



**PUBLIC OPINION  
STRATEGIES**

*Turning Questions Into Answers.*

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Bryan Wahl  
Fr: Gene Ulm, Sarah Simmons  
Date: November 25, 2002  
Re: Messaging in support of density, the economy and a profile of key subgroups

The following memorandum details several points from the data that show potential to be used to encourage support of higher density in Washington.

**Situation analysis:**

- Washington's more urban and suburban voters (particularly the Seattle and Portland markets) voice the most anxiety with regard to the loss of open space. *This should be a plus for higher density messaging.*
- Washington's more urban and suburban markets show the most anxiety toward traffic and congestion. *When approached as traffic abatement and shorter commutes, this should be a plus for higher density messaging.*
- Washington's more urban and suburban markets show less concern with economic issues. *Importantly, Seattle voters weight equally economic needs and environmental needs.*
- Women, particularly homemakers, are the key to any successful messaging. While officially "undecided" on the issue of positives versus negatives of growth, the survey data also show these same voters support more growth management and higher concern for environmental measurements. Excessive growth is also seen as a strain on social services, particularly schools.
- These results are consistent with many other surveys completed by Public Opinion Strategies: pro-growth votes are disproportionately male while anti-growth voters are disproportionately female. Pro-growth voters believe growth supports the economy while anti-growth voters believe there are environmental and societal consequences.

*Conclusion: We will not be able to persuade undecided and anti-growth voters using a straight economic message. Rather, there will likely need to be a societal consequence.*

- There are other negative outcomes of higher density beyond the scope of this survey. In specific, other surveys completed by Public Opinion Strategies show that voters correlate higher density with higher crime. (We also know from this research that crime anxieties associated with higher density developments can be muted with architecture and aesthetics.)
- Use the "sprawl" and "open space" to message in support of higher density. Seattle voters would rather have more development in their neighborhood, prevent sprawl and preserve open space by a 50%-39% margin. Portland market voters feel similarly (45%-39%). Urban (51%-38%) and suburban (49%-41%) voters share this opinion while rural voters are divided (46%-46%).

## **Messaging**

- Using the economy to drive a message. The data shows that voters would like increased opportunity for themselves and their children (81% say yes, 40% definitely so). These results are not surprising considering voters' extreme job worries.

*Messaging in somewhat similar voting states shows the strength of using this issue is in language that says, "If we don't improve the economy and provide jobs, my children and grandchildren are going to have to move away to find work." Previous research in Vermont and Wisconsin show that women are especially moved by the economic messages that emphasize their children's futures.*

- Fears of home affordability strike a similar chord. Seventy percent of the voters say they are concerned about the cost of buying a home for their family – four in ten (39%) are very concerned. Again, the verbiage should combine home ownership worries with forcing children and grandchildren to move away to afford a home.
- Attitudes on density vary widely depending on what people believe is at stake. When asked globally about where to expand, those who support concentrating growth in urban areas consist of subgroups that are typically more liberal, politically - younger people, especially younger women and liberals. Those who support more suburban growth are more typically a conservative coalition, Republicans, self-described conservatives and those who have lived in the area for more than 15 years. Those who would like to see rural growth are demographically a bit mixed, with older men and older women, Democrats and Liberals supporting more urban development.

However, when the same group of people are asked about their own neighborhoods, some different coalitions develop. Older men, working women, conservatives, and those who have lived in the area for 5-15 years prefer to expand the overall urban area, so that there will not be a density increase, but there will be more growth.

Again, women, younger people and liberals would allow more housing in their own neighborhoods to accommodate growth and preserve open space, while older women, men, conservatives and Rural respondents would not allow growth in their neighborhoods, but lose open space.

Please do not hesitate to call with any questions (703) 836-7655.