Compact Development Policy Fact Sheet

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1. Introduction

In a compact neighborhood, stores have enough local customers to stay in business, transit systems have enough riders to justify the public investment, and parks have people strolling through keeping the neighborhood safe. Ample evidence suggests that well-designed higher-density development, properly integrated into an existing community, can improve a community's quality of life while still addressing the needs of a growing and changing population.

For types of Station Areas, refer to the Station Area Matrix.
For information on how planning processes proceed, refer to Planning 101 sheet.

2. Issues of Compact Development

a. Traffic

For more information, refer to Transportation Fact Sheet.

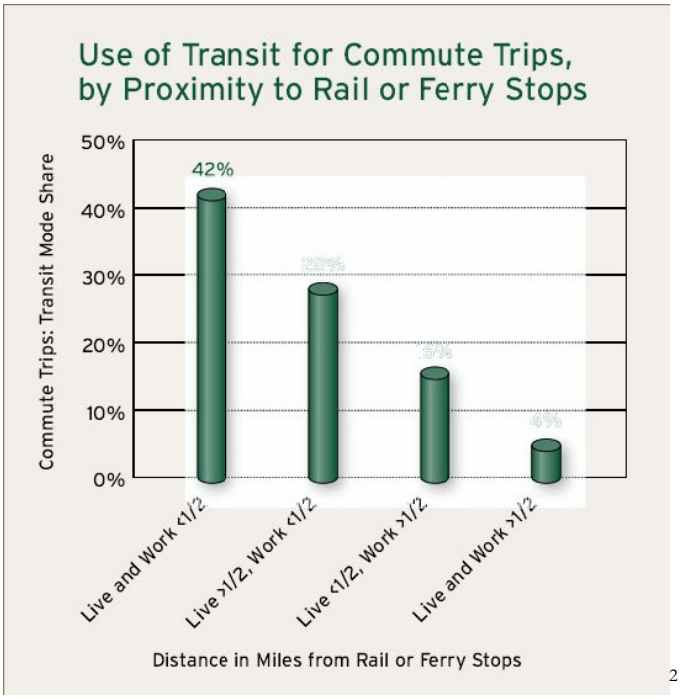
Concern:

More density will create more traffic in the community.

Reality:

Although more people usually means more cars on the road, the traffic doesn't increase proportionately to the number of additional people. People who live in neighborhoods near shops and public services tend to drives less frequently and own fewer cars, because they have more services in walking distance and there are more transptortation options.

- People in condominiums and townhouses make 44% fewer car trips than people who live in low-density single family homes. (5.6 car trips/day vs. 10 car trips/day.
- People who live/work within ½ mile of public transportation stations use transit for 42% of their work commute trips vs. 4% for those who live or work more than 1 mile from a transit station.[1]



[2]

- Doubling density in an area decreases the area's vehicle miles traveled by 38%.[3]
- Higher densities support more physical activity. One study found that in the lowest density blocks (0-99 housing units/mi^2) rates of walking/biking for transport were 3.3% while in the highest density blocks (>3,000 units/mi^2) rates were 14.5%.[4]

b. Parking

Concern:

Providing reduced parking will create parking problems in the community.

Reality:

Studies support that people who live in higher density areas own fewer cars and use less parking than people in low-density neighborhoods.

- Nationwide, households in transit zones have an average of 0.9 cars vs. 1.6 cars in the greater metro regions. Of the households within ½ mile of rail/ferry, 30% do not own cars.[5]
- In the Bay Area, 29% of households within ½ mile of a rail or ferry stop do not own a car, compared to 9% in the rest of the region.[6]

c. Shops

Concern:

Having homes near shops and public services will create too much noise and invade neighborhood privacy.

Reality:

While it's true that more compact development does mean more people, a well-designed space can preserve privacy and minimize noise.

(*See "Compact Development" handout for Design Guidelines*)

Concern:

Higher-density developments will occupy space needed for amenities such as grocery stores.

Reality:

More homes, especially when mixed with offices and stores, create more customers. This makes local shops more viable and improves the local economy.

- Shops and public services within ½ mile of more compact developments are more economical than those far from the town center and homes.
- A neighborhood needs a net density of 7 units/acre to support a small convenience store and more than 18 units/acre for a small grocery store.[7]

d. Schools

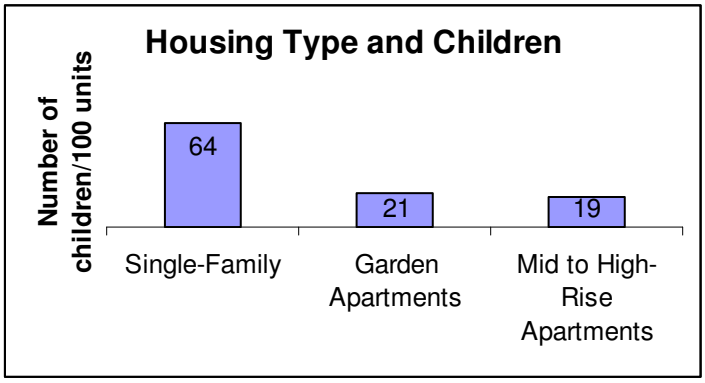
Concern:

Increased density will overcrowd local schools.

Reality:

New homes in low-density areas put more pressure on local schools than more compact neighborhood homes do.

- People in compact neighborhood homes tend to have fewer children than those in low density neighborhoods.[8]
- Mixed-use, walkable, compact development near schools allows children to walk and bike to school, rather than needing to be driven.



- It is important that developers and city agencies to continue to address how to alleviate pressures on local schools.

e. Public Safety

Concerns:

More density leads to more crime.

Reality:

There are sometimes crime problems in urban areas lacking access to jobs and public services, but no study has shown a relationship between more compact development and violent crime rates. On the contrary, studies suggest that compact neighborhoods increase community safety and quality of life.

- Places where people know each other have 40% less crime than neighborhoods without a strong sense of community, regardless of income level.[9]
- Mixed-use development with different types of homes and generations of people provide more "eyes on the street" at all hours of the day and have lower crime levels. [10]
- Compact development allows more efficient use of tax money for social services and neighborhood redevelopment for safety and comfort.

f. Public Infrastructure/Environment

Concerns:

Density will overburden the city's infrastructure system and raise taxes.

Reality:

Compact development makes efficient use of existing infrastructure and requires less new infrastructure. When more homes use the same stretch of road or sewer line, the cost of infrastructure per household decreases.

- It costs more than twice as much money to pay for utilities, schools, and streets for 1 unit/acre versus 30 units/acre. ($22,500/unit vs. $10,000/unit.)[11]
- 40 single family dwellings require 40 times as much concrete in roads and sidewalks as a 40-unit apartment building on a single lot.[12]
- Water, sewer, electrical, phone, cable and other services lie under the street and branch off into each lot; Sprawl housing uses more of these materials than compact housing.[13]
- At the current rate of sprawl, the U.S. will need $12.6 billion more for sewer and water infrastructure, $109.6 billion more for local road infrastructure, and $423 billion for property development costs between years 2000-2025.[14] In Loudon County, Virginia, each new house on ¼ acre lot adds $705/year to the town's budget. A new house on a 5 acre lot costs the community $2232 per year.[15]

Concerns:

Dense housing will cause negative environmental impacts.

Reality:

Compact development preserves open space, reduces pollution by providing more walkable streets, and protects local watersheds.

- Paved surfaces create water pollution and require drilling, mining and transporting of gravel, cement and asphalt.
- Water pollution skyrockets when more than 20% of the watershed is paved over and developed.
- Extensive paving adds to the "urban heat island" effect, worsening air pollution and global warming.[16]

g. Property Values

Concerns:

More compact development and affordable homes will lower property values of the homes in the community.

Reality:

The relationship between property value and more efficient land use is complex and depends on pre-existing land values, supply and demand, location, nearby amenities, local architecture, and community cohesion.

- Average home prices within a 1 mile radius of the Pleasant Hill BART Station in Contra Costa County decreases by $1,578 for every 100 feet from the station.[17]
- In 2001, commercial property values in Santa Clara County were 23% higher near light rail and 120% higher near commuter rail.[18]
- The Rossyln-Ballston Corridor in Arlington County exemplifies how more compact mixed-use development near transportation stops can increase tax revenues:
    - Between 1992-2002, assessed property value along transportation routes increased 81% to $8.88 billion.
    - In Arlington, VA, less than 7% of the county's land is highly compact development, and that 7% generates 33% of the county's real estate taxes. This keeps tax rates down for the surrounding neighborhoods.[19]
- More people with higher incomes are choosing to live in compact developments. The demand for housing in the San Francisco Bay Area near transit for households earning

$75,000 or more will increase by 248% between 2000 and 2030, from 134,402 to 467,558 households.[20]

h. Housing Demand

Concern:

No one wants to live in high-density housing.

Reality:

Surveys and trends show that the American visions of a quiet house in the suburbs are rapidly changing. Many people now are choosing more compact housing in communities that offer varieties of shops within walking distance over single-family houses far from the community core.[21]

Nationwide:

- 3/5 of prospective homebuyers prefer neighborhoods that offer a shorter commute, sidewalks, and amenities like shops, schools, and public transportation within walking distance. They prefer this option over one with longer commutes and larger lots but limited options for walking.
- 71% of seniors (65+) want to live within walking distance of transit.[22]
- There are now more single-person households (26%) than there are households with children (23%). Single people more commonly rent apartments in higher density neighborhoods.[23]
- In 2002, the median sales price of condos was higher and the rate of sales was faster than for detached single-family homes.
- Between 2000 and 2030, the national demand for households in transit areas will increase by 103%.[24]

In the Bay Area:

- As of 2005, there were 286 transit zones, the ½ mile area around concentrated public transportation, in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- Between 2000 and 2030, the regional demand for housing in transit zones is expected to increase by 179%, from 409,497 in 2000 to 1,141,860 in 2030.[25]

3. Who Else is Doing This?

When people think of density, they generally think of San Francisco's high rises, and crowded city streets. However, depending on the design, location, and number of units, different densities appear to be as diverse as one town from another. Below are several examples of different Bay Area transit areas and the different densities around them.

San Jose Downtown[26]

Known for its sprawling developments, San Jose has started focusing on an effort to "make its downtown into the urban heart of Silicon Valley."

- Located 1 block north of the light rail station and St. James Park.
- 2 blocks from transit malls.
- 12,000 homes, including both market-rate and affordable housing units (Villa Torino Apartments include 40% affordable)
- Zoning allows up to 55 units/acre around transit
- Transit: VTA Light Rail, Caltrain, ACE rail, Amtrak

Redwood City[27]

In a prime location between San Francisco and San Jose, Redwood City is becoming "the nighttime entertainment capital of the Peninsula".

- Live/work/shop spaces around the Caltrain station.
- Net density: 13 units/acre (2000 census).
- City Center Plaza Apartments.
    - Within a half mile of the station.
    - 139 affordable homes, mixed-use, walkable from various amenities
- Transit: Caltrain, SamTrans

Pleasant Hill (Contra Costa Centre)[28]

This station is one of most important public transit hubs for Bay Area commuters, used by approximately 6,400 riders daily.

- 140-acre area mixed-use developments around the Pleasant Hill BART Station
- Pedestrian oriented, with access to the regional Iron Horse Trail.
- Highest concentration of multi-family housing within ¼ mile of any suburban transit hub in northern California
- 549 new homes, of which 20% are subsidized affordable housing.
- Net density: 6.7 units/acre (2000 census).[29]
- Transit: BART, County Connection
- Residential development around Pleasant Hill BART generates 52 % fewer peak period auto trips than those in a typical residential development. Office development at the station generates 25% fewer trips than typical office development.[30]

Dublin Transit Center[31]

This mixed use, transit oriented center covers 91 acres and includes 1,800 homes plus shops, offices, and 2 neighborhood squares of open space.

- Camellia Place is a multi-family development with 112 homes, 100% affordable.
- Net density: 7 units/acre (2000 census).[32]
- Walking distance to schools, restaurants, a public library, shopping
- 3 blocks from the Dublin/Pleasanton BART station.
- Transit: BART, LAVTA

Downtown Hayward[33]

Hayward is a good example of revitalization using mixed-use compact development around transit. It has achieved a good balance of commercial, residential and civic development, all transit-oriented. It includes:

- Mixed-use residential, office, and retail.
- Area surrounding BART Station is 30 acres; greater redevelopment area is 222 acres
- Market-rate and affordable housing units (Renaissance Walk has 50% affordable).
- Net density: 30-35 units/acre[34]

Santa Rosa[35]

Santa Rosa is building its small urban downtown. It is has begun revitalization of green space and is planning in anticipation of the new SMART train, which will run from Cloverdale to the Larkspur ferry terminal with a downtown station in Santa Rosa.

- Mixed-use residential, office, and retail.
- SMART commuter train station area proposed for downtown development
- Plans for approximately 600 new market-rate and affordable housing units

- Affordable housing in Burbank Apartments and proposed New Railroad Square project
- Transit: Proposed SMART train, plus Golden Gate Transit, Santa Rosa CityBus, Sonoma County Transit, and Mendocino Transit

4. Density Lingo[36]

- Gross density-The total number of homes divided by the total acres of land in the entire neighborhood.
  - Example: Coggins Square Apartments at Pleasant Hill BART is on a 2 acre site and has 87 affordable units. Its gross density is 43.5 units/acre.[37]
- Net density-The number of residential units/acre after subtracting land needed for infrastructure and open space.
  - Example: If 21% of Coggins Square Apartments at Pleasant Hill BART is reserved infrastructure, only 1.58 acres can be used for housing.
  - 87 units/(2 acres - 21%) →87 units/1.58 acres= 55 units/acre[38]
- Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R.)-The total square footage of a building divided by the square footage of land.
  - Example: A one-story building covering the entire lot has a FAR of 1.
  - A one-story building covering half of the lot has an FAR of 0.5.
  - A 4-story building that covers ½ the lot has an FAR of 2.0.

5. Dig a Little Deeper

Higher-Density Development: Myth and Fact
http://www.uli.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Policy_Papers1&CONTENTID=15805&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm
This is a primary resource for understanding the basic public misperceptions about compact development, and the arguments supporting transit oriented development.

New Places, New Choices
http://www.mtc.ca.gov/library/TOD/index.htm
Learn about the challenges and issues about development around transportation centers. Full color photos support text discussing 10 different functioning developments across the Bay Area.

Neighborhood Explorations: This View of Density
http://www.sflcv.org/density/
See how different neighborhoods in San Francisco impact the environment. Calculations show infrastructure, transportation, and pollution levels based on neighborhood density.

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