

# Urban Sprawl Costs

## Why We Do Not Have More Affordable Housing. Santa Barbara News-Press Affordable Housing Series

By Harlan Green

"Critics of urban sprawl maintain that the predominance of this growth from over the past fifty years has significantly harmed American society," says "Sprawl Costs-Economic Impacts of Unchecked Development" (Island Press, Washington D.C., 2005), a compendium of recent studies on urban sprawl. The studies all point to the same conclusion: "that sprawl has thwarted public transit development, separated rich and poor, and caused unnecessary travel, consumed fragile land, and generated excessive public expenditures."

Urban sprawl, in addition, is perhaps the largest roadblock to more affordable housing. Not only because single-family homes on individual lots take up the prime buildable land, but because the exorbitant costs to service growing bedroom communities that contain few jobs tax governments to the limit, making it difficult to provide the infrastructure and services needed to support the denser developments-such as condominiums and multiplexes-that make housing affordable to most Americans.

Why so? Because our suburbs and bedroom communities simply do not pay for themselves. Studies by the American Farmland Trust show that residential development services cost an average \$1.13 for every dollar of revenue generated. We are subsidizing our suburbs, in other words. And sprawl does not just mean residential development. It is any form of spread out development of separated subdivisions, office parks, malls, and strip shopping centers growing beyond existing cities and towns. They all require some form of transportation-usually autos-and an extensive infrastructure to service them.

The problem is that it underutilizes valuable resources. Two sets of infrastructures are in fact created. Residents are leaving cities and developed infrastructure for newer developments on the periphery. Such developments lie outside existing infrastructure and services, which raise the costs of infrastructure development by as much as 20 percent, say city managers. In fact, 65 percent of city managers surveyed by the National Association of Governors and American Planning Association in 2003 said that rising infrastructure costs are negatively affecting the ability of their budget to meet the city's needs.



Castillo De Las Fuentes is an award-winning 42-unit apartment that is affordable to low income downtown workers for the Santa Barbara Housing Authority.



Cottage Gardens is a 17-unit affordable senior apartment complex built with federal low income tax-credit financing.

The alternative? More compact development that is centrally focused and directs development to locations where public services can be provided more efficiently. This allows access to more forms of transportation, whether mass transit, bicycle, or pedestrian, easing the burden on roads. These so-called "infill" projects are generally closer to the work place,

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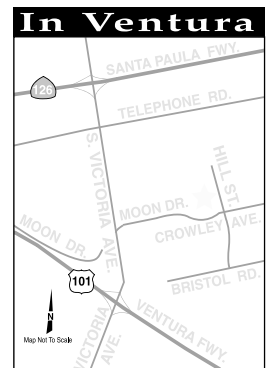
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also cutting down on commuting time and distance.

Then why haven't more governing authorities adopted compact growth principles? Because their planning departments and citizens are under the belief that by limiting growth, they also conserve resources, meaning fewer roads and greater open spaces. They do this by limiting zoning densities-called down zoning-as well as lowering the Floor-to-Area-Ratios (FAR) of residential dwellings. But limiting the size and density of residences only raises their costs (hence price), shutting out most wage earners-still 80 percent of our workforce - from home owning in Santa Barbara County, and in many parts of the country. The land costs of single-family detached dwellings now average 25 percent of total costs nationally, according to "Sprawl Costs," but only 10 percent for multi-family dwellings. They are actually up to 40 percent on the South Coast as well as other desirable living areas.

If instead, governments would accept compact growth, the monies saved in building and servicing sprawl could be used to provide the alternative transportation modes that require fewer automobiles, as well as provide a healthy community life that comes from the old and young, working families, students and

the well-to-do, intermingling, rather than remaining segregated as in conventional developments.

Demographic and cultural trends also reinforce this need, such as our baby boomers beginning to retire. This means that more Americans will be looking for alternatives to single-family homes in the years to come. But they do not want to be isolated from their communities.

This is a win-win solution for all, since the cost savings of building multi-family and mixed-use developments that contain businesses as well as residences are enormous. "Sprawl Costs" estimates that as much as 7 percent in development and infrastructure costs, or \$420 billion, would be saved nationally over the next 25 years, if governments adopted such compact growth scenarios as outlined here.

Santa Barbara County and city planners have begun to pay attention to compact growth, but it has been a halting process. Local governments did form an "Inter-Regional Jobs, Housing and Mobility Policy Steering Group" under the Santa Barbara Association of Governments (SBCAG). Its report, entitled "Taking Action Regionally," which came out in July 2004, gave a comprehensive set of recommendations for more compact growth policies, from legislative action, to more regional cooperation, to specific land use policies that encourage compact development and a higher range of minimum density standards in urban areas. We will be discussing in future articles the recommendations and progress among agencies towards those goals.



The Old Town Inn & Village, Goleta, combines a hotel, shops and condos, and is a central part of Old Town's revitalization.



Carpinteria's 40-unit Village Gardens was made affordable with a buyer's cooperative. Built by The Peikert Group.



Garden Court on De La Vina is a 98-unit affordable apartment complex with meal services for frail seniors. Winner of more than 12 design awards.



## Honoring Excellence in Design and Planning

The best and brightest in building, design and development were recently honored at the Legacy Awards, sponsored by the Home Builders Association of the Central Coast. The Legacy Awards recognize superior performance and overall excellence in design and planning and single-family homes, multi-family communities, renovated homes, land planning and contractors. And the Legacy Award goes to ...

### Best Production Home under 2,000 sq. ft.

**WINNER:** Watt Communities, LLC  
Arborwalk - Plan 1

Finalists Martin Farrell Homes, Inc.  
Lane's End at Mesa Oaks  
Finalists Watt Communities, LLC  
Arborwalk - Plan 3  
Finalists Estrella Associates  
The Cottages at River Oaks  
Finalists Watt Communities, LLC  
Arborwalk - Plan 2

### Best Custom Home

**WINNER**

Giffin & Crane General Contractors  
Showhouse

### Best Renovated or Restored Project

**WINNER:** Giffin & Crane General Contractors  
Hot Springs Road Project

Finalists Giffin & Crane General Contractors  
Lotusland

### Best Legal, Financial, Title

**WINNER:** David Long, Chicago Title Company  
Santa Maria

Finalists Mid-State Bank & Trust  
Clarence Cabrerros

### Best Production Home over 2,000 sq. ft.

**WINNER:** Martin Farrell Homes, Inc.  
Lane's End at Mesa Oaks

Finalists Centex Homes - Central Coast Division  
Knollwood at Black Lake  
Finalists The Towbes Group, Inc.  
Bluffs @ Mesa Oaks Plan 3  
Finalists Western Consolidated  
The Traditions at Bradley Square  
Finalists Inland Pacific Builders - Pacific Crest  
Finalists Watt Communities, LLC - Arborwalk Plan 4

### Best Multi-Family Project

**WINNER:** Capital Pacific Homes  
Villa Del Mar

Finalists People's Self Help Housing Corp.  
River View Townhomes  
*Judges Special Recognition Award*

### Best On-the-Boards Project

**WINNER:** Bermant Development Company  
Paseo Chapala

Finalists Martin Farrell Homes, Inc. - La Vigna at Westgate Ranch  
Finalists Capital Pacific Homes - Agave Court  
Finalists Capital Pacific Homes - Laguna Court  
Finalists Capital Pacific Homes - Providence Landing  
Finalists eda design professionals - Atascadero Colony  
Finalists eda design professionals - Nipomo Commons  
Finalists RRM Design Group - The Woodlands Specific Plan  
Finalists Horizon Senior Housing - The Manse on Marsh - Phase II

### Best Overall Marketing

**WINNER:** Larwin Company  
Pacific Creek Estates

Finalists Centex Homes - Central Coast Division  
Rely on Centex Campaign  
Finalists Martin Farrell Homes, Inc.  
Lane's End at Mesa Oaks  
Finalists Larwin Company - Larwin at Vista Del Mar

### Production Home Over 3,000 sq. ft.

**WINNER:** Centex Homes - Knollwood at Black Lake

Finalists The Towbes Group, Inc.  
Bluffs @ Mesa Oaks Plan 4  
Finalists The Towbes Group, Inc.  
Bluffs @ Mesa Oaks Plan 5  
Finalists Capital Pacific Homes  
Providence Landing  
Finalists Rottman Froman Communities  
Santa Ysabel Ranch

### Best Mixed Use Project

**WINNER:** Bermant Development Company  
Villas at State and Hope

Finalists Giffin & Crane General Contractors  
Kimsey/Carlson  
Finalists Inland Pacific Building - Mission Creek  
Finalists Estrella Associates - River Oaks

### Best Architect, Land Planning, Engineering

**WINNER:** Peikert Group Architects

Finalists eda design professionals  
Copeland's Court Street Commercial Project  
Finalists eda design professionals Pismo Beach Office Park  
Finalists eda design professionals Santa Ysabel Ranch  
Finalists Cannon Associates  
Finalists RRM Design Group

### Best Building Industry Professional

**WINNER**  
Mohamed Somji, Eurodesign Cabinets

Finalists Urban Planning Concepts  
Laurie Tamura and Lynette Noyes