

How Lack of Growth Harms Communities

Or

The Dark Side Of Low or No Growth Planning Policies

by

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How Lack of Growth Harms Communities

Executive Summary

In the discussions surrounding city and county responses to Washington's Growth Management Act it is important to discuss the potential harm low and no growth public policies can visit on a community.

In testimony from the public, decision-makers are usually presented with a pro-growth argument based only on the significant benefits growth can bring to a community. That argument is then countered by emotional presentations detailing the personal harm growth is likely to bring the presenter. On balance, then, the decision-maker is asked to decide between a kind of "Pie in the sky by and by" benefit and a more personal, more immediate, harm.

A more balanced approach by those supporting rational policies pertaining to growth is to not only expose decision makers to information about the benefits growth brings a community but also to material regarding the harm lack of growth brings. The benefits of growth to communities have been well explored and presented. Discussions about the harm low growth policies result in has generally been lacking.

It's not enough, however, to simply bring forward information. That information must be presented in an understandable format. Citizens have difficulty comprehending sophisticated material presented out of context. In discussing planning approaches, the old cliché "An illustration is worth a thousand words," is certainly true.

Because many, if not most, people understand visual illustrations more readily than they do theoretical constructs, it is important to develop a "word picture" process that can be put forward in a way allowing ordinary citizens to easily visualize the picture in their mind's eye then manipulate that picture to "see" what happens when various low or no growth policies are effected.

This word picture can be created using a construct called, "Our Village." The town of "Our Village" is a theoretical town with 25 families living in 25 homes. Each home consists of two parents and two children. The town has exactly the infrastructure mix needed to service the people living there and in the surrounding areas; providing just the right number of jobs, public facilities, and other services needed to make the village a fully functioning, and desirable, place to live. Our Village is, then, a town in equilibrium.

Because Our Village is in equilibrium, changes in population or in the household mix will have impacts reverberating throughout the social, economic, and political life of the town. For example, if two children in Our Village decide to marry and establish a household, the town is no longer in equilibrium. Now we're one house short of the number of homes needed to house the new family and, because a new household needs to be maintained we're short of the jobs needed by one or, perhaps, both the residents of the new home. It's easy to visualize what will happen to the new couple if we neither allow a new home to be constructed to house the new family nor allow new businesses, and thus new jobs, to come into the community.

By allowing easy visualization of the likely impacts of slow or no growth policies can have on Our Village, the illustration, using a very small population living in equilibrium, vividly demonstrates the impacts slow or no growth policies have on individual families in the town and, in doing that, allows for more realistic appraisals of the impacts policies before decision makers in each of our own towns or cities are likely to have on larger populations.

That low or no growth policies have substantial, and negative, impacts on towns, cities, and counties is indisputable.

For example:

- Comparison between the ten fastest growing states and the ten slowest growing states in the United States demonstrates that high growth states tend to have higher rates of income growth, lower growth in the per capita tax burden, and a lower budget growth per capita than the ten slowest growing states do.
- Credible studies show that economic growth benefits the life and income of poor people. The restriction of growth in a community by government below natural levels restricts opportunities, income, and quality of life for poor people living in that community.
- Growth restrictions meant to artificially reduce or stop growth do not harm the wealthy significantly. The nation's working poor, middle class, and the elderly bear the brunt of the negative impacts low or no growth policies bring. In their effects those policies can be characterized as efforts to force "undesirables" out of the community by reducing the availability of and increasing the cost of housing and land.
- Research by the Federal Transit Administration has shown that a community with low or no growth policies will begin to see deterioration in services and amenities. The local government will lose income, the local economy will suffer, and as the community ages, the community itself will become outdated and unattractive to new economic drivers.
- Low growth policies lead to increased pollution, low density sprawl, and increased pressure on environmentally sensitive areas.
- Analysis of data contained in the Places Rated Almanac reveals that low growth communities generally have a lower overall quality of life as compared to communities with more rapid rates of growth. The long term effects of low or no growth also are shown to reduce the quality of life even further.
- Using growth management to slow or stop growth is a misuse of a valuable community tool. Anti-growth tactics can keep communities from revitalizing old areas and cause communities that can be made better to become less attractive areas to live in. Policies designed to reduce or eliminate community growth harm already established citizens as growth continues without managed direction. The long term result of the policies is to reduce vitality and sap the strength of the community.

About Jack Petree

Jack Petree is a freelance writer and public policy researcher headquartered in Bellingham, Washington.

Petree's authored three books, more than 1,500 articles, and hundreds of miscellaneous works throughout his career. His work has concentrated in recent years on planning, environmental, and technical issues. In addition to his writing career, Petree consults with individuals, companies, associations, and others regarding the impacts of their projects on community. He has been involved in efforts to improve public understanding of growth management issues almost from the inception of growth management in Washington State.

INTRODUCTION

Why A Paper On Harming Community? Wouldn't It Be Better To Focus On The Benefits Of Growth?

Attend a public hearing on nearly any aspect of Growth Management in Washington today and you will hear a litany of complaint, sometimes accompanied by tears and/or anger, about the harm growth is doing to the lives and lifestyles of those testifying. Infrequently interspersed will be the testimony of an occasional Realtor, contractor, or attorney representing the interests of a landowner with plans for his or her property. These people, of course, testify their projects will be good for the community.

While low growth, no growth, or even negative growth is an inescapable fact of life in some areas of the United States, the focus of the low/no growth discussion in states like Washington, especially in local venues, tends to be on attempts to reduce population growth through legislation of some kind. Those believing growth brings insurmountable challenges demand down zones, permit restrictions, exactions on builders, infrastructure restrictions, and other techniques be implemented and enforced by governments in order to make it more difficult for growth, especially population growth, to occur.

Decision makers are faced with a difficult choice after they've heard such testimony. After all, **when it comes to community, the good things everyone knows growth can provide are nice to have while the bad things predicted if more growth comes can be terrifying.**

Given a choice, what responsible person would want to risk allowing terrifying things to happen in a community? Most people in most communities already believe their home town is one of the best anywhere. If change brings frightening levels of risk and you already like what you have, why would you want to encourage change?

To understand the choice decision makers face on hearing how person after person's lives will be destroyed by growth, think about your own family. Everyone wants the best for those they know and love. Almost everyone pursues the things that will bring their families a good life; **but no one pursues the good things in life with the fervor they invest in fighting things perceived as having the potential to bring active harm to their families.**

Decision makers value their communities because the community becomes their extended family when they run for, or are appointed to, an office. They value family as reflected in community and they want the best for that corporate family. Like a father or a mother the decision maker will go out of his or her way to provide for the things that, in their perception, make life nicer for those in the community and, just like the rest of us, they will fight to make sure terrifying things don't happen to their "family" of constituents.

Discussions focusing exclusively on the benefits of growth are, then, relatively weak when balanced against the terror promised by some if growth comes.

To balance the discussion then, it is important to discuss not only the benefits growth can bring to a community but, the harm lack of growth brings as well. **Too often overlooked in the discussion is the fact that low growth and/or no growth policies, if adopted, can bring immense harm to both individuals and to the communities those individuals call home.**

With all that in mind, this paper examines some of the harm active pursuit of low and no growth policies can bring to

a community's environment, its quality of life, and its economy. By extension, that same hurt is visited on individuals hoping for nothing more than a chance to lead full lives in that community.

The purpose of the paper is to give decision makers a more balanced picture of growth than they usually get - to demonstrate more clearly the ramifications of the decisions they make. It is informed by scholarship but does not attempt to be scholarly. As can be seen in the following, ordinary people sometimes suffer great harm when excessive restrictions on growth are adopted. Ordinary people must understand the discussion if that harm is to be avoided.

Making The Discussion Personal - An Illustration Is Worth A Thousand Words

Those opposing population, or any other kind of growth, have the game down pat. A stream of individuals parade forward and provides testimony about how each person in the parade will suffer personal injury as a consequence of the development, road, policy, or other action in question.

In opposition, those supporting the action generally speak to the value the action will have to the larger community.

Those speaking against have provided "personal" testimony while those speaking in favor have presented from a more impersonal perspective.

The dynamic takes place because the mechanics of public discussion demand it. If an individual speaks to the harm he or she will personally experience as a result of an action, there is no blame attached, everyone has a right, indeed, an obligation, to defend themselves.

Speaking to an individual benefit, however, is often, or even generally, taken as being selfish. Thus, to be taken seriously, it is necessary, in supporting an action, to speak to the value a project has to the broader community.

The problem is, and has always been, that a worry about the potential harm an individual might suffer as the result of an action is more personal and more immediate to a decision-maker than any theoretical construct about potential benefit to the overall community is. Testimony to the effect that "I'm hurting now," will always carry more weight than will testimony claiming that, "Yes, a few might be negatively impacted in the short term but most of us will be better off tomorrow if we do this."

Because the natural dynamic of the discussion has always tended to favor those opposing "growth" in a community, those realizing that at least some growth is necessary to the social, economic, and environmental health of a community need to work on finding ways to discuss that growth, especially population growth, in ways that better approach the immediacy and the level of personal experience the anti-growth movement utilizes as a matter of course.

One way to do that is to ask the decision-maker to imagine the town or city being discussed contains only 25 families and that each family is made up of two adults and two children for a total population of 100 residents living in 25 units.

Ask the decision-maker to further imagine that, through some kind of alchemy, "Our" town has just the right number of stores, industries, and other facilities necessary to provide all the benefits "Your" town offers its people and those of the surrounding area today.

In short, present "Our" town as a town at equilibrium.

Because "Our" town is at equilibrium, changed conditions must have an impact. We can examine what those impacts are likely to be then draw credible word pictures describing them. Because "Our" town is small enough to allow the imagination to encompass the likely changes coming as the result of an action, even the average person not working with the issues every day can "see" in the mind's eye what is likely to happen to the town if an action being discussed is actually undertaken. Using the "Our" town imaginary, the benefits and/or harm a decision might bring can be talked about without having to personalize the discussion in a way that might appear to be self-serving.

Once the scene's been set it's no stretch, then, to apply the lessons learned in "Our" town to the larger community being discussed.

Now, when the decision-maker acts, she or he has a more intimate understanding of the help or harm likely as a result of the decision. A vote can be taken on the decision-maker's understanding of the facts rather than on the basis of emotion.

The discussion papers following put forward important information decision makers should understand about the harm low and no growth policies can bring to a city, town, or county. The "Our" town model is used in each paper to explain how low and no growth policies might bring harm to citizens if implemented.

No Growth/Low Growth Policies Harm Community

DISCUSSION PAPER ONE:

LOW GROWTH CAN HARM INDIVIDUALS ECONOMICALLY

OVERVIEW:

High growth states see better wage growth, slower tax growth per capita, and lower budget growth per capita than do slow growth states

DISCUSSION:

A broad brush comparison of fast growing states in the U.S. with slower growing states paints an interesting picture useful not only in the discussion about the harm and/or benefits of population growth but also in the discussion about whether the costs of growth are borne by new residents, by builders, or by the larger society.

In terms of population, the ten fastest growing states in the U.S. 1990 - 2000 grew by 31.02% . The ten slowest growing states grew only 3.77%. That means the fastest growing states saw, in the '90s, about 8.23 times more new population growth as a percentage of previous population levels than the slowest growing states did.

If growth is as expensive and/or harmful to communities as some would claim, a group of states experiencing more than 8 times the population growth experienced by a slower growing group of states should see skyrocketing budgets and soaring tax increases while slower growth areas should see taxes and budgets coming under control.

BUDGET GROWTH:

In reality, the ten fastest growing states grew their gross budgets by an average of 218% through the decade of the '90s while the ten slowest growing states grew their budgets by 175%. When it is considered that faster growing states served almost 1/3 more people in 2000 than they did in 1990 while slow growing states served only 4% more people, it can be seen that on a per capita basis, slower growing states actually grew their budgets at a slightly higher rate through the decade than did faster growing states.

If growth were as expensive to governments as some have claimed it to be, budgets in faster growing states should have skyrocketed in comparison to slower growth states, not grown more slowly on a per capita basis.

Even as budget dollars spent per person grew slightly more rapidly in slow growth states than they did in fast growth states, there is some evidence services in fast growing states outpaced those provided by governments in slower growing states (See the discussion on quality of life comparisons between fast growing areas and slow growing areas in the Urban Land Institute's year 2000 working paper on land use policy, *The Benefits of Growth* for some analysis on this issue).

Some anti-growth activists have claimed growth is costly to citizens already living in a town or city. While a great deal of work still needs to be done to provide conclusive evidence, indications are the opposite is true. It appears

citizens already living in a region see their tax loads grow more slowly than they would have absent the growth even as their lives are substantially improved by the availability of new services.

STATE AND LOCAL PER CAPITA TAXES:

Of course, the decade of the '90s was known for budget shifting as states required localities to perform more services without necessarily providing the funding needed to accomplish the tasks. Considering only state budgets could lead to erroneous conclusions if substantial cost shifting took place over the decade.

It could be claimed that a look at per capita tax burdens with state and local taxes combined in fast growing states compared to slower growth states would present a fairer picture when it comes to the cost of growth.

Looking at the ten fastest growing states 1990 - 2000, the per capita tax load (taxes paid per citizen) with state and local taxes combined grew by 51.9% unadjusted for inflation. In the ten slowest growing states the per capita tax load grew by 60.3%. If only the five fastest and slowest growing states are considered, the difference is even more striking with the tax burden growing only 50.2% in fast growing states as compared to 66% in slower growth states (Data from the U.S. Dept. of Commerce and the U.S. Census Bureau as compiled and charted by the State of Rhode Island).

If growth's burdens are shifted to existing citizens, why do taxes on each citizen rise less in fast growing states than they do in slow growing states? In fact, the conclusion has to be that growth more than pays for itself. If growth costs more than it returns to society, taxes would have to rise more quickly in fast growing states than in slow growth states to pay for the budget increases necessary to fund the growth. In fact, the reverse is true. **It seems indisputable that citizens in slower growing states experience increased tax burdens. In faster growing states tax burdens grow more slowly. It would seem to be the case then that taxes paid by new citizens help lighten the tax burdens of existing citizens.**

INCOME GROWTH:

Income also grew more rapidly in faster growing states than in slower growing states. In the fast growing states, average pay grew by 46%, 1990 - 2000 while in slower growing states it grew by 42%. Measured another way, median family income in fast growing states grew by 31.8% while in the slower growth states it grew by 28.7%.

It should be noted income growth was less tied to individual state's growth rates than other factors were. It should also be noted that the combination of lower taxes and generally higher income growth in fast growing states means significant enhancements in spendable income, or the income available to a family after taxes, were seen in more rapidly growing states through the '90s.

SO WHAT'S IT ALL MEAN?

In an academic arena, drawing firm conclusions about any of the findings above, in isolation, would be suspect because a broad variety of factors could influence each individual data point.

By way of example, it could be noted that on a state by state basis, income growth in the '90s was sporadic with some of the slower growing states experiencing good income growth and some of the faster growing states experiencing less robust growth. This particular comparison presents a good example of the dangers of trying too hard to draw conclusions from too limited data.

However, taken as a whole, the consistency of the data across a broad range allows a reasonable person to conclude that in terms of the economic impact of growth on the individual citizen, rapid growth seems to provide benefits slower growth is unable to provide.

One important conclusion that seems to be particularly clear is that the claims made by some that the broader society pays a high price for growth with newcomers benefiting at the expense of existing residents are simply not true. If those claims were true, budgets in fast growing states would have to show explosive growth per capita compared with those in slow growing states. Corresponding tax increases would have to be levied with increasing per capita tax burdens coming as a result. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case.

It also seems to be pretty clear that spendable income goes up and taxes go down in regions experiencing rapid growth as compared to slower growth areas.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN "OUR" TOWN

Imagine a town with 100 residents living in 25 residential units with two adults and two children in each unit. The town is much like our own town, just smaller. All the amenities we've come to enjoy in our town are present as are all the potential problems.

What happens to our economy, especially as it impacts individuals, if we restrict growth in "Our" town to artificially low levels?

First, as our children grow older and marry, they must move out of town to find homes and jobs. Because all 25 units in town are occupied, there is no place for even our own children to live, unless they continue to live in the family home. The children get married and move out but we don't, so there are no vacancies in town. Even if some of us do move, there are people living elsewhere who want to live here because we're a great town. They can bid up the price for homes so our children can't live here even if a few homes come onto the market.

It's not too difficult to figure out what happens. Four of our children decided to marry this year. That creates two new families needing two new homes. In a town as small as ours housing unit growth would have to grow 8% just to accommodate existing population, never mind anyone new moving into town. Just the fact that our children marry and create new households has pushed necessary growth beyond the levels we've decided to allow so the children must go.

As our children move away, a percentage of our local businesses begin to close. New businesses are reluctant to move into town because there is little or no growth taking place and, thus, restricted opportunity. On top of that, our demographics are changing - as people age, no new people with children move into town so, for example, a business specializing in selling clothing to young adults will find itself with few customers in only a few years. Construction firms begin to close as well because there's little or no building going on.

As the businesses close those of us working in them lose our jobs. Our unemployment not only reduces our ability to pay taxes, it places additional burdens on government. Because there are few jobs, employers, faced with declining revenues due to the unemployment we've created, are unwilling, indeed, unable, to increase wages making increased taxes even more problematic.

Demands on our city's finances increase even as revenues decrease. New environmental regulations require the city to upgrade water and sewer facilities even as it must invest in groundwater treatment. No option exists other than raising taxes. The increased taxes make it even more difficult for our businesses to survive and thrive so they move or close. If they move, we now drive to the new business centers, removing even more money from the town's coffers.

By restricting growth to artificially low levels in "Our" town, we've created a vicious cycle of declining wages and increasing tax burdens for ourselves and we can only wonder what happened. After all, we did this in the first place because people pointed to places like Boulder, Colorado as examples of what can be done if we are only willing to "control" growth. We forgot to really take a look at Boulder and realize that, for the most part, it's a town that excludes people like us unless we're driving in from distant towns to work in the stores that service those who live in what used to be "Our" town.

No Growth/Low Growth Policies Harm Community

DISCUSSION PAPER TWO:

Low Growth Policies Harm The Poor

OVERVIEW:

Economic Growth Directly Enhances The Incomes Of The Poor

DISCUSSION:

An extensive study done under the auspices of The World Bank and released in 2000 examined a number of “facts” about growth, economic development, and the poor of the world (*Growth Is Good for the Poor*, Development Research Group - The World Bank, 2000).

While the study did reveal some things about poverty and income growth many Americans would probably prefer not to hear (neither democratic institutions nor public spending on health and education seemed to do much to enhance the incomes of the poor), the work did reveal a direct connection between growth and the income of the poor.

Three comments from the study illustrate the contention that growth is good for the poor and, by extension, lack of growth causes harm and lost opportunity for the them:

“Income of the poor rises one-for-one with overall growth”

“Thus, it is almost always the case that the incomes of the poor rises during periods of significant growth.”

“...the basic result that growth in the overall economy is reflected one-for-one in growth in income of the poor turns out to be very robust.”

Addressing some commonly accepted “facts” about growth and the poor the study found that the elevation in the incomes of the poor held true across the spectrum of countries, whether rich or poor, that foreign trade benefits the poor to the same extent it benefits the entire economy, and that the incomes of the poor do not fall disproportionately in times of economic crisis.

Studies like that commissioned by the World Bank, in combination with other data regarding the income and tax reduction benefits of growth allows a conclusion that governmental policies restricting growth below “natural” levels causes harm to the poor. Policies designed to enable growth just as clearly benefit the poor though no conclusions can be drawn from available data to demonstrate whether or not there is a point at which pro-growth policies are no longer effective.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN "OUR" TOWN

Imagine a town with 100 residents living in 25 residential units with two adults and two children in each unit. The town is much like our own town, just smaller. All the amenities we've come to enjoy in our town are present as are all the potential problems.

What happens to our poor if we restrict growth in "Our" town to artificially low levels?

When we restrict growth to artificially low levels in "Our" town we also restrict the social mobility of our citizens.

Historically, upward mobility has been provided in "Our" town as those of us living here move up the employment ladder. As each of us moves up a rung, we vacate a rung below, leaving it to be occupied by someone else.

Without growth, however, new jobs are never created and, in fact, jobs are lost as stores close or move away. Those at the bottom of the ladder are frozen out of the job market. We've created permanent poverty and we've taken away hope for a better tomorrow.

We've particularly reduced opportunity for the working poor, especially when it comes to potentially owning a home. In most towns and cities "affordable" housing is that created as individuals move up and out to newer homes, leaving their old homes behind. If growth is restricted in "Our" town, there is no moving up in the housing market. There are no vacancies left behind. There is no opportunity to purchase an older home, fix it up, prosper, and, in turn, move up, leaving a home behind for a new family to begin their own lives in.

No Growth/Low Growth Policies Harm Community

DISCUSSION PAPER THREE:

Low Growth Policies Harm Ordinary Working People

OVERVIEW:

Growth restrictions don't impact those with the means to buy their way into a city, town, or county. They often do not unduly impact the very poor in terms of having the necessities for everyday life. The working poor and the middle class bear the brunt of low growth/no growth policies in most cities and towns.

DISCUSSION:

It's a simple fact of life that in any city, town, or county restricting growth, the price of a home rises so long as a pool of people with both the desire and the means to move to the area exists. Growth restrictions don't impact those with the means to buy their way into a city, town, or county. They often do not unduly impact the very poor. The working poor and the middle class bear the brunt of low growth/no growth policies in most cities and towns.

What happens when land supplies are restricted in a desirable area? Those both wanting to live in that area and having the means to do so, begin to pay higher prices for land and homes. As neighborhoods in desirable cities and towns become more crowded and expensive to buy into, growth spills out into the countryside, raising prices there as well as creating sprawl. Vacancy rates sometimes go down but, more importantly, the price of all housing rises.

It can be argued that the very poor are affected only minimally when housing prices skyrocket. In general, most cities and towns, assisted by state and federal dollars, will show compassion to the very poor in the form of housing subsidies and other amenities. In many of Washington's cities and towns the poor live in good housing provided by society at little or no cost.

Those subsidies do, however, come at a price. While the costs are imposed on all taxpayers, the working poor and the middle classes feel them more because they are priced out of the marketplace as incomes decline relative to housing prices and taxes increase due in part, ironically, to the subsidies.

Most cities and towns have waiting lists for their subsidized low-income housing. Towns with restricted land supplies for moderately priced housing have housing shortages even in their moderately priced housing markets. So what happens when someone not qualifying for, or unable to obtain, low-income housing must move due to circumstance beyond their control? Nothing is available.

What happens when nothing is available in a market?

Where does an abused woman, a mother desiring to move her children out of a violence centered household, or any other individual finding themselves in an untenable situation go when housing in a price range they might find affordable simply doesn't exist? Where does a retired couple move when living in their family home is no longer tenable but growth restrictions do not allow alternative housing to be built?

In a region where low or no growth has been legislated as a part of public policy society has answered the question for those without the means to buy their way out of the situation. "To avoid population growth," society has said, "We are willing to reduce or eliminate your options."

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN "OUR" TOWN

Imagine a town with 100 residents living in 25 residential units with two adults and two children in each unit. The town is much like our own town, just smaller. All the amenities we've come to enjoy in our town are present as are all the potential problems.

What happens to our most vulnerable citizens if we restrict growth in "Our" town to artificially low levels?

We don't like to think these kinds of things happen in "Our" town but, statistically, there will be abuse in at least one or two of the homes our neighbors live in.

We've restricted growth in "Our" town so, people wanting to move here have bid up the price of even undesirable homes in the area. Now, a woman, abused for years, decides she must leave the family home. Without a reasonable vacancy rate in "Our" town there's no place to move to. The woman feels forced to stay with, sometimes, disastrous consequences.

One of our older couples are reaching the point in life where they have health issues. The big old home that was so comfortable when the kids were growing up is just too much to handle now. It's worth a good amount of money today but, not nearly as much as new homes are so, what are the couple's options?

We've artificially restricted growth in "Our" town so there is neither a financial imperative nor a physical ability to construct new housing that's either appropriate or affordable for the older couple. Their children had to move out of the area because homes and jobs weren't available for them so staying with the children is not a viable option. The only real option the couple has today is to stay in an untenable situation and make do as best they can or, pack up and move away from the place they've called home for decades.

DISCUSSION PAPER FOUR:

Low Growth Policies = Deteriorating Communities

OVERVIEW:

Communities must grow just to accommodate existing populations. Communities not growing at some level begin to deteriorate to the detriment of quality of life within the community.

DISCUSSION:

Any community, whether it's growing or not, needs to have some level of construction going on almost all the time or it begins to deteriorate. The deterioration can be physical, due to changing tastes, or the result of catastrophic events. Physical deterioration comes when a structure is simply too old to be of much use anymore. Structures can also be outmoded simply by changing tastes. A motel room built in the 1960s is unlikely to be acceptable to much of the traveling public today. Catastrophic change also brings deterioration as fire, earth movement, or some similar event either destroys or reduces the usefulness and, thus, the value of a building.

According to Anthony Downs, a Senior Fellow doing research at the Brookings Institute, a noted think tank generally associated with the term "liberal," a city or town must achieve a growth/replacement rate for housing of 2.9% per year just to accommodate internal growth, replacement of old structures, and immigration from abroad (Cited in *Transit Cooperative Research Program Report 74 - Costs of Sprawl 2000* a research effort sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration).

Even if 1/3 of that "growth" takes place on the sites of existing structures (an old house is torn down and a new one is built on the site) the town must still grow by 1.9% or so just to stay even with the needs of existing populations and immigration from abroad.

In fact, even if 0 population growth were to occur in a city or town for a time, growth in the number of housing units would be necessary for some decades just to accommodate changes in the family structure within the borders. A boy and a girl get married, for example, and a new household is created even if the population remains static. Nearly half of all marriages in the United States today end in divorce. A divorce creates a need for new housing units with no change in population.

Failing to grow, Downs points out, results not only in physical decay but also in functional obsolescence. Confine a department store to the facility it operated out of in 1950 and the result will be the loss of the store to a more modern facility the next town, or county, or state is willing to allow. The sewer plant built to handle wastes in 1940 can no longer meet modern regulatory requirements but we're not allowing new growth even as our wage earners are leaving town. Rather than pay ever higher taxes, we make do as our plant grows less and less capable of handling the load and more and more likely to become a source of environmental pollution.

As the financial participation of the existing population declines, business survival in the community becomes problematic. Businesses that once catered to middle aged parents with growing children have lost their customers and there's no one to replace them so they close. The local newspaper closes because the advertiser base is gone.

New businesses no longer come to the town as there is no population base to support growth. Now, people begin to travel to enjoy shopping, entertainment, and other amenities their own town may have once provided taking even more tax dollars out of the community. Faced with declining tax revenues upgrades or even maintenance of public facilities is put off with all the environmental consequences that entails.

In short, the town begins to deteriorate, both physically and socially.

Plenty of examples exist regarding the deterioration taking place when areas grow too slowly or not at all. The term “rust belt city” refers to industrial cities in the upper Mid-West and lower Northeastern regions of the United States that once housed vibrant manufacturing facilities that are now closed, shuttered, and in decay.

A particularly interesting illustration of the impacts of slow growth on a community is found in a series of monographs by Rolf Pendall of the Brookings Institute’s Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy.

Upstate New York, Pendall points out, was the “third slowest growing ‘state’ in the U.S. through the 1990s. The region has grown so slowly that 1/3 of the new residents in upstate New York in the ‘90s were prisoners!

Consequences of the lack of growth have included a moribund economy, a stressed senior population making up an ever larger percentage of the population even as jobs and the associated tax revenues leave the region, and a reduced ability on the part of the cities to fund necessary services.

One conclusion Pendall draws is that, “Legislators and other decision-makers, as well as the general public should be concerned about slow population growth. People move to regions with strong employment prospects; this fact is well enough recognized by now, and fuels the state’s main economic development priorities on the creation of jobs. But many studies also show that jobs follow people. This mutually supportive relationship between population and economy suggests that policy for Upstate New York needs to concentrate on both jobs and people—on the factors that encourage strong business conditions as well as those that encourage mobile residents to stay in the region, especially once they graduate from college.”

As an interesting aside, sprawl in upstate New York has continued even in the face of little or no population growth.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN “OUR” TOWN

Imagine a town with 100 residents living in 25 residential units with two adults and two children in each unit. The town is much like our own town, just smaller. All the amenities we’ve come to enjoy in our town are present as are all the potential problems.

What happens to our community, especially as individuals are impacted, if we restrict growth in “Our” town to artificially low levels?

As has occurred throughout the country, slow and low growth means job losses. As jobs move elsewhere so do workers, especially the young with careers ahead of them. As the workers move out, so do some businesses depending on those workers. Seniors, with fewer options possible, are left behind. The aging of the population even as tax income associated with a more vibrant economy is reduced leads to stresses on health care systems and other services necessary to maintaining quality of life for seniors.

Cities and towns struggle as well. Slow deterioration in the quality of the community is the result. Because newer businesses desire modern infrastructure, "Our" town loses its ability to attract modern business. The businesses that would have come to town establish themselves in nearby areas more willing to accommodate them. Now, our people begin to drive to remote areas for shopping, recreational, and job opportunities, dropping their tax dollars in those areas before returning home. Empty buildings, unmaintained due to the expense, begin to show up around the city. The reduced taxes require cuts by the cities so city facilities begin to deteriorate and facilities we would have once wanted to expand are left as they are, whether adequate or not.

In short, "Our" town begins to drift through its life rather than approach the future as being one filled with opportunity and it's not as though we didn't make the choice deliberately. Plenty of examples are available regarding what happens when a town, a county, or a region grows too slowly. We just never thought it would happen here. We thought we were special.

No Growth/Low Growth Policies Harm Community

DISCUSSION PAPER FIVE:

Low Growth Policies Harm The Environment

OVERVIEW:

Studies of urban containment policies in the United States show those policies aimed at restricting growth in an area generally succeed only in redirecting growth to adjacent areas - exactly the opposite effect to that intended. That redirection can have significant environmental impacts including increased vehicle travel, increased sprawl in low density development, and development pressure on environmentally sensitive lands that may not have been developed absent the low growth policies.

DISCUSSION:

Urban containment policies generally fall into one of three types, though there are many varieties of each. Urban Growth Boundaries are best known in the Pacific Northwest. Some cities, the most renowned of which is Boulder, Colorado, have surrounded themselves with greenbelts, restricting their growth by walling themselves in. Other cities have used Urban Service Areas in the attempt to direct growth. Combinations of each policy have also been tried.

Even more important than the kind of containment policy tried is the underlying reason for implementing the policy. Some jurisdictions utilize growth management in an attempt to direct growth while others are working to prevent growth. Population growth is usually targeted in the second instance.

Efforts to contain growth have had mixed results. In looking at a broad range of cities working on the problem it is not difficult to make a credible case that growth management aimed at reducing population growth has generally proven to be a failure almost everywhere it's been tried. Cities and other jurisdictions trying to reduce or eliminate population growth have sometimes been successful in that specific but have done so only by pursuing approaches that end up imposing the growth on nearby areas. Ironically, those jurisdictions, as often as not, still end up paying the piper as unanticipated consequences of actions taken play themselves out over time.

Low and no growth policies can negatively affect the environment in a variety of ways including creating restrictions in the financial ability of governments to pay for enhancements, increased development pressure on environmentally sensitive lands due to lack of land supply, and others. The most important, and most easily seen impacts often come, however, as the result of the increased sprawl most low and no growth policies encourage.

The nation's major study on sprawl, *Costs of Sprawl - 2000*, a study sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration, points to the problem with most population control measures saying, "Attempts by individual localities to limit growth within their own boundaries normally cause the spread of growth beyond their boundaries and into other localities in the same region - thus generating more sprawl... consequently, nearly all local growth controls are essentially 'beggar thy neighbor' policies."

In a significant examination of Urban Growth containment efforts in the United States, " *Holding The Line: Urban Containment In The United States*," a number of renowned researchers working on behalf of the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy pointed to some of the observable impacts city efforts to reduce

population growth have had in real life. Speaking to the sprawl often created by such policies the authors pointed out that, "...in many high profile situations in the United States - including both Boulder (Colorado) and California - local urban containment policies, free from regional goals and tied to local growth limitations, have clearly led to *unplanned* leapfrog development."

In Washington both public and private efforts to reduce growth seem also to have led to similar results with all the environmental impacts rampant sprawl brings. Across the state low density development is occurring in outlying areas as more dense localities restrict land supplies, provide infrastructure expansions only reluctantly, and develop at less than allowable densities. The result is people drive further, build using septic tanks rather than sewers, consume open space at more rapid rates than they would have given easier access to the cities, and impact environmental features needlessly.

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What happens to our environment if we restrict growth in "Our" town to artificially low levels?

In recent years "Our" town has limited land supplies within the cities and restricted expansion of the Urban Growth Areas. We've said we're accommodating growth but through a variety of restrictive policies we're really working to accommodate that growth by reducing it.

Because "Our" town is a nice place to live and work in people have continued to come to the area despite our efforts to discourage them. Housing prices are so high here as a result of our work that even our own can no longer live here so the upper middle class - teachers, police officers, and the like - now live in outlying towns or on small acreages outside the UGAs and commute to work. Average and low wage earners live in more remote regions, commuting to town as well. Very low wage or no wage earners can still live in the city as we've subsidized multifamily housing for them.

The morning and evening commute have become problematic in "Our" town because we've only planned road systems for our own population. Now, most of our workers live outside the city, driving dozens of excess miles each day to get to work. The exhaust from the additional miles driven each year is impacting our air and the congestion is impacting our quality of life.

Out in the county, thousands of two, five, ten, and even larger parcels are becoming affordable compared to land in the city. Last year many homes that should have been built in the city were built, instead, on those parcels. Each of those homes includes impervious surfaces, a septic tank, and a well, and each on

average, consumes two acres rather than the 1/8th acre that would have been consumed had the structure been built in the city at mid to high densities.

Each of those homes also houses voters and those voters are beginning to demand services. They want more and better roads, more and better schools, and faster response times for police and fire. As the population in more remote locations increases businesses follow, establishing branch locations or locating out of town as an option to locating in "Our" town. In fact, a new and modern shopping facility has just opened its doors ten miles out so now our own residents are traveling to obtain modern services we no longer provide.

We thought we could suppress growth in our town and, as it turns out, we could. But now we have roads full of vehicles each day driving into town and utilizing our services but taking their tax dollars out of town. We have reduced open space and there's increasing pressures on what's left. In fact, the pinch is getting to be tight enough that there is growing pressure in "Our" town to look at expansion but, now, it will have to be accomplished at great price because the land we could have utilized efficiently had we done proper planning years ago has been converted to low density housing and those people don't want change any more than we did ten years ago so, we need to go even further out to be effective now. We've allowed growth to manage us rather than take the steps we needed to take to manage growth.

No Growth/Low Growth Policies Harm Community

DISCUSSION PAPER SIX:

Low Growth Policies Harm Quality Of Life

OVERVIEW:

Analysis of data contained in the *Places Rated Almanac* reveals that in most areas important to citizens, rapidly growing places far outstrip slow growing places in the quality of life offered residents.

A year 2001 publication of the Urban Land Institute, *The Benefits of Growth*, focused a good deal of attention on analysis of data contained in the *Places Rated Almanac* regarding quality of life issues in fast growing and slow growing American cities. Eight factors including cost of living, transportation, jobs, education, crime, arts, health care, and recreation were examined by *Places Rated* and analyzed by the Urban Land Institute's authors.

In six of the eight areas of importance to quality of life in a community, fast growing cities far outstripped slow growing cities in the rankings. Slower growing cities ranked better in control of crime and marginally better in health services. Both ratings are understandable. Criminals are the ultimate entrepreneurs and would be expected to be "where the action is." In terms of health care, established cities would tend to have mature health care systems in place while in newer, faster growing areas, the health care system is growing and adapting to the place even as the place grows.

The ULI also examined the relative scores of metropolitan areas by size. The ten largest metro areas in the U.S. were compared with the ten smallest (The census bureau has established a list of Standard Metropolitan areas. The largest are cities like Los Angeles while the smallest are areas like Casper, Wyoming, Great Falls, Montana, and Rapid City, South Dakota).

In this comparison the larger cities scored higher in quality of life categories by huge margins in 6 of the categories. Smaller towns scored better in terms of crime and in cost of living. Again, not much is surprising. Criminals are opportunistic and there is certainly more opportunity in a large city than in a small one as well as a better chance to melt into the population once the crime has been committed. As to cost of living, no one would be shocked to find it costs less to live in Pine Bluff, Arkansas than it does in Chicago, especially if the wage differential is not taken into account.

While quality of life issues are subjective, the ULI index does offer evidence that for many, if not most, citizens, very significant quality of life benefits are available to those living in large, or rapidly growing regions of the country and that those benefits are less available in smaller as well as in slower growing areas.

This is important because, all too often, there is a sort of sneering acceptance of the idea that rapid growth deteriorates quality of life in a region and an equal acceptance of the idea that slowing growth preserves quality of life. In reality, a balance exists. Rapid growth probably erodes some things some people value but, as it does that, it enhances the quality of other things, things that cannot be made available in regions too small to support them.

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What happens to our quality of life if we restrict growth in "Our" town to artificially low levels?

As our population growth has slowed we've forced new populations to more remote areas. That's slowed our job growth as new jobs have followed the population. Because we're not building new roads as a matter of public policy we're seeing our older roads stressed by usage as people living outside the city travel into "Our" town to visit government offices, family they've had to leave behind when we forced them to move due to lack of housing, or to use the public services they appreciate our having paid for in the past. Reduced available dollars have led to reductions in the availability of arts and recreation facilities and deterioration in those already existing. Our outmoded schools are having trouble providing students with modern computer labs and other facilities due to the difficulty and expense of retrofitting outmoded buildings. Many of the things we tried to protect by passing anti-growth legislation are slowly deteriorating in both quantity and quality as other, more vibrant areas take our place as the center of people's lives.

No Growth/Low Growth Policies Harm Community

DISCUSSION PAPER SEVEN:

Low Growth Policies Contribute To A General Malaise In "Our" Town

OVERVIEW:

The bedrock underpinning most low growth/no growth policies is the idea that, "If we can just make things miserable enough, people won't move here."

DISCUSSION

Growth Management was adopted in Washington State as a tool to be used in shaping a better life for all. It was not adopted to be used as a weapon to be wielded against anyone or anything viewed as supportive of growth nor was it adopted as a pro-growth initiative.

A look at the arguments generally put forward in hearings, discussions, articles, and other venues where growth is discussed quickly reveals that most "solutions" posed by those wanting to slow growth usually revolve around the idea, "If we can just make things miserable enough in our community, people will stop moving here."

The examples run the gamut.

- If we just quit building roads people would stop moving here...
- If we make it difficult enough to get permits and build new housing, prices will rise so much people won't be able to afford to move here...
- Don't provide more jobs, that will just make it more attractive to live here...

"We would do better to make the areas we want people to live in more desirable rather than try to make the places we already inhabit less attractive."

The anti-growth argument leaves a sour taste in the mouths of even those decision makers who worry about some of the impacts growth does bring. If those same decision makers realize that slow growth creates problems for society at least the equal of those created by too rapid growth they can be encouraged to get on with the task of realizing the benefits of growth while striving to minimize the potential problems.

The best, and first question to ask in the discussion about growth then is, "Wouldn't we do better to make the areas we want people to live in more desirable rather than try to make the places we already inhabit less attractive? Wouldn't it be better to direct growth rather than let growth direct us?"

The fact of the matter is that while it is difficult to prove a negative, there appears to be no region in the United States where stringent growth controls have worked to achieve the goals set for them. The holy cities of the anti-growth

movement - Portland, Oregon and Boulder, Colorado - have solved some problems with their approach only to create other problems. Both are wonderful cities but, so are many cities that have not particularly fiddled with growth issues.

There is some evidence, however, that building attractive, mixed use development at density, can attract residents. Many downtowns are seeing a renaissance as they are refurbished to suit the desires of modern residents while, on the outskirts of towns, urban centers built to sometimes very high densities are becoming vibrant, enjoyable places to work, live and play. The "flight to the fields" or sprawl, is being stemmed in regions working to create livable areas.

The whole point of the Growth Management Act is to have cities and counties work together to find ways to have the cities "capture" a greater amount of the growth coming into the county that they have in the past. The term "capture" implies a positive view of at least some growth rather than an outright rejection of growth in general. At bottom, the ideal is to design our cities to be so pleasant, with enough variety in terms of housing choice, recreational enhancements, economic opportunity, and social equality, that nearly everyone coming to a county will want to settle in and near the cities in that county. All that doesn't mean the cities of Washington must, or should, recruit growth. It does mean they should work in affirmative ways to assure the growth that will come our way anyway is managed well so the things we value as communities can be preserved even as the benefits growth can bring are realized.

At bottom, policies designed to reduce or eliminate population growth harm already established residents as much as they do those we're trying to keep away. If we don't build roads in order to keep outsiders away, we are the ones stuck in traffic. If we don't provide land for housing, our environment pays for the resulting sprawl. If we discourage the construction necessary to support new jobs, our economy suffers as old jobs move away or disappear and nothing replaces them. Every day, in every way, we pay for the effort to reduce growth even as growth continues. We've allowed "Our" town to deteriorate in order to "save" what we thought we once had.