management* plan attempts to guide the future of the incorporated areas city through government intervention and a sense of the common good.

Summary

Rapid population growth in Texas has been concentrated in three major urbanized areas, Austin, Dallas, and Houston. In all three areas, growth has occurred both within the city boundaries and sprawled into surrounding counties outside the city limits. This article provides case studies illustrating how each area has approached growth management and regional planning. The article also explores the limits of these initiatives and questions whether they will be enough to maintain residents' current quality of life as the population continues to grow.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Culture and growth management are at odds in the state of Texas. While Texas culture embraces the free market, local control, private property rights, and individual autonomy, growth

management relies on government intervention, regional cooperation, and an overriding sense of the common good.

The Texas State Constitution has served to limit official attempts to regulate regional growth by limiting city and county government controls. City governments are empowered to regulate growth using ordinances and other land use controls within their incorporated limits. County officials, however, have little authority to control development in unincorporated areas. As a result, uncontrolled suburban sprawl has boomed in unincorporated areas just outside city boundaries.

The City of Austin has responded to sprawl by adopting smart growth principles including infill development, mixed-use zoning, pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented neighborhoods, downtown housing, and open space preservation. While the application of smart growth principles has served to control growth within the city, suburban development continues to expand in areas just outside the city limits. In response, a voluntary public/private partnership has formed between more than 40 jurisdictions and 200 businesses. This partnership, The Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council, addresses regional planning issues in the area. The Council encourages communities in the region to identify the impact of their neighboring communities on them and provides advice on the tools they need to address issues relating to these impacts.

The City of Houston is the largest American city without a zoning code. In addition, a large portion of Houston's population lives in unincorporated subdivisions outside the city boundaries. Municipal Utility Districts (MUDs) have facilitated the proliferation of these subdivisions. The county is responsible for supplying unincorporated subdivisions with some services traditionally provided by city government. County and city partnerships have subsequently been developed to coordinate government services. An example of such cross-jurisdiction partnerships is the consolidation of city and county emergency management services into one building. Such partnerships permit more effective and inexpensive services to residents living in both the city of Houston and the surrounding areas.

In North Texas, the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth have sprawled together. The cities have subsequently recognized the benefit of jurisdictional cooperation. In order to provide more effective and efficient services to their residents, the two cities share an airport and provide a commuter services between the two cities. In addition, the North Central Texas Council of Governments has been formed to collect data and provide staff for dozens of committees and task forces related to regional planning. Most elected officials of the region agree that, as North Texas continues to grow, regional cooperation will increase and one day include coordinated land use planning across several counties.

Part 1: introduction; Part 2: texas culture vs. growth management; Part 3: austin and hill country; Part 4: houston; Part 5: north texas

Gordon, Peter & Harry W. Richardson, and Reid Ewing. 1997. *Alternative Views of Sprawl*. Chicago: American Planning Institute (32 pages, bibliography, ICURR Doc. UI 188, English)

Purpose

To present alternative views on sprawl; to evaluate whether or not the promotion of compact cities is a worthwhile planning goal; and, to review the characteristics, causes, and costs of alternative development patterns.

Key Definition(s)

Sprawl is a form of suburban development that lacks accessibility and open space. It is not a natural response to market forces, but rather a product of subsidies and other market imperfections (p.107). Sprawl is characterized by low-density strip, scattered, and/or leapfrog development. *Compact Cities* are cities with compact development and include the concentration of employment, some clustering of housing, and some mixing of land uses that provide an alternative to sprawl. There are three approaches to examining compact cities: (1) the *macro approach*: based on high average densities at the city-side or even metropolitan level, but more likely to be applied to a freestanding town, (2) *the micro approach*: reflecting high densities at the neighborhood or community level; and (3) *the spatial structure approach*: emphasizing a pattern oriented to downtown or the central city versus a polycentric (or dispersed) spatial pattern, with obvious density consequences. *Discontinuous Development* is a settlement pattern in which certain sites are bypassed initially to leave room for more intense uses later on (p.108).

Summary

This document, composed of two articles, provides debate on the impacts of sprawl and the desirability of compact cities. The first article is an argument in favor of sprawled development and denounces the idea that efficiency is gained from compact cities. The second article responds to these arguments and argues that compact cities are a desirable goal. This article also describes the characteristics, causes, costs, and cures for sprawl and concludes that sprawl is not a sustainable form of development.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The first article argues that sprawled development is a desirable urban form. The suburbs are overwhelmingly the favored choice for residential living. Government interventions into energy pricing have kept gas prices low and therefore transportation costs, accumulated through suburban commuting, affordable. At the same time, public transit systems are less time efficient than private automobiles therefore unattractive to suburbanites and expensive for governments to maintain.

The article also concludes that the negative transportation impacts of suburbanization are benign. Long commutes into the inner city have been avoided as industry has followed its workforce to the suburbs. Commuting times for working and shopping are therefore not considerably higher for suburbanites than for central city residents. In addition, technological innovations have resulted in declining transportation and communication costs which were once the reason for concentrated settlement.

The authors also denounce the argument that compact cities are more equitable. The exclusion of the poor from expensive residential areas is instead an issue of affordability. Income redistribution, not land use policy, is therefore the key to addressing issues of housing segregation and inequities.

The second article concedes that sprawl is shaped by consumer preferences. Consumers tend to prefer the single-detached housing type currently found in outlying locations where land is inexpensive and congestion moderate. The preference, however, is not necessarily for low-density development. Consumers, while stating a preference for single-detached homes over multiple-family homes, also prefer compact centers over commercial strips. The article recommends combining these two preferences to provide compact housing developments that are alternatives to existing sprawling suburbs.

The article also concludes that in compact cities as densities rise, transit and walking mode shares increase and vehicle trip rates drop. The result is less per capita fuel consumption, less pollution,

and less expenditures on infrastructure. In addition, less demand for land results in less pressure on and less loss of environmentally sensitive land.

Technical innovations in telecommunications have failed to replace face-to-face interactions. The central city continues to be the premier locations for finance, legal services, advertising, and other industries requiring rapid face-to-face contact.

Compactness also increases the accessibility of services to the disadvantaged creating a more equitable city and facilitates face-to-face interactions amongst residents facilitating stronger community bonds than found in sprawling suburbs.

Governments should therefore discourage sprawl and create compact cities using tools such as area-wide congestion pricing, planning initiatives that reward good development and discourage bad, compact mixed use developments, and public private partnerships.

Part 1: editor's note; Part 2: introduction; Part 3: open space and agricultural land; Part 4: density preferences; Part 5: the energy glut; Part 6: the scope for transit; Part 7: suburbanization and congestion; Part 8: the efficiency of compactness; Part 9: technology and agglomeration-congestion trade-offs; Part 10: downtowns in eclipse; Part 11: rent seeking and politics; Part 12: compactness and equity; Part 13: competition among cities; Part 14: conclusion;

Part 1: introduction; Part 2: characteristics of sprawl; Part 3: causes of sprawl; Part 4: costs of sprawl; Part 5: cures

ALTERNATIVES TO SPRAWL

Urban Land Institute. 1998. *ULI on the Future: Smart Growth*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute. (56 pages, ICURR Doc. RH 103, English)

Purpose

To define smart growth and outline strategies for implementing smart growth principles.

Key Definition(s)

Smart Growth “describes development that enhances existing communities, that is compatible with the natural environment, and that uses tax dollars efficiently while attracting private investment” (p.iv). *Smarter Transportation* provides an alternative to the automobile and encourages the transportation and land use planning practices to reassessment.

Summary

Smart growth is being embraced as “a new approach that can resolve problems that have long been endemic to urban growth and development in the United States”(p.2). These problems, such as loss of open space and farmland, growing traffic congestion, absence of a sense of place, crowded schools and air pollution, have resulted from a dependence on the suburban lifestyle. This book presents smart growth as an alternative to previous patterns of urban sprawl. The book defines smart growth and its goals; provides strategies for achieving smart growth; and describes tools for implementing these strategies.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Smart Growth principles were developed with the goals of creating communities that are physically, economically, and culturally vibrant. The main goals of Smart Growth are to:

- Enhance the sense of community
- Protect investment in existing neighborhoods
- Provide certainty in the development process
- Protect environmental quality and conserve open space
- Reward developers with profitable produce, financing, and flexibility
- Decrease congestion by providing alternative modes of transportation
- Make efficient use of public money

The document also recommends the following strategies for achieving smart growth in cities and their regions:

- Conservation of open/green space, including farmland preservation.
- Incentives to encourage investment and reinvestment in central cities, older suburbs, and existing communities.
- Location of major new regional attractions in central cities.
- Creation of higher-density development nodes around transit.
- Use of new urbanist ideas to build communities with charm and character at higher densities.
- Mixed-use development.
- Dispersed Affordable Housing .
- Infill Development.

Urban transportation planning has a powerful influence on the pattern of growth and development of U.S. metropolitan areas. Smart Transportation, which encourages alternatives to automobile use, is therefore key to achieving smart growth. Smart Transportation policies, including regional coordination of public transit; street designs accommodating pedestrians, cyclists, and buses; subdivision layouts incorporating traffic calming; mixed use developments accessible by transit; and federal tax policies, are tools for discouraging dispersed housing and universal automobile use.

The integration of high-density housing into comprehensive land use plan can be encouraged with improved designs and financial incentives to builders and buyers. Suburbanites will buy higher-density housing when it is both associated with the bundle of desirable community characteristics offered in suburban locations (low crime, good schools) and affordable.

State legislation is recommended as a tool that local and regional governments and agencies can use to plan and implement growth management strategies. Legislation should strengthen intergovernmental relations; promote predictability and complexity in the approval process; raise the quality of development; and, build on prior growth management legislation.

Cooperation is also key to achieving smart growth. Regional planning processes are increasingly being revived as effective tools for addressing problems that cut across municipal lines. The global economy will continue to reinforce the need for local officials to cooperate in order to maintain competitive regions. Environmental awareness amongst a critical mass of Americans has aware of the ways in which current lifestyles adversely affect the quality of air, water, and land. A new generation of enlightened developers is also concerned about the environment and are joining with representatives of nonprofit and the public sector in smart growth coalitions

The recognition of that a relationship exists between regional growth patterns and healthy central cities stresses the importance of strengthening the central city. Healthy central cities require a mix of urban activities, which function competitively with or in close proximity to the others.

Part 1: foreword; Part 2: introduction; Part 3: smart growth in our future?; Part 4: smart transportation for smart growth; Part 5: the case for higher-density housing: a key to smart growth?; Part 6: the states: growing smarter?; Part 7: smart growth and regional cooperation; Part 8: smart growth for center cities.

Emeneau, Janice (ed.). 1996. *A Practitioner's Guide to Urban Intensification*. Toronto: Canadian Urban Institute (85 pages, ICURR Doc. UE 034, Bibliography, English)

Purpose

To provide practitioners with literature on topics related to urban intensification.

Key Definition(s)

Intensification implies more development on a site than in a typical suburban model. Higher densities can be achieved using five types of land use tools: conversion of existing units or buildings, infill development, redevelopment, adaptive re-use, and suburban densification. *Infill development* involves “building homes, businesses and public facilities on unused and underutilized lands within existing urban areas” (p.26).

Summary

This documents includes a selection of articles from *The Intensification Report*, a bi-monthly journal of the Urban Institute. The articles support urban intensification as a “fiscally and environmentally responsible alternative to urban sprawl” (intro). The objectives of intensification include higher population densities, more efficient use of infrastructure, a greater mix of uses, and greater efficiency between these uses. The articles also discuss the implementation intensification plans and suggest a variety of “tools” that can be used to intensify urban areas. Several of the articles also discuss the consequences of sprawl and the implications of continuing this pattern of growth.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Urban intensification results in the efficient use of urban land; allows rebuilding of cities to occur; and, accommodates the growth and redesign of cities to be environmentally and socially sustainable

Sprawl, in contrast, has negative impacts on land, environment, and people. The consequences of sprawl include traffic congestion, declined transit ridership, increased infrastructure costs, environmental deterioration, disappearance of prime agricultural land, and declining quality of life in low-density neighborhoods.

This guide provides a “toolbox” of intensification ideas. The recommendations for achieving urban intensification, by taking advantage of a city’s housing potentials, include:

- *Main Streets initiatives*: the encouragement of modest residential intensification along its network of arterial streets including housing above shops along commercial strips.
- *Property Tax*: the calculation of property taxes based on property values or square footage in order to encourage investments higher-density housing developments.
- *Innovative Starter Homes*: the development of new housing designs including small high-density homes with the ability to grow along with family need.
- *Infill development*: the redevelopment of existing pockets of land within the urban landscape while maintaining the character of existing neighborhoods.
- *Higher densities*: the enhancement of a sense of community through natural interactions and shared spaces.

The guide concludes that officials cannot rely on residential land uses and housing potentials to solve the problems linked to sprawl. Land use planning is too weak a tool to solve the economic and social forces shaping cities. Local officials need to consider legal constraints such as Official Plan provisions requiring compatibility of new and existing residential development; zoning by-laws permitting higher-density developments; and, development charges assessed on value rather than size.

Part 1: consequences of continued sprawl; Part 2: a toolbox of intensification ideas; Part 3: density and quality of life; Part 4: telecommunications technologies: the implications; Part 5: innovative development practices: the new urbanism; Part 6: constraints

Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. 1995. *Alternative to Sprawl*. Cambridge: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy (32 pages, ICURR Doc. UH 224, Bibliography, English)

Purpose

To serve as a resource for private citizens and public officials in making informed choices about the future growth patterns of the cities, towns and countrysides.

Definition(s)

Sprawl is the growth of the population outside the central city at no specified density or scale of land consumption. It is also viewed as a specific form of suburbanization that involves extremely low-density settlement at the far edges of the settled area, spreading out far into previously undeveloped land". Anthony Downs. Richard Moe "low-density

Summary

This policy report is based on the "Alternatives to Sprawl" conference sponsored by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The report provides a historical background of the roots and causes of sprawl, the social and economic costs of sprawl, and suggests alternatives to sprawl.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Sprawl is a uniquely American phenomenon supported by the predominance of automobile use. It has evolved in a society that is based on "the notion of boundless space, the concept of throwaway culture [and] the conviction that newer is always better" (p.4).

Factors that encourage sprawl include (p.6):

- occupancy of single-family homes in wide-spreading, low-density developments;
- universal use of private automobiles
- dominance of scattered low-density workplaces, most of them providing convenient free parking;
- fragmentation of powers of governance over land use; and
- reliance on the "trickle down" economic process to provide housing for low-income households

Sprawl also has negative economic impacts on the economy, environment, and society:

- poverty is concentrated in urban areas
- society is segregated along economic and racial lines in residential patterns and in access to education

- public investment in urban services such as schools, public safety and mass transit systems is rendered unfeasible
- increased automobile dependence undermines or nullifies efforts to improve air and water quality and to conserve energy.
- financial instability, spurred by such factors as rising housing costs and decreased availability of certain types of employment, creates widespread anxiety among the middle class.

Attempts to manage sprawl have been hindered by the fact that there is no clear villain in the sprawl scenario. Even opponents of sprawl have had to acknowledge that the majority of people derive some benefit from the auto-dependent culture that fuels sprawl. Those who do not benefit from the auto-dependent culture have tended to be in the minority and unable or unwilling to take up the issue. As a result, sprawl's opponents enjoy little credibility as advocates on behalf of this minority.

The report concludes that the Achilles heel of sprawl is that it is not sustainable.

Part 1 : introduction; Part 2: sprawl: how it began, how it spread; Part 3: living with sprawl; Part 4: creating and encouraging alternatives to sprawl; Part 5: traditional town planning; Part 6: conclusion; Part 7: notes; Part 8: bibliography; Part 9: ordering information

CASE STUDIES ON SPRAWL

Ehrenhalt, Alan. 1997. The Great Wall of Portland. *Governing*, 10:8 (5 pages, ICURR Doc. UA 103, English)

Purpose

To examine the debate over Portland's urban growth boundary.

Key Definitions

Portland's *urban growth boundary* (UGB) is a 364 square mile territory surrounded by parks, forests, and farmland. Within this boundary, 41 % of the people of Oregon live. Outside of the boundary it is virtually impossible to build anything.

Summary

The city of Portland, Oregon is greatly admired for its livability, hailed as a "shining example of effective sprawls control" (p.20). Portland is also looked at a role model for urban development. At a time when Oregon is booming and the housing market heating up, the debate over the positive effects of the UGB is being questioned. This article examines the urban growth boundary (UGB) debate that rages within the city.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Opponents of the UGB argue that the boundary has forced up real estate prices and made the construction of new housing unaffordable. Homebuilders, real estate brokers, and potential buyers argue that a housing problem has been created by the UGB. Commercial companies cannot find the necessary large lots inside the UGB.

Supporters of sprawl fear the expansion of the UGB will facilitate sprawl.

The UGB has not put an end to sprawl in the Portland region. Between Portland's city limits and the UGB roads, malls, and subdivisions have sprung up as in other city. The UGB, however, has successfully contained sprawl causing the urbanized area to "fill up".

The inner core of the city of Portland is booming as developers and property owners invest in higher-density developments. While high-density developments are being built, there has also been significant backlash against increased urban densities in many neighborhoods.

Communities outside the UGB oppose its expansion. Inclusion into the Portland UGB would transform small towns into suburbs and kill their downtowns. Also fear the expansion of subdivisions into their areas, in the light of recent dramatic property tax cuts, new subdivisions are equated with high infrastructure expense with little return tax money..

Portland is under strict state control. The state's Land Conservation and Development Commission has the legal authority to reject community land use plans and punish non-compliance by withholding taxes. The state can therefore ensure that the land use program won't fall apart and cease functioning.

Part 1: introduction; Part 2: urban growth boundary; Part 3: anti-growth forces; Part 4: slow-growth coalition; Part 5: conclusion

O'Hara, Frank. 1997. *The Cost of Sprawl. Maine: Maine State Planning Office (20 pages, ICURR Doc. UG 217, English)*

Purpose

To explore the economic and social costs of sprawl in Maine.

Key Definition(s)

New suburbs are the towns 10 to 25 miles from metropolitan areas from which residents commute to the city. *Sprawl* is the phenomenon of spreading out development that occurs as a result of the movement of people from city to country.

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Summary

Over the past 30 years, Maine has experience rapid growth in "new suburbs" as the metropolitan areas sprawl into surrounding rural lands. This booklet provides information regarding the phenomenon of sprawl in the state of Maine. The booklet reveals how sprawl has occurred at great cost to taxpayers, the environmental, and community character. The booklet, recognizing sprawl as a problem, also explores what the State Administration is doing to prevent further sprawl.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Sprawl has significant fiscal impacts on the residents of Maine. As the population shifts from traditional urban downtowns to new rural centers, old infrastructure is abandoned and must be re-created in rural areas. Increased costs in service provisions results in higher property taxes in both rural towns and cities. Costs to Maine taxpayers rise as a result of:

- duplication of schools with one set in the city and a new set in the country.
- increase in road construction, maintenance, and repair costs with increased use in particular along commuter corridors.

- higher police costs as patrols are forced to spread out over an extended area.

Quality of life in Maine is closely associated with the natural environment. The spread-out pattern of living threatens the environmental assets of the state. The environmental impacts of sprawl include:

- poor air quality with increase car use.
- loss of habitat for wildlife and the fragmentation of existing habitat by development sprawl led to diminished wildlife.
- wetland destruction.
- pollution of lakes and waterbodies.

Sprawl is also costing towns in Maine their community character. Downtowns are losing their historic anchors of department stores, post offices, churches, and historic buildings. In rural towns, active working landscapes, such as farms and fisheries, are being replaced by passive use as middle class suburbs.

The future direction of managed growth in the State of Maine relies on the cooperation of citizens, business owners, developers, and government officials. Solutions to the problems caused by sprawl will be derived from homeowners decisions to live near their places of work, business owners reinvestment into towns and city centers, and government legislation that rewards in-town living and promotes regional planning.

Part 1: overview; Part 2: the cost to taxpayers; Part 3: environmental costs; Part 4: the cost to community character; Part 5: future directions; Part 6: what you can do

Forbes, Alex and Ken Forrest. 1997. *Case Study: Frustrated in Fredericton* (4 pages, ICURR Doc. UA 105, English, French)

Purpose

To examine the trend toward ruralization in New Brunswick focusing on recommendations contained in the CLURE Report that pertains to rural sprawl.

Key Definition(s)

CLURE is the Commission on Land Use and the Rural Environment appointed to address rural sprawl, ribbon development, the lack rural planning and development control, and related resource and environmental concerns in New Brunswick. *CLURE* is focused on policy areas related to structure and process for planning, environmental impact, impact on resource lands, impact on municipalities and rural communities, impact on the highway systems and traffic, and financial impacts.

Summary

This article describes how New Brunswick's system of rural government and land use management has led to rural sprawl and the stagnation of urban development. The article summarizes rural sprawl trends and describes the *CLURE* recommendations for managing these trends. The article also uses a case study of the city of Fredericton as a model of rural sprawl in New Brunswick.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Rural growth in the province of New Brunswick is not a product of a growing agricultural sector, the fisheries, or other rural pursuits rather the result of provincial government policy and practice that make rural development attractive and affordable at the expense of city taxpayers.

Residents of the unincorporated areas surrounding Fredericton benefit from :

- Lower property taxation system between unincorporated areas and urban municipalities. Municipal governments cannot provide services at a tax rate that can compete with the rate in unincorporated areas.
- The use of services, such as education, medical, recreational facilities, provided by the City of Fredericton without having to contribute to the upkeep of the city infrastructure they use.
- Fewer building codes than required in the city.
- Lack of provincial land use policies, such as zoning, to discouraging unserved residential, industrial, or commercial development.

CLURE recommends that the province adopt policies to “halt the spread of sprawl and ribbon development by encouraging development in more appropriate areas and by protecting resource lands and environmentally sensitive areas”.

The key to curbing sprawl in New Brunswick is the delivery of a more equitable tax system. CLURE recommended that the Province adopt a cost accounting system which would accurately reflect the cost of providing services to rural areas. Municipalities will continue to have a difficult time in competing with unincorporated areas for development until the fiscal and regulatory environment is changed to create a level playing field.

Part 1: introduction; Part 2: combating sprawl: the clure recommendations; Part 3: the reality of sprawl in new brunswick: the fredericton example; Part 4: after clure: the government response

Bank of America. 1996. *Beyond Sprawl: New Patterns of Growth to Fit the New California*. Bank of America Corporation (15 pages, ICURR Doc. UA 104, English)

Purpose

To suggest new ideas regarding how California can continue to grow while still fostering the economic vitality and quality of life that makes it a vibrant place to live and work.

Key Definition(s)

Sprawl is a pattern of urban and suburban development characterized by decentralization of urban jobs, construction of new housing tracts into outlying farmland, and the increased automobile use. The *Old California* describes the sprawling city that emerged post-WWII during a time of rapid population growth and economic boom. The *New California* is the city of the future. This city, while also facing continued rapid population growth, seeks to curb past patterns of sprawl and embrace new and sustainable patterns of growth.

Summary

After decades of rapid growth and sprawling development, California is now faced with the difficulty of managing future growth. California can no longer afford to support its past favored pattern of urban and suburban development - sprawl. This report is “a call for California to move beyond sprawl and rethink the way [it] will grow in the future” (p.1). The report outlines the causes of sprawl, the trends that are typical of the effects of sprawl and the forces that fuel sprawl. The cost of sprawl to taxpayers, businesses, residents of old and new suburbs, farmers, and the environment is also summarized. The report then suggests better ways to manage growth and create “a strong, vibrant economy and ensure a high quality of life for the 21st century”.

Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The Old California was fueled by a combination of individual choices, market forces, and government policies which made sprawl both psychologically and economically desirable. Residents' perceptions that the suburbs were safer and cheaper made them preferable to other urban housing options. Automobile ownership boomed as the construction of new highways made suburbs easily and affordably accessible. At the same time, technological advances encouraged the decentralization of employment away from traditional centers. Local government policies provided fiscal incentives encouraging the "cherry-picking" of land uses based on tax considerations

The sprawling cities of the Old California are characterized by:

- Decentralized employment centers.
- New housing tracts pushed deeper into agricultural and environmentally sensitive areas
- Increased dependence on automobiles
- Isolation of older communities, including central cities and "first wave" suburbs built in the 1950's and 1950's.

Sprawl has come at great expense to California society. The costs to taxpayers, businesses, residents of old and new suburbs, farmers, and environment include:

- The cost of building and maintaining highways and other major infrastructure improvements to serve distant suburbs.
- The cost of dealing with social problems that fester in older neighborhoods when they are neglected or abandoned.
- The cost of solving environmental problems, in particular air pollution, overdrafted water supply, wetland destruction, and permanent loss of agricultural land.
- The geographical mismatch between workers and jobs, leading to higher labor costs and a loss in worker productivity
- The cost of new suburban infrastructure
- The shift in political power and government service.

The report concludes that California cannot afford another generation of sprawl. The state is "increasingly characterized by a limited supply of developable land, environmental stress at the metropolitan fringe, and older communities in transition" (p.15). Continued sprawl will create a California that is crippled by preventable economic, social, environmental and political problems.

The new California requires alternatives to sprawling development and therefore new patterns of development. In order to be sustainable, the report recommends patterns of growth in the future that make efficient use of existing urban and suburban land; delineate where new development should and should not occur; integrate conservation and development priorities; and conserve of ecologically important habitats and other open space such as prime agricultural land.

An effective growth management plan will require changes in public policy, private business practices, and individual behaviors. Both governments and businesses are advised to provide the leadership required to discourage the disinvestment incurred by sprawl and sustain the economic health of the state.


Part 1: executive summary; Part 2: introduction; Part 3: sprawl and its causes; Part 4: the cost of sprawl; Part 5: beyond sprawl; Part 6:



Appendix A

Land-Use Patterns and Urban Densities in Canadian and American Cities

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Source: Kenworthy, Jeff and Tamim Raad. 1998. The US and Us: Canadian Cities are Going the Way of their US Counterparts into Car-dependent Sprawl, p. 16 -17.

Appendix B

Alternative Development Patterns

ICURR Intergovernmental Committee on Urban
and Regional Research
Comité intergouvernemental de recherches
urbaines et régionales **CIRUR**

Source: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. 1995. Alternative to Sprawl, p.19.



Appendix C

Criteria for Determining Sprawl Conditions

ICURR Intergovernmental Committee on Urban
and Regional Research
Comité intergouvernemental de recherches
urbaines et régionales **CIRUR**

Source: O'Hara, Frank. 1997. *The Cost of Sprawl*, p.18-19.

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