

## Higher-Density Development: Myth and Fact

No one likes sprawl and the traffic congestion it creates. However, proposals for increasing density in existing neighborhoods are often squashed by community fears. To some degree, these fears are the result of memories people have of the very high-density urban public housing projects of the 1960's and 1970's that have been subsequently deemed a failure. Somehow, the concept of density has become associated with the negative imagery and social problems of depressed urban areas.

The respected Urban Land Institute has prepared a report, *Higher-Density Development: Myth and Fact*, which dispels these negative connotations. It examines eight widespread misconceptions about higher-density development and dispels them with well-researched facts and examples of quality, compact developments.

### **The report debunks several common myths about density:**

#### **Myth: Higher-density developments lower property values in surrounding areas.**

Fact: Several studies have examined whether multifamily housing has any impact on the value of nearby single-family detached houses. These studies have shown either no impact or even a slightly positive impact on appreciation rates. Harvard University did a study based on U.S. Census data from 1970 to 2000. Other studies were done by Virginia Tech University and by the National Association of Home Builders. For details, consult page 13-15 of the report.

#### **Myth: Higher-density development creates more regional traffic congestion and parking problems than low-density development.**

Fact: Higher-density development generates less traffic than low-density development per unit; it makes walking and public transit more feasible and creates opportunities for shared parking. Research shows that doubling density decreases the vehicle miles traveled by 38 percent. The reason is that higher density developments make for more walkable neighborhoods and bring together the concentration of population required to support public transportation. The result is that residents in higher-density housing make fewer and shorter auto trips than those living in low-density housing. Condominium residents average 5.6 car trips per day, compared with the ten trips a day averaged by residents of low-density communities. (pages 16-18).

#### **Myth: No one in suburban areas wants higher-density development.**

Fact: This country's population is changing and becoming increasingly diverse. For the first time, there are more single-person households (26.4%) than married-couple-with-children households (23.3%). The groups growing the fastest, people in their mid-20's and empty nesters in their 50's, are the groups most likely to look for an alternative to low-density, single-family housing. They are seeking a more convenient and vibrant lifestyle. Many of these households now prefer higher-density housing, even in suburban locations. (pages 28-31)

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