



Why are the costs of sprawl important?

Recent studies have shown that sprawling development has detrimental effects on society. These detrimental effects include: high costs to local and county governments, congestion, air pollution and loss of open space. In Oregon this can be seen on the fringe of urban areas and in the gradually urbanizing areas in the Willamette Valley and east of the Cascade Mountains

Smart growth strategies are a solution to increasing congestion, high infrastructure costs and decreasing amounts of open space. But first, what is sprawl? And what types of costs are we really talking about?

What is sprawl?

Sprawl is a pattern of real estate development that is characterized by:

- Travel dominated by the automobile
- Developers acting independently of each other
- A lack of integrated land use planning
- Low density development
- Unlimited and poorly connected outward expansion (leapfrog-style development)
- A separation of different land uses (i.e. retail centers separated from housing subdivisions)

Costs of Sprawl

“Between 1970 and 1990, suburban sprawl gobbled up more than 19 million acres of rural land nationally,” said Larry Bohlen, the co-chair of the [Sierra] Club’s Challenge to Sprawl Campaign, “and the rate of development is accelerating.”

Various studies have outlined the major costs of sprawl. The costs are often real costs. They are costs that taxpayers unknowingly pay through increasing property taxes, utility prices or by spending more time waiting in congestion. Costs must be measured not only in terms of capital investments but also in terms of resource depletion.

The costs of sprawl can be simplified into five major categories as was done by a recent Pennsylvania study:

- Increased infrastructure costs, roads, utilities, schools and services



- Increased costs of transportation
- Consumption of agricultural land, natural areas and open spaces
- Increased concentration of poverty and acceleration of socio-economic decline in cities, towns and older suburbs
- Increased amounts of pollution and stress

For more information...

Sprawl Costs Us All. Sierra Club Report 2002
www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/report00/

The Traditional Neighborhood vs. Suburban Sprawl by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. Conscious Choice, April 2001
<http://www.consciouschoice.com/issues/cc1404/neighborhoodvsprawl1404.html>

Farming on the Edge, American Farmland Trust
www.farmland.org/farmingontheedge/index.htm

Smart Growth America, *Measuring Sprawl and Its Impact*
www.smartgrowthamerica.com/sprawlindex/sprawlindex.html



Fairview Village (Fairview, OR) includes a mix of housing types and smaller lots

In 1998, the Sierra Club undertook the task of researching the real costs of sprawl to the US taxpayers. Their studies identified specific projects and dollars amounts where taxpayers are subsidizing sprawl. The two examples below are just two of the types of costs paid by taxpayers.

Schools

In Washington State, the cost of providing education for each new single family house is \$18,600. Developer impact fees range from \$1,100 to \$6,140. This leaves the remaining \$12,000 per new household to be paid by the taxpayers. Similar situations can be found in Arizona and Colorado.

Utilities

In Arizona, the cost of hooking up each home build in a “wildcat” (subdivision) development costs

\$23,000. Property taxes for the home pays \$1,700. The taxpayers pay the difference.

Solutions to Sprawl

It is important to note is that solutions to sprawl do not impede growth. Solutions to sprawl manage growth. They promote the type of growth and development that does the least amount of harm to health, safety and welfare of communities and their residents.

Lessons can be drawn from other states and cities.

Citizens in Peninsula Township in Michigan’s rural northwest voted to pay farmers to continue farming rather than subdivide their land

Minneapolis, Minnesota invests in its parks, which boosts real estate values and generates hundreds of millions in private redevelopment

To draw people to older neighborhoods, the state of Maryland gives at least \$3,000 to people who purchase a home closer to their place of work. This is part of the state’s smart growth plan.

As noted above, there are many ways to combat the effects of sprawl. More importantly, as will be highlighted below, there are techniques to reduce the likelihood of sprawling development in your city or county right here in Oregon.

The Oregon Model

Oregon is special in that Statewide Planning Laws reduce the occurrences of sprawling development between cities. However, cities and counties must work to reduce the likelihood of sprawling development in urbanized areas to decrease infrastructure costs and to protect the environment. Reducing infrastructure development and new public service provisions costs can increase the availability of funding for schools.

Next steps

- Assess developers and residents fees that are more closely in line with the full cost of building new schools, extending sewer and water lines and roads to new communities.
- Design new communities that encourage walking by allowing mixed uses and skinner streets.
- Provide incentives for infill and mixed-use development.
- Change zoning codes to encourage more compact development.
- Encourage alternatives to automobiles as a means of transportation, including sidewalks, walking paths, bike lanes, and transit.

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