

Perspectives on Urban Sprawl

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Urban Sprawl in the United States has become a concern on many levels of government and for local entities. As the need for more housing and development of infrastructure continues, the fight against sprawl becomes harder even with the use of smart growth practices. Increased traffic causing pollution and congestion are factors affecting many suburban areas. Table 1 outlines a stakeholder group, their values, contributions, and concerns.

International Nonprofit Perspective

A relatively new international nonprofit called Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) has many active projects in the United States to combat sprawl. They are concerned with continued post WWII urban

development practices causing a detriment to our environment and economy. The

organization's goals according to their website are "to diversify neighborhoods, to design for climate change, and to legalize walkable places" (McKeag, 2019). The CNU recognizes the unbearable costs that urban sprawl is creating such as a rise in energy costs, physical health costs, and environmental damages, "The long-term economic impacts of environmental damage caused by sprawling, high-emissions development, including climate change, have been assessed by many entities... The loss of so-called 'ecosystem services' – such as purification of water and air – could total many billions of dollars" (The Congress for the New Urbanism, n.d). One of their current projects helping resolve this issue is called Sprawl Retrofitting; the program was

built to develop sprawled areas and transform them into high-performing walkable cities. which they proved is possible through existing policy and wish to propose more (The Congress for the New Urbanism, 2017).

Regional Government Perspectives

A regional government group in Portland Oregon known as the Metro Council is the entity that enforces and facilitates urban growth boundaries along with other environmental, transportation, and social justice projects, all to improve the livability of the Portland area. The former Metro Council President Tom Hughes wrote in his foreword on behalf of the Metro Council, “the climate is changing, and we need to continue to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and work for clean air and clean water.” As part of the goals for Metro Council to partake in while further developing Portland within urban growth boundaries (Hughes, 2018). The Metro Council has been combating sprawl and its effects in Portland since 1997 and is one of the leading cities of the U.S. in new urban development. Current Metro Council President Lynn Peterson discusses the significant challenges Portland is facing at her inauguration “Air quality, especially in the summer is some of the worst in the nation, traffic congestion steals time from our families and pollutes the environment...” (Christensen, n.d).

Property Rights Group Perspectives

Although smart growth policies have been effective in reducing sprawl and mitigating its negative effects, not all people agree with smart growth practices. A property rights group, The American Dream Coalition, feel

that smart growth policy is intrusive; they hold a strong position against smart growth boundaries (Cooper, 2004). Former coalition leader and current coalition treasurer made a statement about livability of cities partaking in these policies, “I don’t see it as a livable place to live. Our message is, don’t emulate Portland” (Cooper 2004). The executive committee is made up of 10 people from across the U.S., all of them coming together “to defend freedom, mobility, and affordable homeownership against the threat of over-reaching government at all levels.” They accomplish this through conferences and presentations in different states (American Dream Coalition, n.d.). The coalition identifies the American Dream as having the ability to own a single-family home, having access to automobiles for access to higher paying jobs, and protecting property rights for economic freedom (American Dream Coalition, n.d.). Per their website, the coalition’s goal is to defend these aspects that make up the American Dream for all citizens across the United States and “smart growth is one of the greatest threats to American mobility, affordable housing, and freedom today.”

Local Perspectives

Citizens’ perspective of urban sprawl varies depending on the person’s values and concerns. Former suburb resident Jacob Brostoff “hated growing up in the suburbs. [He] found the isolation and monotony of that environment oppressive” (Clarren, 2002). Now he lives in Orenco Station, a de-sprawled city in Oregon that is “nothing like traditional suburbia.” He enjoys the walkability of the city and how all the necessities are easily accessible (Clarren, 2002). Another Orenco resident, Janis Steinfeld, who formally lived in a 4,200

square foot home, wanted a change in her living style and feels as though "It has simplified [her] life dramatically – [She doesn't] have to deal with traffic or house or yard maintenance" (Clarren, 2002). She states that the only drawback is "I wish I had room for a great big dog. I used to have a big yard. The big yard and dog kind of go together" (Clarren, 2002).

Federal Government Perspectives

Although urban sprawl is typically a state or local issue, the federal government also is being affected by sprawl and holds the opinions of their voters and fellow political colleagues on said topic. Washington Senator Maria Cantwell introduced the Smart Cities bill in which she claims it will “replace aging infrastructure” with “smart infrastructure” to “...improve the livability and health of residents” along with other benefits (Cantwell, 2017). The technology to create more sustainable cities exists and the legalization of these methods is crucial to improve many aspects of life in the United States. Washington representative Suzan DelBene says, “The investments and policy improvements we propose here can improve the quality of life in our communities, reduce pollution and spur job-growth in 21st century jobs” (Cantwell, 2017). The attitudes from federal government bodies in Washington are largely in agreeance with the increase in smart growth infrastructures for America.

Table 1. Stakeholder Perspectives

Stakeholder group and representatives	Representative Examples	Stakeholder Value Typology	What does the stakeholder value or contribute?	What are the concerns of the stakeholder?
International nonprofit	Congress for the New Urbanism	Moralistic Aesthetic Utilitarian Ecologistic	Anti-sprawl efforts New urbanism	Infrastructure development Environment Livability
Regional Government	Metro	Utilitarian Ecologistic	Urban growth boundaries	Environment Economy Traffic pollution
Local people	Residents	Utilitarian Aesthetic	Homes Lifestyle	Livability Convenience
Federal Government	Senator Maria Cantwell Representative Ben Ray Lujan	Ecologistic Economistic	Voter opinions Laws and regulation	Economy Government Sustainability
Property Rights Group	American Dream Coalition	Negativistic Dominionistic	Economy American Dream	Freedom Property Rights

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