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To: ["modren@mackaysposito.com"](mailto:modren@mackaysposito.com)
Cc: ["Jamie Howsley"](#); [Oliver Orjiako](#); [Jose Alvarez](#)
Subject: RE: DEAB Planning Commission Memo
Date: Wednesday, January 28, 2026 3:17:00 PM
Attachments: [DEAB Ltr to PC 1.28.2026.pdf](#)
[image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)

Good day, Mike,

Thank you for providing this memorandum to the feedback provided for the Hearing to select the Preferred Land Use Alternative.

I am forwarding to additional members of Staff. Your comments will be brought to the attention of Planning Commission ahead of the Jan. 29th continuation of the Hearing to select the Preferred Land Use Alternative. This will also be added to the Index of Record.

Best regards,



Jeff Delapena
Program Assistant
COMMUNITY PLANNING

564.397.4558



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From: Mike Odren <modren@mackaysposito.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 28, 2026 2:55 PM
To: Jeffrey Delapena <Jeffrey.Delapena@clark.wa.gov>
Cc: Mike Odren <modren@mackaysposito.com>; Jamie Howsley <Jamie.howsley@jordanramis.com>
Subject: DEAB Planning Commission Memo

-

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Good afternoon, Jeff.

Please find attached DEAB's memorandum to the Planning Commission following up to their testimony at the previous joint PC/Council hearing. Would you please distribute this to the members of the Planning Commission?

Thanks in advance!

Mike Odren
DEAB Chair

Mike Odren, RLA

Landscape Architect, Land Use Planner
Project Manager, Shareholder

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Dear Chair Johnson and Planning Commission Members:

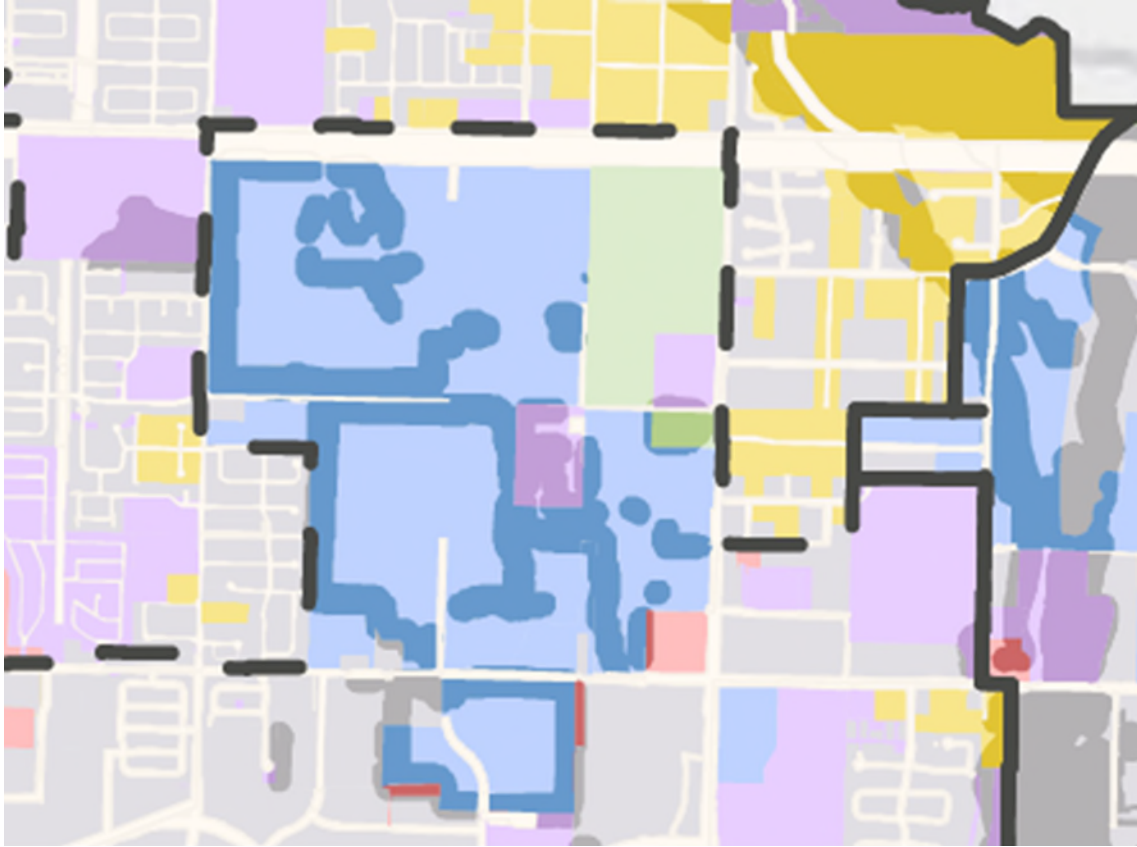
On behalf of DEAB (Development Engineering Advisory Board) we would like to provide this follow-up to our testimony with the additional supporting documentation for your consideration during your deliberations. We would first like to offer an executive summary of the points we raised for your quick reference during your deliberations.

Executive Summary

- The VBLM needs to be refreshed as we have more than two years of additional development. Adoption of a 20 year plan is really the adoption of a 17 year land supply without this refresh
- The density for the residential numbers are gross over assumptions that are not likely to develop over the 20 year planning period
- The lands being proposed for de-designation are characterized by urban growth and therefore no longer meet the definition of lands of long term commercial significance
- Regardless the vast majority of lands proposed for de-designation are for employment purposes and when analyzed under all of the non-exclusive factors again reinforce they are not lands of long term commercial significance
- Site Specific Requests should be considered

Recommendation for VBLM Refresh

The vacant buildable lands data is stale. A cursory review of the VBLM maps reveals that many parcels labeled as vacant actually have development on it. Here are just a few examples.



This map shows the Section 30 area. Two of the areas in blue currently along 1st have buildings on them. One is the [Hewlett Packard building](#) shown below under construction.



Just to the east of this building is an industrial warehouse put up by Panattoni Development. A photo of this building is shown below:



Right next door to the Panattoni building where the map shows vacant commercial is a new commercial development by Gramor called [Lacamas Square](#). This development has a Credit Union, Starbucks and more.

Another example of commercial land can be found in Ridgefield at the interchange. The VBLM shows this as vacant commercial land. And yet this is where the Costco and Washington's first In and Out is, amongst other projects. The aerials on GIS have not been updated since 2023 that shows this.



As for residential here is an example of land in Camas. The large area of yellow next to the “purple Lacamas Lake” used to be owned by CJ Dens. It was built by Toll Brothers and is almost fully built out with houses.



DEAB just randomly selected one of the lots in the project on GIS to show it as built. Again, most are fully constructed and occupied.



Again, these are just a few examples of maybe some higher profile projects that you may be aware of that are not reflected in the VBLM model and may be giving a false sense of the ability to accommodate growth. DEAB strongly recommends that the Planning Commission recommend a refresh of the VBLM maps and have both the cities and members of the development community review it for accuracy.

Proposed Density in Residential Zones is Unrealistic

Below shows the density data contained within the VBLM run. The table below shows the minimum and maximum density per zoning district and also what the VBLM assumes for zoning district. DEAB takes issue with this data because it assumes that most development will far exceed what the historic development patterns have been. Staff assumes that every project will take advantage of the states middle housing legislation to push the density well beyond the prior max density. We would suggest that you review the memorandum from Johnson Economics that looked at various residential projects and concluded that most development achieve about 68-69% of the density of the zone. To assume that development over the next twenty years is going to develop at 100+% ignores the market dynamics and sheer fact that development codes contain competing interests that inevitably push development more towards the minimum density targets.

DEAB strongly suggests that you listen to the recommendations from its members who work on development projects for a living and know how they are done. Land development is not a two dimensional paper exercise that can easily have assumed equations applied to it. It needs to be reality based.

Zoning	Zone	Min Density	Max Density	VBLM
MX	Mixed Use (MX)*	<u>24</u>	<u>50</u>	27
OR-24	Office Residential-24 (OR-24)	<u>18</u>	<u>24</u>	22
OR-32	Office Residential-32 (OR-32)	<u>24</u>	<u>32</u>	27
OR-40	Office Residential-40 (OR-40)	<u>32</u>	<u>40</u>	27
OR-45	Office Residential-45 (OR-45)	<u>40</u>	<u>45</u>	40
OR-50	Office Residential-50 (OR-50)	<u>45</u>	<u>50</u>	40
R-24	Residential (R-24)	<u>18</u>	<u>24</u>	22
R-32	Residential (R-32)	<u>24</u>	<u>32</u>	27
R-40	Residential (R-40)	<u>32</u>	<u>40</u>	27
R-45	Residential (R-45)	<u>40</u>	<u>45</u>	40
R-50	Residential (R-50)	<u>45</u>	<u>50</u>	40
R1-10	Single Family Residential (R1-10)	2.9	4.4	3
R1-20	Single Family Residential (R1-20)	1.4	2.2	6
R1-5	Single Family Residential (R1-5)	6.2	22	14
R1-6	Single Family Residential (R1-6)	5.1	22	14
R1-7.5	Single Family Residential (R1-7.5)	4.1	22	14
	Klineline, 99 Comms, and Totem TC (HWY99/K9T)	<u>24</u>	No max.	75
	Parks Common, and Minnehaha GV (HWY99/PM)	<u>24</u>	No max.	75

Tenny Creek, and Totem TC (HWY99/TNT	<u>24</u>	No max.	75
Transitional Area (HWY99/T	<u>24</u>	No max.	75
HWY 99 MF	<u>24</u>	No max.	100
Transit Oriented Development - Hazel Dell (TOD-HDTC)	TBD	TBD	100

We would also draw the Planning Commission to the attached document from JHP which shows density in its various forms. We provide this to illustrate what the types of development that the VBLM assumes that the Highway 99 corridor will achieve. This type of density is not being achieved anywhere in the region outside of the downtowns of some of the larger cities. To assume this type of density in a suburban setting ignores the realities of how these projects are financed and constructed. DEAB asks that the Planning Commission use common sense and look to what types of development may actually occur which is more in line with the types of development shown on the DHP density guide page four. The pages above page five are not realistic in a suburban market.

The Lands Proposed for De-Designation Are Characterized by Urban Growth

LaCenter

Area 1



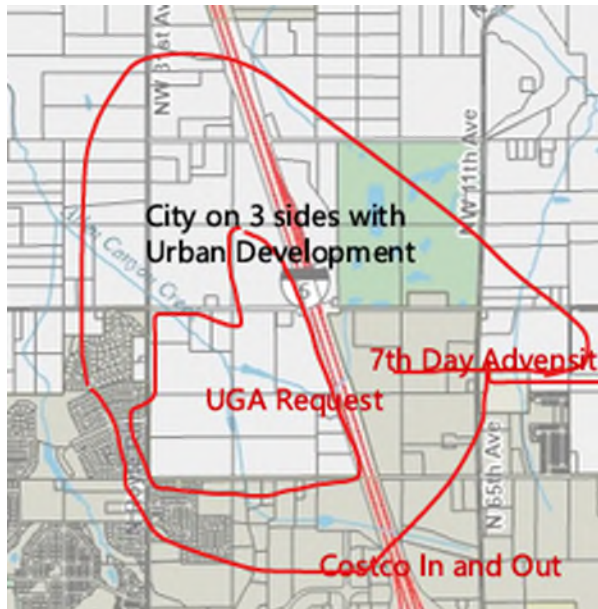
These properties are adjacent to urban growth or next to land that will urbanize as part of the Cowlitz tribes holdings. Clark PUD also owns property here and to the west of the highlighted Cowlitz parcel is the regional bus barn for school districts and then another PUD facility to the west. These properties are characterized by urban growth.

La Center Area 2



The second area of LaCenter are heavily impacted properties that don't have farming on them. And even if they did they have mapped environmental constraints primarily adjacent to I-5 which could not be permitted for farming use under today's code. These properties are already characterized by urban growth due to their proximity to the LaCenter Interchange, the Cowlitz Tribe, I-5 and the impacted nature of the site. The highest and best use of these properties are for employment uses.

Ridgefield Area 1



The Ridgefield Area 1 has had an urban reserve on it for 32 years since 1994. It has been contemplated for employment since that time. It is characterized by urban growth and surrounded by the City and urban development including being adjacent to Costco, Washington's first In and Out, the new Paradise Point PUD to the West, I-5 to the east along with the Seventh Day Adventist Regional Headquarters, the Tri-Mountain Golf Course and the developing Clark College properties.

Ridgefield Area 2



This property is referred to as the Maul request and is surrounded by the City of Ridgefield on four sides. This property is characterized by urban growth as it has a middle school, regional sports complex, and urban housing surrounding it. Please bear in mind these aerials are from 2023 and the level of development has only increased since that time.

(iii) Identifying the location of any new lands added to the urban growth area. Lands should be included in the urban growth area in the following priority order:

(A) Existing incorporated areas;

(B) Land that is already characterized by urban growth and has adequate public facilities and services;

(C) Land already characterized by urban growth, but requiring additional public facilities and urban services; and

(D) Lands adjacent to the above, but not meeting those criteria.

(iv) Designating industrial lands. Counties and cities should consult with local economic development organizations when identifying industrial lands to identify sites that are particularly well suited for industry, considering factors such as:

(A) Rail access;

(B) Highway access;

(C) Large parcel size;

(D) Location along major electrical transmission lines;

(E) Location along pipelines;

(F) Location near or adjacent to ports and commercial navigation routes;

(G) Availability of needed infrastructure; or

(H) Absence of surrounding incompatible uses.

And again, DEAB believes these properties to be characterized by urban growth and the Cities have articulated a need for additional jobs lands.

But even if the Planning Commission moved beyond the first prong of the de-designation criteria which is to analyze whether properties are characterized by urban growth or not and moved to an examination of the non-exclusive WAC factors, these properties would not pass muster for a variety of reasons. We encourage the Planning Commission to examine the properties on a specific basis, review the resource studies conducted for each of the parcels by the property owners and use common sense based on the photos above.

Site Specific Requests

There are numerous site specific requests both in the urban and rural areas contained in Alternative 3 that merit discussion either now or in the future. They have been foreclosed now by the process and should have due consideration by the Planning Commission.

Conclusion

DEAB has more than two centuries of development experience and is providing these insights based upon their expertise. Governor Ferguson's second Executive Order 25-02 declared a housing emergency (attached). Simply trying to make the Comprehensive Plan a math exercise by putting forecasted populations into unrealistic density targets will only further exacerbate the housing problem. On the jobs front the Cities are trying to be self-determinative and have laid out a vision for how they want to grow based upon the external pressure surrounding them.

We strongly encourage the Planning Commission to recommend something between Alternative 2 and Alternative 3.



JHP

Density Guide

Residential density is a useful planning tool to help determine what housing type fits the needs and scope of a site. Reference this guide to see what housing type(s) might be right for your project.





Residential Density can be thought of as the number of housing units per acre of land. Choose a density that matches the scale and purpose of your project.

What is density? In simple terms, it is the ratio of housing units per acre of land. Different housing types (e.g. single family homes, garden apartments, high-rise apartments) yield different densities, and density should always be chosen based on the scale and purpose of the project. Whatever you develop, it should fit nicely into the surrounding built and natural environment.

The following pages are density rules of thumb for various housing types. We cover standout features, pros and cons of:

- Single Family Cluster Housing
- Townhomes/Rowhouses
- Cluster/Manor Homes
- Garden Apartments
- Village Cluster/Urban-Suburban Homes
- Four Story Apartments with Central Garage Structure

- Five Story Apartment with Central Garage Structure
- Four/Five Story Apartments over Podium Garage
- Mid-Rise Housing
- High-Rise Housing

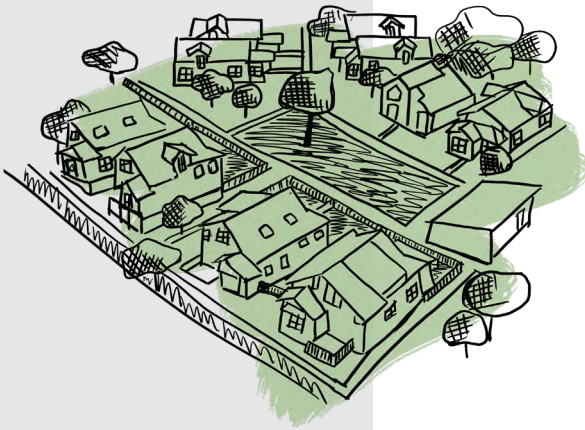
However, every project has unique needs, and it should be noted that this document is not the be-all and end-all when it comes to density. Just because a specific housing type meets your desired density, does not mean it is the right type of housing for your project.

Contact us for a real evaluation and to discuss the unique factors of your site.

Single Family Cluster Housing 10-12 units/acre

Cluster housing provides the benefits of a townhome with the privacy of a single family home. Usually smaller than a single family home, cluster housing is situated around courtyards and parking courts.

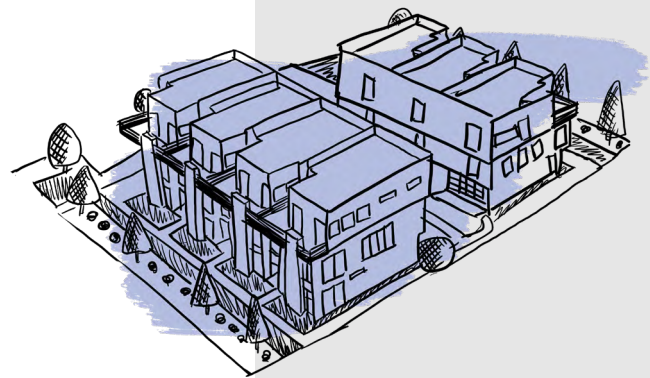
- Single family, detached homes
- Front-facing with walkable streets
- One or two story homes
- Private patios or limited small yards

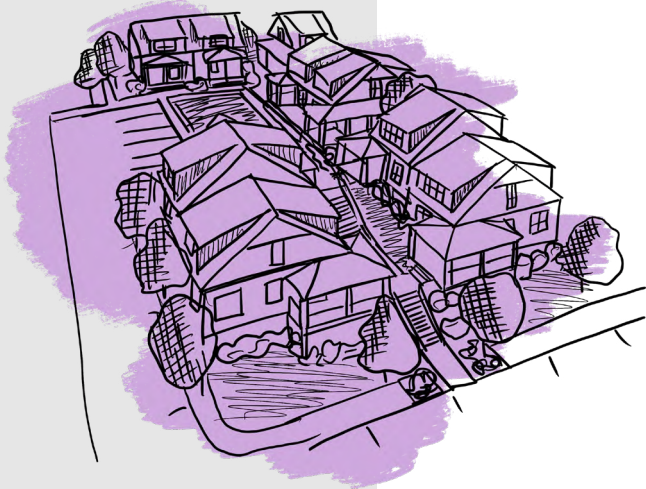


Townhomes or Rowhouses 12-18 units/acre

Townhomes or rowhouses combine lower maintenance needs with valuable community amenities and an urban location at a lower price point than a traditional single family home in exchange for less privacy and space.

- Single family, attached rowhouses with garage or tuck-under parking from rear alley
- Front-facing with walkable streets
- Small, private patios
- Limited curb cuts along streets





Cluster or Manor Homes

15-22 units/acre

Cluster homes, or Manor homes, are smaller walk-up style multifamily buildings. They fit multiple residences in a mansion-scale structure.

- Smaller multifamily buildings, sometimes clustered around courtyards
- Front-facing with walkable streets
- Two to three stories; walk-up
- Organized with parking courts behind and with parallel on-street parking



Garden Apartments

18-25 units/acre

Garden apartments are what is currently thought of as the “typical” suburban multifamily structure. They are a good option for larger sites.

- Not inherently walkable
- Smaller buildings, with 4 units per level around stairways
- Two to three stories; walk-up with open-air stairways
- Organized with surface parking in front and around



Village Cluster or Urban-Suburban Homes

28-35 units/acre

Village clusters or urban-suburban multifamily homes are a hybrid option between garden-style apartments and structured parking solutions.

- Multifamily buildings oriented towards streets in a walkable setting
- Typically three or four stories; walk-up or limited elevators
- Corridor style buildings, either open-air or conditioned
- Organized with parking courts behind, and/or tuck-under rear ground floor parking, with parallel on-street parking

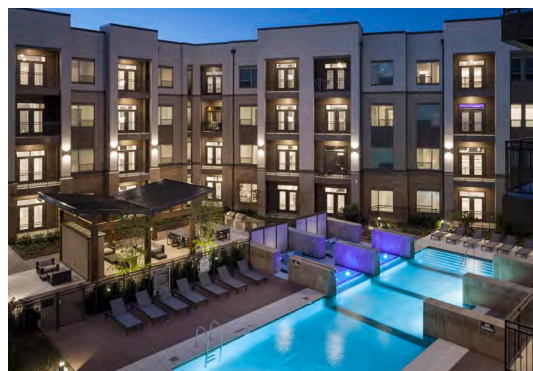


Four Story with Central Garage Structure

45-70 units/acre

Called the "Texas Donut" Wrap, this is a four story structure in which housing wraps around a central parking structure. This scenario provides ample parking on-site while still hiding parking from street level.

- Four stories of Type VA wood construction
- Multilevel parking structure (typically concrete)
- Urban Form facing walkable streets



Five Story with Central Garage Structure 80-95 units/acre

A five story building with a central garage structure utilizing Type IIIA construction. Building to this height is dependent upon local fire codes as it is not allowed by all municipalities.

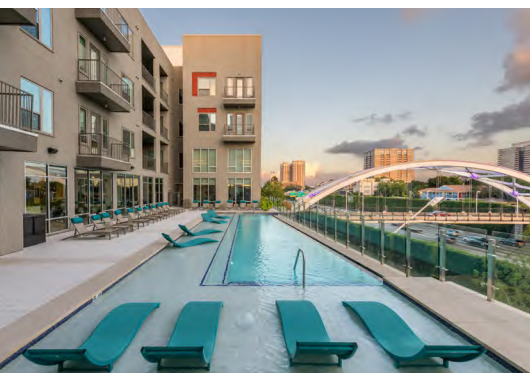
- 5 stories of Type IIIA non-combustible wood construction
- Multilevel parking structure (typically concrete)
- Urban Form facing walkable streets



Four or Five Story over Podium Garage 90-110+ units/acre

This four or five story building places residences on top of a garage podium. It efficiently uses the site up to the maximum height for “wood” construction.

- 4 stories (Type VA) or 5 stories (Type IIIA) wood construction over garage podium and/or below grade garage
- Podium is directly beneath housing
- Allows for maximum density while still in wood construction
- Height can be an issue and depends upon various local codes. Some municipalities amend downward the High Rise height limit of 75ft to top floor level to 55ft.

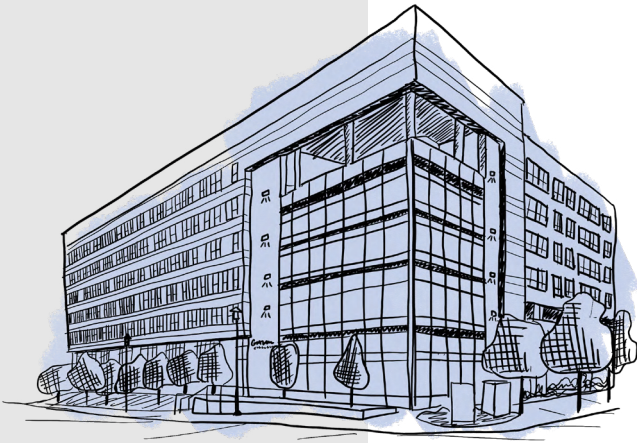


Mid-Rise Housing

125-150+ units/acre

Mid-Rise housing is a great option for very urban or transit sites and features seven to eight stories above a parking podium and/or below grade parking.

- Typically limited to 7 or 8 stories (Type I or III) metal or concrete construction below the High-Rise code of 75ft (maximum floor level)
- Multilevel podium parking structure is directly beneath housing
- Allows for very efficient utilization of smaller sites
- Height can be an issue and depends upon local codes

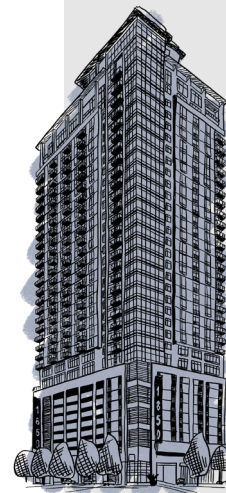


High-Rise Housing

140-200+ units/acre

High-Rise housing is ideal in very dense, very urban locations but of course comes with higher construction costs. It provides the biggest return in terms of units per acre.

- Height and stories (Type I) steel or concrete construction usually limited by Zoning height limits or construction economics
- Multilevel parking structure is either directly beneath housing (above or below grade)
- Allows for maximum density
- High-Rise code and structural requirements apply with increased costs



JHP is an award-winning architecture, planning and urban design firm practicing nationally from its base in Dallas, Texas. Founded in 1979, the firm's primary practice areas include such specialty markets as: Transit Oriented Development (TOD), high-density urban infill communities, mixed-use, sustainable development, and market-rate, senior, student and affordable housing. JHP is dedicated to providing high quality design solutions through analysis, thoughtful design and professional representation. We have an appreciation for the economic forces that motivate clients to invest in and develop real estate. We are steadfast in our belief that environmentally intelligent design, planning and building is essential to our world's future. Our obligation is to those who live with—and within—our decisions.

We create memorable environments for people that are rich in diversity, unique to the place and sustainable over time; bringing people together as a Whole Community. Let's work together on your next project.

JHP ARCHITECTURE / URBAN DESIGN

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STATE OF WASHINGTON
— OFFICE OF GOVERNOR BOB FERGUSON —

EXECUTIVE ORDER 25-02

**ASSESSING REGULATORY EFFICIENCY AND
ADDRESSING WASHINGTON'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS**

WHEREAS, access to affordable, resilient, and habitable housing is fundamental to the security, health, well-being, and prosperity of all communities in Washington, including those in urban, suburban, and rural areas; and

WHEREAS, Washington is experiencing a severe housing shortage, which increases housing costs and reduces housing affordability, is the primary cause of the homelessness crisis in Washington, hinders the state's economic prosperity, and prevents too many Washingtonians from maintaining housing stability, which is the foundation of every family's health, well-being, and economic stability; and

WHEREAS, housing stock shortage and housing underproduction has resulted in insufficient affordable housing as well as increased costs for Washingtonians that affect both renters and homeowners, with many spending more than 30% of their paychecks on housing; and

WHEREAS, the rising costs of home ownership and rental units disproportionately impacts low-income households; and

WHEREAS, homelessness is a pressing issue affecting individuals and families across Washington, with over 200,000 Washingtonians currently experiencing homelessness or housing instability—a record high rate; and

WHEREAS, housing affordability is a major concern in our state, where the average worker must earn more than \$40 per hour to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment—meaning a worker earning our state's highest minimum wage (\$20.76 per hour in Seattle) would have to work nearly 80 hours a week to afford an apartment for their family; and

WHEREAS, addressing the housing shortage and building enough housing to meet current and future demand will improve housing affordability in Washington and decrease homelessness and the risk of homelessness in Washington; and

WHEREAS, my administration is committed to further developing, rehabilitating, and preserving housing to ensure the continued vibrancy and vitality of all communities in Washington; and

WHEREAS, improving governmental efficiency and centering the people of Washington in all aspects of their government is a priority for my administration, which recognizes that enhanced

efficiency in state regulatory systems and processes may promote housing growth and help to address the housing crisis in our state;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bob Ferguson, Governor of the state of Washington, by the power vested in me by the constitution and the statutes of the state of Washington, do hereby order and direct all executive and small cabinet agencies as follows:

1. Each agency shall review all its rules and regulations and prepare a written report for the Governor's Office that shall:
 - a. Identify any rules or regulations that may impact the construction of new housing (whether the rule or regulation expressly pertains to housing construction or not), and describe the impact;
 - b. Identify any such rules or regulations that are no longer necessary and can be rescinded, and explain why;
 - c. Identify any such rules or regulations that could be amended to streamline processes with the goal of speeding up housing construction, and describe each proposed amendment and its anticipated impact on housing construction; and
 - d. As to rules or regulations that may be rescinded or modified, identify any aspects of the rules or regulations that are intended to protect the environment or cultural or historic sites.
2. In conducting the review described above, each agency shall give due consideration to impacts on the environment; archaeological, cultural, and historic sites (including as directed in Executive Order 21-02); public health and safety; procurement laws; ethical requirements; and other applicable law. The agency shall describe any notable considerations in its report.
3. Additionally, the report shall identify and describe the potential for each agency's state-owned lands to support housing development or to support nearby housing developments.
4. The report shall identify and describe any additional strategies the agency could implement to facilitate housing production in Washington.
5. The report may be in the form of a chart, a spreadsheet, a narrative report, or a combination of the above, subject to the agency's judgment about the best way to present the required information.
6. The report shall be completed and provided to the Governor's Office no later than sixty (60) days from the effective date of this Executive Order.
7. All agencies shall make the review, planning, approval, and processing of permits related to housing a priority.

8. All agencies shall consider the goal of creating additional housing in any policy or programmatic decisions and, where appropriate, shall collaborate with other agencies to effectuate that goal.

This Executive Order shall be implemented consistent with applicable law. Provisions of this Order are not intended to alter any existing collective bargaining agreements. This Order is not intended to confer and does not confer any legal right or entitlement and shall not be used as a basis for legal challenges to any rule or any other action or inaction of the governmental entities and employees subject to it.

This Order shall take effect immediately.

Signed and sealed with the official seal of the state of Washington on this 15th day of January, AD, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five, at Olympia, Washington.

By:

/s/

Bob Ferguson
Governor

BY THE GOVERNOR:

/s/

Secretary of State



Why America Should Sprawl

The word has become an epithet for garish, reckless growth — but to fix the housing crisis, the country needs more of it.



By Conor Dougherty

Conor Dougherty covers housing and is the author of “Golden Gates: The Housing Crisis and a Reckoning for the American Dream.”

April 10, 2025

The conference room next to Ross Perot Jr.’s office has a floor-to-ceiling map of the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. The map is in black and white, with pools of orange and blue shading representing the various warehouses, office buildings and housing developments that one of Perot’s companies, Hillwood, has splayed across the region since the late 1980s.

Perot, whose father made billions in the computer business and used that wealth to fund the outsider presidential campaigns that made him a household name, has amassed his own fortune by becoming one of the largest real estate developers in the country. When I met him in the conference room on a recent morning, Perot stood on the toes of his wingtips and stretched his arm overhead to point to the exurbs north of Dallas, where Hillwood has seven projects in development. There, under his fingers, lay one of the fastest-growing areas in the country.

A Hillwood executive took me on a helicopter tour to see the map in real life, promising that a view from 1,500 feet was the only way to understand just how fast the city is growing. The helicopter made a dusty landing about 40 miles from downtown Dallas, in an area where builders were laying down new traffic circles next to pastures grazed by herds of longhorn cattle.

Hillwood is a land developer that creates planned communities, building infrastructure and dividing up lots that major homebuilders like D.R. Horton and Pulte Homes then fill with houses. The executive took me around one of the firm's projects, quaintly named Pecan Square, which has a faux downtown complete with parks and pickleball courts; a co-working space on the square has been built with exposed ductwork, to give it an industrial vibe. Once finished, Pecan Square will have 3,100 homes, starting around \$415,000 for a three-bedroom.

Perot, who is now 66, plans to spend the rest of his life building such communities. The Dallas area has grown by about three million people over the past two decades, and, he predicted, it would continue to push outward for many decades more — 40 miles from downtown, then 50, until the metroplex bulges across the state line into Oklahoma, surpassing the population of the Chicago region and continuing to expand from there. “I told my kids, ‘All you got to do is fill in this map, and you’ll have a pretty good business,’” Perot said.

Perot's vision of Dallas as an endlessly expanding suburb has for decades been regarded by planners and environmentalists as a nightmare that needs to be slowed or stopped. The epithet is “sprawl,” a word that is used to deride edge city development, evoking lollipop cul-de-sacs lined with homes so similar they can be

distinguished only by the cars parked in front. Since the mid-20th century, critics have blamed sprawl for many of the country's deepest and most lasting problems, accusing it of chewing up farmland, spewing out greenhouse gases and carving American cities into rings of monotonous neighborhoods whose lonely and isolated residents are imprisoned by two-hour supercommutes. Environmental groups, a number of which were founded specifically to stop outward growth, have gone so far as to call sprawl a "curse" and a "cancer."

Anti-sprawl legislation has successfully limited or prohibited this sort of growth in much of the country. Consider the trajectory of California. In the 1960s and '70s, when the state added eight million residents and fruit trees were being ripped out to make space for ranch houses, its Legislature passed a flurry of land-use and environmental laws aimed at preserving agricultural land and containing development to major metropolitan areas. Those laws were celebrated for saving farming regions like Napa Valley and wild spaces like the Marin Headlands, but they also have made building so difficult that even environmentally friendly projects, like a small apartment building next to a commuter rail line in San Francisco, can be tied up in years of lawsuits that can add millions of dollars to the final cost.

Similar laws throughout the country have slowed the pace of construction and made housing far more expensive, contributing to one of the worst affordable housing crises in the nation's history. After two decades of underbuilding, economists estimate the country's housing shortage at somewhere between four million and eight million units. Last year was among the most difficult on record to buy a home; a quarter of tenants now spend more than half their income on rent and utilities; and the most recent homeless count, at about 770,000, was up nearly 20 percent from the previous year.



In Princeton, Texas, the nation's third-fastest-growing city, infrastructure has struggled to keep up with growth. Dan Winters for The New York Times

The second-order effects of the housing crisis are also enormous. The rising cost of rent has become one of the main drivers of inflation, which was a defining issue in the 2024 presidential election. Housing costs have made businesses less productive by preventing people from moving to the job markets most in need of workers. For all the focus on billionaires and stock prices, it's home values that are a primary source of wealth inequality and the root of a generational schism between the housing-rich baby boomers and young adults today. According to Edward Glaeser, an economics professor at Harvard, the housing crisis has become “a huge hindrance on the quest for well-being and the pursuit of happiness.”

The solution is to build more. That's not controversial — housing is one of the few remaining areas of bipartisan agreement. The rub, as always, is where and how to get it done. Over the past decade, dozens of cities and states have tried to spur construction by passing laws that aim to make neighborhoods denser: removing single-family zoning rules, reducing permitting times and exempting housing in established neighborhoods from environmental rules.

That shift is important, especially in cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles that have little chance of lowering housing costs or reducing their homeless populations without building up. But cities are difficult and expensive places to build because they lack open land. Adding density to already-bustling places is crucial for keeping up with demand and preventing the housing crisis from getting worse. It will not, however, add the millions of new units America needs. The only way to do that is to move out — in other words, to sprawl.

Like “privilege” and “gentrify,” “sprawl” is a word that has come to contain more emotion than meaning. New York is usually considered the antithesis of sprawl and Los Angeles the progenitor of it. And yet when you look at the density across both urban areas, Los Angeles is actually *more packed* than the New York region. There's of course no place in L.A. that's as dense as Manhattan. But the homes in L.A.'s suburbs are squeezed side by side for miles beyond the core city, while New York's outskirts are in general more spacious.

So what is sprawl, exactly? In his 2005 book, “Sprawl: A Compact History,” the architectural historian Robert Bruegmann described sprawl as low-density development that is scattered around the urban periphery. That description, he noted, captures what the edges of large cities have looked like for most of history. The fringes of ancient Rome were known as “suburbium,” meaning outside the walls. There, and in so many other large cities — London, Paris, New York — growth has almost always pressed outward through a buffer zone that is neither fully urban nor rural. This wasn't a permanent condition but rather the first step of growth, as, over time, the buffers filled in and were often incorporated into the city core: The Upper East Side of New York and the Hyde Park section of Chicago would have both been considered exurbs in their earliest stages of development.

Before the 19th century, regular travel between the core and the outlying areas of cities made sense only for those wealthy enough to afford carriages, boats and other forms of private transit. First railroads, then automobiles changed that, opening the gates of suburbia to the middle class. In his book, Bruegmann traces widespread anti-sprawl rhetoric to London in the 1920s, when it emerged as a way for aristocrats to denigrate their new middle-class neighbors under the guise of protecting nature. The word was popularized in the United States by a 1958 essay, “Urban Sprawl,” by the Fortune writer William H. Whyte Jr., who described the modern suburbs as “smog-filled deserts.”

“The attack on suburbs in the U.S. didn’t really become a dominant motif among the chattering classes until after World War II,” Bruegmann told me, “when the move out from the city by lower, middle and working classes in American cities became very obvious.” As millions of expanding families moved to larger homes in more spacious neighborhoods, artists and social critics followed with a long list of books (“Revolutionary Road”), songs (“Little Boxes”) and movies (“The Stepford Wives”) that criticized the conformity of suburbs and the American appetite for growth.

Cities and states responded by adopting anti-sprawl rules that created growth boundaries, made it easier to sue over new development and in some cases prevented even moderate density by limiting housing to multiacre parcels. The predictable result was that the pace of building slowed, housing costs exploded and anti-development sentiment became so pervasive that by the early 1980s the word “NIMBY” — short for “not in my backyard” — had proliferated to describe it.

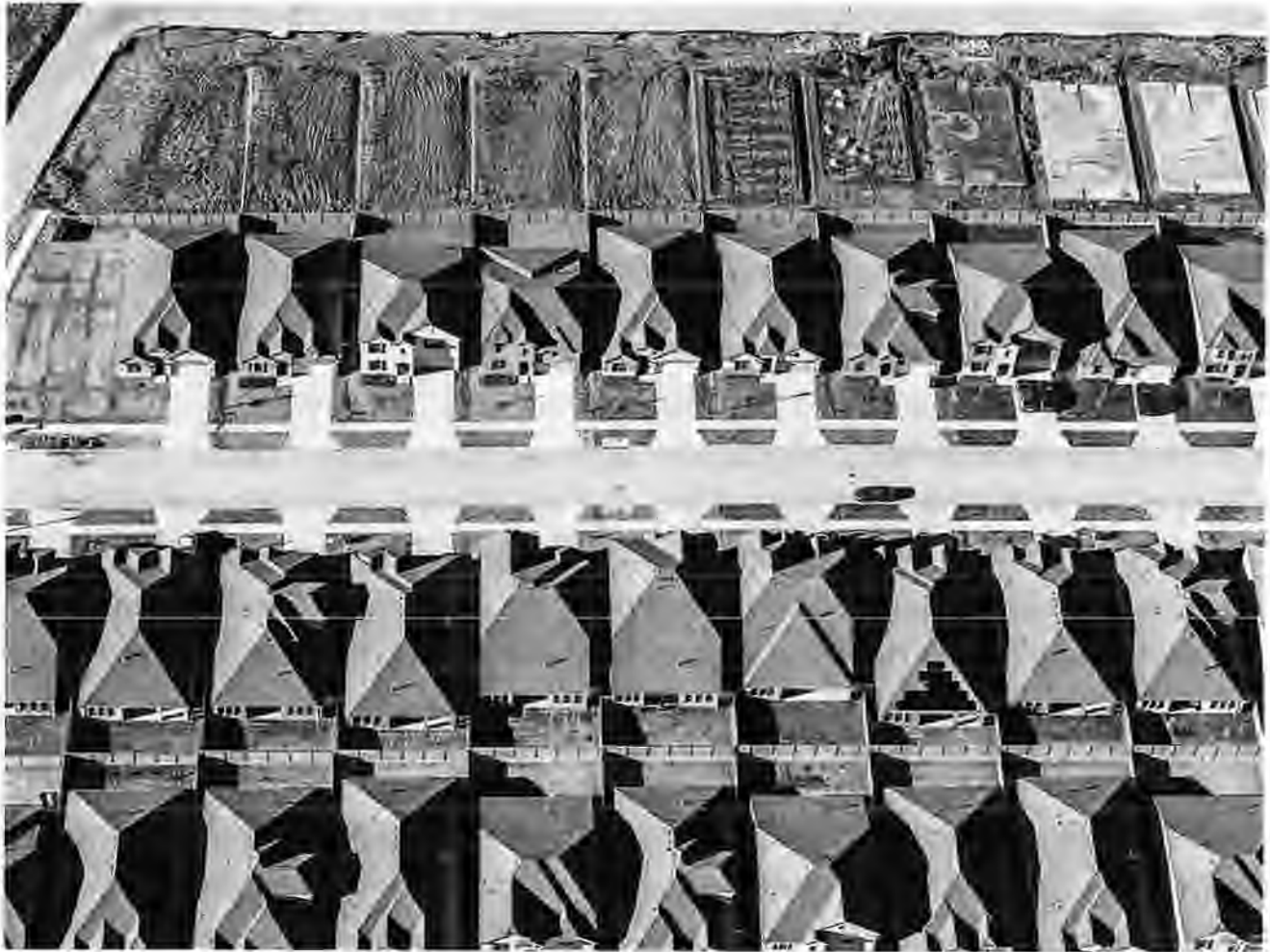
One of the better accounts of this shift is a 1979 book, “The Environmental Protection Hustle,” by a professor of urban planning at M.I.T. named Bernard Frieden. Frieden documented how organizers in the San Francisco Bay Area were often as hostile to denser housing in urban neighborhoods as they were to low-slung developments on farmland. Chapters of the Sierra Club, he wrote, would protest exurban housing for being too sprawling, suburban housing for being insufficiently close to job centers and urban housing for taking up open space.

Frieden's book points to a second distinguishing feature of postwar sprawl: Because most of today's suburbs were built after zoning and land-use laws became more widespread and stringent, it has been harder to fill in the closest suburbs with density the way older cities did. This has increased the pressure to grow outward. Since 1950, big American cities have added very little new housing in established neighborhoods, according to an analysis by Issi Romem, an economist at MetroSight, an economic research and consulting firm. It might not seem that way when you look out on the glass-tower apartments and condominiums that have risen in the downtowns of big and even midsize U.S. cities. But those projects are frequently part of an industrial redevelopment, like Mission Bay in San Francisco or Hudson Yards in New York. They rarely disrupt neighborhoods zoned for single-family homes, which account for a majority of the land mass in many U.S. metro areas.

California and other states have spent much of the past decade trying to get out of this predicament by undoing single-family zoning laws and streamlining permitting for apartments, backyard cottages and other higher-density housing. These attempts to make it easier to fill in nearby suburbs where prices are highest — to fill in the previous generation's sprawl — is the same process maturing cities have gone through for centuries. But density is gradual and takes decades to be effective. "Infill" — housing built in populated areas — is difficult and expensive. For all the vitriol this has caused in City Council meetings and legislatures, the overall pace of building has barely budged.

Even if all the regulatory restraints were removed tomorrow, developers couldn't find enough land to satisfy America's housing needs inside established areas. Consequently, much of the nation's housing growth has moved to states in the South and Southwest, where a surplus of open land and willingness to sprawl has turned the Sun Belt into a kind of national sponge that sops up housing demand from higher-cost cities. The largest metro areas there have about 20 percent of the nation's population, but over the past five years they have built 42 percent of the nation's new single-family homes, according to a recent report by Cullum Clark, an economist at the George W. Bush Institute, a research center in Dallas.

Lora Karacic became a real estate agent in Dallas in 2021, when the pandemic slowed air travel and she was furloughed from her job as a flight attendant. Her timing turned out to be perfect: In the past five years, the Dallas metro area has led the nation in both population and housing growth. Last year alone, Dallas permitted the construction of 72,000 new homes, or about three-quarters as many as the entire state of California, according to Moody's Analytics.



Celina, Texas, has 54,000 residents, compared with 8,000 a decade ago. Dan Winters for The New York Times

I recently visited Karacic and her partner, Zack Srisauy, at their home in Celina, Tex., which is about 40 miles north of Dallas. A color-changing Tesla sat in the driveway. On Instagram, Karacic has racked up more than 100,000 followers, who scroll through her videos of spacious houses in the Dallas exurbs with walk-in

closets and kitchen islands that have the dimensions of a conference-room table. Karacic and Srisauy are partners in business as well as life: He films, she tours, then they organize meetups with new clients over direct message.

I asked the couple how much of their business consisted of people moving to Texas from out of state.

“Like 75 percent,” Karacic said.

“Yeah, maybe even 80,” Srisauy added.

Celina was recently declared the fastest-growing city in the country. The area had 8,000 residents a decade ago. Now it has 54,000, and the population is projected to hit 110,000 by 2030. Nearby, Hillwood is building a community called Ramble, which is scheduled to offer 4,000 new homes starting next year. Four months ago, Karacic and Srisauy decided to relocate to Celina from a more central part of Dallas in order to be closer to the houses they sell, paying \$500,000 for a four-bedroom house. They told me they had gotten tired of spending hours in traffic on the way to showings.

“All the business is up here,” Karacic said.

There were just two stoplights in Princeton, Tex., when Eugene Escobar Jr. moved there. That was a dozen years ago, back when Princeton was a town of fewer than 10,000 that sat beyond Dallas but wasn’t yet part of it. The subdivisions had started arriving, but a good amount of the housing still consisted of faded homes with clapboard siding and chain-link fences.



Celina, Texas. Dan Winters for The New York Times

Escobar, a 33-year-old from Harlem, paid \$240,000 for a 3,500-square-foot home, where he still lives with his wife and four of his children. He runs a tech-support business from a desk by his pool table, and he recently became the city's first Black mayor, in an election dominated by debates over runaway growth. Since Escobar arrived, the population of Princeton has quintupled to just under 50,000 residents, according to city estimates, overwhelming the roads, the sewers and the local Police Department. Now the nation's third-fastest-growing city, Princeton has become a case study in what happens when development outpaces planning.

When I met Escobar on a recent afternoon, we drove past newly graded fields, half-built apartment complexes and subdivisions with names like Monticello Park and Sicily. Most of the drive was along a four-lane road packed with cars going 15

miles per hour. Despite the boom in residents, Princeton still has just a handful of restaurants and few places to take children beyond private backyards. There are not many local jobs, so most of Princeton's residents commute out of town for work. The largest employer is the local government.

"We went from a farm town to a city of 47,000, and in the next three years it will be 80,000," Escobar said. "The city allowed a lot of developers to come in and was looking at the tax money but didn't realize, 'Hey, the water is behind, the police are behind.'"

Last year, the City Council voted to impose a moratorium on all new housing projects in hopes of giving infrastructure time to catch up. The moratorium hasn't slowed much down, because Texas law prohibits cities from stopping development that has already been approved. It nevertheless sent a message: Residents, having bought into what they thought was a bright future, are now worried about where the city is headed.

Escobar became a politician in hopes of helping it change course. His reward has been a full-time job with no pay that requires him to spend every other Monday in City Council meetings, where he sits at the center of the council dais, six feet from the microphone where residents comment and complain about the growing pains he ran for office to solve. "Until you're in the shoes, you really don't understand how much pressure that you're under all the time," Escobar said.

Princeton's godawful traffic and its views of pastures being consumed by tract homes are exactly the sorts of scenes opponents of sprawl have in their heads. But this is how cities are built: through a chaotic and uneven process in which the mix of homes, jobs and infrastructure is constantly shifting and never quite in balance. Instead of endless sprawl, it's better to think of boomtowns like Princeton as economic nodes in a broader region. Their relationship to Dallas proper is akin to Newark's relationship to New York or Oakland's to San Francisco: They begin as satellites of the core city but, over time, become their own cores.

That process is well underway in Texas: As the population of Dallas's northern region has exploded, jobs have followed. Plano and Frisco, two Dallas suburbs that have each surpassed 200,000 residents, are rapidly adding offices and apartment buildings and have daytime populations that roughly equal or exceed their nighttime populations, becoming cities in their own right. Modern, car-centric cities will probably never become as dense as places whose streets were designed for pedestrians, but the basic process of expanding outward with housing, then jobs, is unchanged. Over decades, places like Plano and Frisco will come to look and feel more like central Dallas. "Sprawl is a way of thinking that is centered on the core city, that imagines somehow that people, however far out their homes are, they're going to commute to the core," says Clark, of the George W. Bush Institute. "That's increasingly unmoored from the reality of how people are living."

Policy wonks on the political right have been preaching this for years. One of them is Judge Glock, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute who has written essays with titles like "Sprawl Is Good" and "Sprawl Is Still the Future." Glock is not a reflexive defender of the suburbs: In an interview, he praised many of the efforts to repeal single-family zoning laws and add small apartments to neighborhoods where they have long been banned. "But the importance of outward growth has been massively underestimated," he said.

As the scale of America's housing crisis has grown, that position has moved toward consensus. Around the country, Democrats in state and federal office have started pushing proposals to amend urban growth boundaries, sell off federal land and pare back environmental laws that aim to keep growth from pressing outward. The liberal journalists Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson's recent book, "Abundance," champions the idea that it has become too hard to build housing and infrastructure in the places where Democrats govern. Even Alan Durning, founder of the Sightline Institute, a think tank that advocates for dense housing and renewable energy, says he has come to the conclusion that new cities are likely to be part of the solution to America's housing shortage. Those cities are already being built, right in plain sight, the same way they always have been: on the edges of the cities we already have.



McKinney, Texas. Dan Winters for The New York Times

Certainly the process is smoother in some places than in others. Developers like Hillwood usually make sure to secure a water supply and build enough infrastructure to make growth feasible over the long term, designing “total

communities” around a denser core with walkable streets, rowhouses, grocery stores, parks and other spaces for gatherings like concerts and fairs. Other developers, often those who cater to a lower-income demographic, simply build houses, which, if they multiply too fast, can turn a town into a disjointed collection of subdivisions and test a city’s ability to maintain infrastructure. That puts the onus on the local government and mayors like Escobar to create a more complete place with things to do and places to shop.

Toward the end of my interview with Escobar, we swung by his home, a two-story brick house with a collection of scooters and toys in the entryway. Escobar told me he moved to Princeton because he could find a big house there for less than \$300,000, but now the city is home, and he didn’t like where it was headed. Over the next four years, he said, his goal is to redevelop the downtown, try to attract offices where locals can work and build out a park system that voters recently funded with a bond measure. “You ask anybody what they love about Princeton, and it’s simply just the affordability,” Escobar told me. “We need to be more than that.”

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