

# MYTH

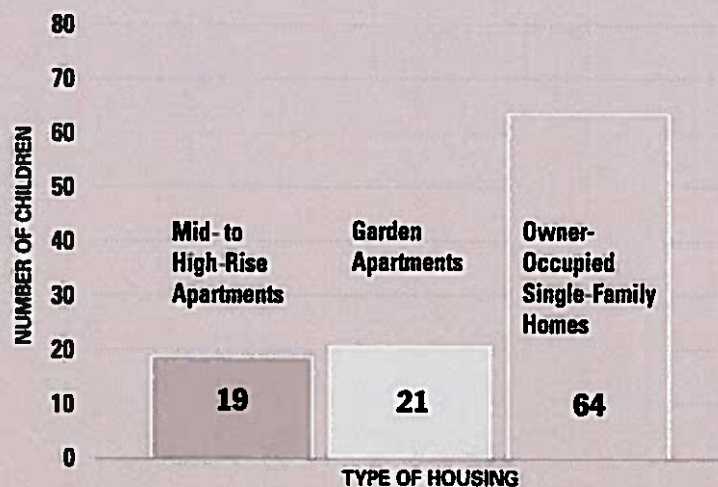
Higher-density development overburdens public schools and other public services and requires more infrastructure support systems.

# FACT

The nature of who lives in higher-density housing—fewer families with children—puts less demand on schools and other public services than low-density housing. Moreover, the compact nature of higher-density development requires less extensive infrastructure to support it.

**P**ublic officials across the country struggle to afford the infrastructure needed to support sprawling development. A recent study analyzing the costs of sprawl estimated that more than \$100 billion in infrastructure costs could be saved over 25 years by pursuing better planned and more compact forms of development.<sup>6</sup> The issue has transcended political parties and ideologies and has become an issue of basic fiscal responsibility. California's Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has criticized "fiscally unsustainable sprawl,"<sup>7</sup> while Michigan's Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm has noted that sprawl "is hampering the ability of this state and its local governments to finance public facilities and service improvements."<sup>8</sup>

NUMBER OF SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN  
PER 100 UNITS OF NEW HOUSING



Source: 1999 American Housing Survey (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1999).

# MYTH

Higher-density developments lower property values in surrounding areas.

# FACT

No discernible difference exists in the appreciation rate of properties located near higher-density development and those that are not. Some research even shows that higher-density development can increase property values.

**T**he precise value of real estate is determined by many factors, and isolating the impact of one factor can be difficult. Although location and school district are the two most obvious determining factors of value, location within a community and size and condition of the house also affect value. 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.

## PROFILE



### Haile Plantation

Haile Plantation is a Gainesville, Florida, icon. Although it is denser than surrounding communities, the values of homes in Haile Plantation are often higher than the values of houses in neighboring lower-density communities, because the traditional neighborhood design employed there makes Haile Plantation more desirable and valuable. Beginning with the master plan in 1979, Haile Plantation has been called one of the first new urbanist communities in the country. Developers Bob Rowe and Bob Kramer in conjunction with the Haile Plantation Corporation developed the 1,700-acre site to include more than 2,700 units, ranging from single-family homes to townhouses and garden apartments. The sense of community has only grown with the expansion of the development to include a town center, a village green, trails, civic uses, and offices. Indeed, it is density and diversity that together add value to this popular Florida community.

**Homes in Haile Plantation sell for more than neighboring homes because prospective buyers view the traditional neighborhood design as a valuable and desirable amenity.**



# 3 MYTH FACT

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

**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.**

**M**ost people assume that higher-density development generates more traffic than low-density development and that regional traffic will get worse with more compact development. In fact, the opposite is true. Although residents of low-density single-family communities tend to have two or more cars per household, residents of high-density apartments and condominiums tend to have only one car per household.<sup>23</sup> And according to one study using data from the National Personal Transportation Survey, doubling density decreases the vehicle miles traveled by 38 percent.<sup>24</sup>

## PROFILE

### Mockingbird Station

The residents of Mockingbird Station in Dallas, Texas, are far less dependent on their cars, because they have a whole host of amenities at their doorstep. Dallas developer Ken Hughes partnered with Denver-based Simpson Housing Group to create the ten-acre pedestrian-oriented urban village, which includes 216 loft apartments, an eight-screen film center and café, more than 90 shops and restaurants, offices, an enclosed public plaza, and parking, all directly linked to the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) light-rail system. Mockingbird Station provides direct platform access to DART trains, which offer residents an eight-minute commute to Dallas's central business district and a single train connection to the Dallas Convention Center, Reunion Arena, and other downtown entertainment. The new village is also immediately adjacent to the campus of Southern Methodist University and within walking distance of the university's new stadium and sports center. RTKL created architecture reminiscent of historic train stations but with a modern twist to the materials and detailing. Although only limited driving is necessary, a parking garage is provided but placed out of sight and underground. The myriad materials, architectural styles, and amenities create a vibrant transit-oriented community.



**Residents of Mockingbird Station can leave their cars in the garage and take an eight-minute train ride to downtown Dallas; they can also walk to shops, offices, and a movie theater.**

# 5 MYTH FACT

Higher-density development is environmentally more destructive than lower-density development.

Low-density development increases air and water pollution and destroys natural areas by paving and urbanizing greater swaths of land.

**L**ow-density sprawl takes an enormous toll on our air, water, and land. The United States is now losing a staggering 2 million acres of land a year to haphazard, sprawling development.<sup>39</sup> More than 50 percent of Americans live in places where the air is unhealthy to breathe,<sup>40</sup> and childhood asthma and other respiratory diseases are on the rise.<sup>41</sup> Almost half the damage to our streams, lakes, and rivers is the result of polluted runoff from paved surfaces.<sup>42</sup>

It is inefficient land use, not economic growth, that accounts for the rapid loss of open space and farms. Since 1994, housing lots larger than ten acres have accounted for 55 percent of the land developed.<sup>43</sup> This loss of land often causes unexpected economic challenges for rural communities, where farmland, forests, ranchland, and open space tend to be the economic drivers that attract businesses, residents, and tourists. Low-density sprawl compromises the resources that are the core of the community's economy and character. The majority of American homeowners think it is important to stop these trends. In fact, 76 percent of local ballot initiatives related to land conservation passed in November 2004, making \$2.4 billion in funding available for protection of parks and open space.<sup>44</sup> But purchasing land is only part of the solution and not always an option for financially strapped governments.

Higher-density development offers the best solution to managing growth and protecting clean air and clean water. Placing new development into already urbanized areas that are equipped with all the basic infrastructure like utility lines, police and fire protection, schools, and shops eliminates the financial and environmental costs of stretching those services farther and farther out from the core community. Compact urban design reduces driving and smog and preserves the natural areas that are assets of the community: watersheds, wetlands, working farms, open space, and wildlife corridors. It further minimizes impervious surface area, which causes erosion and polluted stormwater runoff. Two studies completed for the state of New Jersey confirm that compact development can achieve a 30 percent reduction in runoff and an 83 percent reduction in water consumption compared with conventional suburban development.<sup>45</sup>



# 6 MYTH FACT

Higher-density development is unattractive and does not fit in a low-density community.

Attractive, well-designed, and well-maintained higher-density development attracts good residents and tenants and fits into existing communities.

**H**igher-density development comes in many forms. Some of the most attractive well-planned modern development is built at a high density. Across America, appealing higher-density mixed-use town centers have been wildly popular with the public. Lushly landscaped boulevards, fountains, and showcase architecture have created a sense of place in areas previously known only for faceless, uninteresting low-density development. The enduring appeal

## PROFILE

### Post Riverside

Atlanta is often called the poster child for suburban sprawl. However, it is also the home of Post Riverside, a revolutionary new mixed-use pedestrian-oriented community developed by Atlanta-based Post Properties, Inc., and located on the banks of the Chattahoochee River between Atlanta's bustling Buckhead and Vinings communities. As is the trend nationally, 65 percent of all vehicle trips in Atlanta are to run errands, not to commute to work. With offices, shops, and restaurants within walking distance of the apartments, Post Riverside residents depend on autos much less than their neighbors in lower-density areas. In addition, the community is connected to Atlanta's MARTA subway system and the Cobb County transit system. This award-winning 85-acre mixed-use development includes 25,000 square feet of retail space, 225,000 square feet of office space, and 535 apartments, all designed around a gracious town square. For many people, this amenity-rich, low-maintenance lifestyle better suits their needs than a traditional single-family home in a low-density neighborhood.



POST PROPERTIES, INC. PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE HARRIS

**Post Riverside in Atlanta demonstrates that higher-density development can be attractive and successful in a community known for lower-density development.**

# 7 MYTH FACT

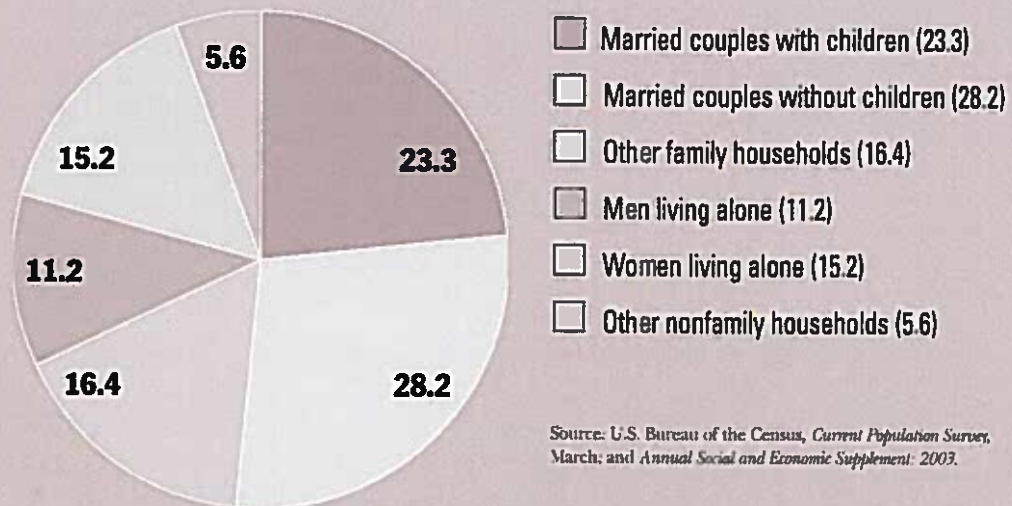
No one in suburban areas wants higher-density development.

Our population is changing and becoming increasingly diverse. Many of these households now prefer higher-density housing, even in suburban locations.

**W**hen many of us think of the American Dream, we envision married couples with children living in single-family detached houses in the suburbs. The notion is that the only people who want to live in higher-density areas are those who cannot afford a traditional house with a back yard or who want to live in the middle of the city. Both perceptions are flawed.

This country's population is changing, and so are its real estate preferences. These lifestyle changes have significant implications for suburban development. For the first time, there are more single-person households (26.4 percent) than married-

HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE: 2003 (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL)



# 8 MYTH FACT

Higher-density housing is only for lower-income households.

People of all income groups choose higher-density housing.

**M**ultifamily housing is not the housing of last resort for households unable to afford a single-family house. Condominiums, for instance, are often the most sought after and highly appreciating real estate in many urban markets. The luxury segment of the apartment market is also rapidly expanding. Most people are surprised to learn that 41 percent of renters say they rent by choice and not out of necessity, and households making more than \$50,000 a year have been the fastest-growing segment of the rental market for the past three years.<sup>39</sup> Multifamily housing throughout the world has historically been the housing of choice by the wealthiest individuals because of the access and convenience it provides. From Manhattan to Miami to San Francisco, higher-density housing has been prized for the amenity-rich lifestyle it can provide.

Higher-density development can be a viable housing choice for all income groups and people in all phases of their lives. Many financially secure baby boomers, who have seen their children leave the nest, have chosen to leave behind the yard maintenance and repairs required of a single-family house for the more carefree and convenient lifestyle multifamily housing provides. Interestingly, their children, the echo boomers, are entering the age where many will likely live in multifamily housing. Just starting careers, many are looking for the flexibility of apartment living to follow job opportunities. Their grandparents, likely on a fixed income, may also prefer or need to live in multifamily housing as physical limitations may have made living in a single-family house too challenging.

Providing balanced housing options to people of all income groups is important to a region's economic vitality. The availability of affordable multifamily housing helps attract and retain the workers needed to keep any economy thriving. In many American towns and cities, rapidly rising house prices are forcing working families to live farther away from their jobs. In fact, the lack of affordable housing is mentioned as the number one problem facing working families today.<sup>40</sup>