

Infill Development

Rebuilding Our Cities for a Sustainable Future

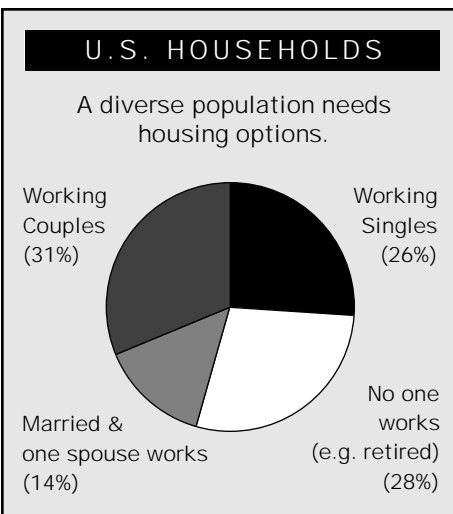
GREENBELT ALLIANCE IS THE BAY Area's citizen land conservation and urban planning organization. Known for opposing sprawl development, we also work to promote its alternatives, including "infill development."

What is infill development?

Infill is building homes, businesses and public facilities on unused and underutilized lands within existing urban areas. Infill development keeps resources where people already live and allows rebuilding to occur. Infill development is the key to accommodating growth and redesigning our cities to be environmentally and socially sustainable.

Does infill provide more housing options?

Absolutely. These days we are seeing smaller families with working and single parents, singles of all ages, and people wanting work spaces in their homes. This diversity of needs is often overlooked by development built exclusively for the 1950's-style family (working dad and domestic mom) which now accounts for only 14% of U.S. households (see below).



Infill can encourage a variety of designs and housing options—second units, townhouses, bungalows, studios, and cohousing—which are closer to jobs and services and less expensive than oversized housing at the urban fringe.

Will infill bring low-income housing projects to my neighborhood?

Not necessarily, but we still need to provide housing opportunities for all kinds of people. Instead of huge housing projects, proponents of infill often recommend a mix of market-rate and affordable housing. As in the natural world, achieving balance and diversity in our communities is healthy and creates richer experiences in the places we live.

Will higher density increase crime?

No! No study has ever established a link between crime increases and housing density. In fact, density and design can enhance safety by ensuring

visibility and creating a sense of community through natural interactions and shared spaces.

Will higher density crowd our cities and worsen traffic congestion?

All growth increases traffic, but infill can alleviate congestion by reducing trips and encouraging alternative transportation.

Good infill projects are sometimes "mixed-use," placing residences and businesses in close proximity. Bringing homes and jobs together, along with services like shopping, schools and recreation, shortens trips and makes walking and bicycling more appealing.

Only higher housing densities can support transit like light rail. A major study found that in a neighborhood with 15 homes per acre, one-third fewer auto trips occur compared to a suburban tract. The bottom line is

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HOUSING TYPES AND DENSITIES

Density is not crowding! Good designs are attractive with any number of units per acre.

LOW DENSITY

Usually called "sprawl"



Older suburb
6 units per acre

MODERATE DENSITY

"Compact Development"



Suburban neighborhood
14 units per acre

HIGH DENSITY

Appropriate in limited areas



Apartments/ condominiums
30 units per acre

that infill is necessary for giving us transportation choices beyond the automobile.

What does infill development mean for children?

Infill can be a boon for children, creating safe opportunities for play and discovery. As infill offers more transit options and closer destinations, teenagers will not be entirely dependent on their parents for transportation. Of course, successful infill designs will be attentive to a variety of special needs and enhance the lives of all people, old as well as young.

How do infill's costs add up?

Without doubt, infill development is less expensive than sprawl in the long run. However, because of up-front costs, building within the city is often less profitable to the developer, who pays for site clean-up, zoning permits, building on a small scale, and accommodating neighborhood concerns.

But according to the Urban Land Institute, urban sprawl eventually costs from 40-400% more than infill development due to the costs of building and maintaining new roads, sewers, fire stations and schools, not to mention the health and psychological costs of

air pollution, traffic congestion and loss of open space. The costs of sprawl are passed on to communities as higher taxes, the deterioration of local businesses, and a declining quality of life.

What can I do to encourage infill?

A great deal. Citizen participation is important in the rebuilding process. You can work with Greenbelt Alliance on a variety of pro-city projects, which include:

- awareness and education;
- endorsements of appropriate compact housing proposals; and
- policy research and partnership development.

For more information about our programs and volunteer opportunities, call us at 415-398-3730.



INFILL GLOSSARY

- Infill — Development of unused and underutilized land within urban areas.
- Density — The number of units per acre, either net (just buildings) or gross (buildings and streets).
- Mixed-Use — Residential and commercial uses on the same site.
- Transit Oriented Developments (TODs) — Higher density and mixed-use development around transit centers, particularly rail and light rail.
- Redevelopment — Official government process that relies on "tax-exempt" financing for rebuilding "blighted" areas of cities.