



Urban Infill Policy

Preamble

Sierra Club's mission in combination with growing threats to our environment require a renewed emphasis on cities and towns where people can live, work, and thrive while protecting and restoring our natural environment and fighting the causes and impacts of climate change. Our resilience to the threat of climate change begins with our social, cultural and economic resilience, which depends upon inclusive and fair communities.

Therefore, the Sierra Club supports transformative strategies that build communities that feature:

- Affordable housing accessible to all;
- Transit, bike, and pedestrian first approaches to transportation;
- Expanded opportunities for all residents to participate in the local economy and civic decisions;
- Living wage jobs;
- A balance between employment opportunities and housing;
- Access to education, services, amenities, and recreation that improve overall quality of life; and
- Measures and policies that increase climate resilience.

Affirmative support for such communities is a natural corollary to the Sierra Club's opposition to sprawl, which promotes automobile dependence, destroys natural ecosystems, separates people from each other, increases social inequity, reduces economic security and increases carbon emissions.

The Sierra Club acknowledges that many national and local land use policies were designed to separate people by class and race, and that many planning, housing and development practices still reinforce those inequitable and racist outcomes. The Sierra Club believes affordable housing is a human right. Further, all neighborhoods should be open to people of all income levels and backgrounds. In working to expand housing and economic opportunities we recognize our obligation to address past and ongoing inequity in the communities and neighborhoods most damaged by it and to fully engage the stakeholders of such communities in our work.

Climate Change

How we build cities and towns has a profound effect on the causes and impacts of climate change. An essential strategy for reducing urban related carbon emissions is supporting dense, mixed-use communities and land uses that prioritize walking, biking or transit to meet daily

transportation needs, as well as balancing jobs and housing within the region. If we make communities not only dense, but inclusive, then fewer people will have to drive till they qualify for housing financing, saving even more emissions. The benefits of sustainable development, also known as smart growth, include saving money for people, governments and businesses, improving public health, enhancing the quality of life, reducing carbon emissions and other pollution, and leaving more pastoral and natural lands in place.

To mitigate the primary drivers of climate change and prepare for the impacts:

- Development should be dense, inclusive, and located within or connected to existing communities and neighborhoods. New development should be designed to make neighborhoods walkable, and neighborhoods in the city and metropolitan contexts should be linked together by convenient high quality transit prioritized in regional, state and national transportation expenditure plans.
- Materials, building codes, and design should optimize energy use, the entire site's potential, building space and material use, and protect and conserve water and land.
- Development areas served by public transportation, shared transportation, public infrastructure (wastewater, water, roads, etc.) should be zoned for dense/multi-family/mixed use development in order to reduce emissions and waste. New areas should not be zoned for exclusively single family housing only.
- Cities should develop and enforce land use plans that minimize and mitigate the causes of climate change (carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions).
- All land use plans should identify opportunities for adapting to climate change and build resilience across communities and physical infrastructure.

Vibrant Communities

Land use zoning regulations and public infrastructure investments that favor lower density, automobile dependent development are problematic for reasons including: increasing vehicle miles traveled, degraded air and water quality, and destruction of open space, farmland and critical habitat. Concentrating economic opportunities, new homes, services, and amenities in existing communities protects and mitigates against sprawl, reduces pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, while creating livable communities.

- Development should allow a mix of uses (housing, commercial, retail, schools and amenities) sufficiently close to each other, and at sufficient densities, to support walkability.
- Development should be located near existing transit or built so that it can support future transit options, whether in an urban, suburban or rural context.
- Development should be allowed at the highest densities within walking and bicycling distance of transit stations.
- Regulations and public incentives should expand housing choices in neighborhoods that offer access to educational and economic opportunity, particularly for residents who, because of race, ethnicity, and/or income, have historically been marginalized and displaced in land use decisions. This would include neighborhoods which have any of the

following characteristics: near transit, near jobs or schools, and/or neighborhoods with high employment, education or income status.

- Transportation investments should focus on improving walking, bicycling and transit connections in already built-out areas, and ensuring access for persons with disabilities.
- Every neighborhood should host its fair share of affordable and low-income housing through equitable zoning, regulation, and investment. New proposed employment centers should be required to contribute to affordable housing programs.
- Urban growth boundaries and other development management tools should be established and enforced to define the areas of public investment in urban infrastructure to serve dense housing, jobs and services, prevent environmentally and fiscally unsustainable development, and protect farmland, critical habitat and open space.

Engagement, Equity and Inclusion in Development and Planning

Land use policies and development often reflect and contribute to racial and economic bias. Decision-makers must actively engage all parts of the community to ensure diverse viewpoints are heard before decisions are made. Even more critical, they must ensure that the substance of land use decisions work to address past bias and inequity.

- All communities and neighborhoods should have equitable access and choices for mobility, commerce, and housing to ensure a diverse network of opportunities.
- Discriminatory policies that marginalize, segregate and/or isolate communities based on race, beliefs, socioeconomic or disability status, or gender and/or gender identity, must be removed.
- Policies should ensure that people from low income, disadvantaged, marginalized, and communities of color have equitable access to quality of life services that are essential for overall well being, economic advancement, and dealing with the impacts of climate change.
- All engagement on land use and related community decisions should be firmly rooted in the [Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing](#) and ensure representation from disadvantaged/impacted communities.
- Development should honor and support the right to organize and promote quality union jobs and livable wages for both construction work and the permanent jobs that follow. Construction work should pay prevailing wages and utilize apprentices.
- Quality housing should be accessible to people of all ages, abilities, and income levels.

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